Chapter III

Annie Besant’s Social and Political Perception of Indian Society, Culture and Indian Polity
When Mrs. Besant came to India in her forty-seventh year, she initially took up the task of deepening her understanding about the religious, philosophical and intellectual aspects of her mission for India’s regeneration. It was her inner spiritual urge that created in her an irresistible attraction towards India, and she resolved to leave her home and dedicate herself to the service of humanity through service to India. The goal of Swaraj was already in her vision. However, she realised that a Swaraj administered by men who were ashamed of their own religion and its mighty tradition would be a sheer mockery. Thus, she began her systematic work for regeneration of Hinduism by reminding Indians persistently about the glories of their past especially their cultural heritage.

Her sense of duty bound her to work for one’s fellow beings. She unified people around the righteousness of her causes—be they the condition of mill workers, freedom of speech, or the right to unionize. But in India her strength lay in perceiving a harmony between duty and the cause of Indian liberation. And theosophy provided her with great hope that struggle would ultimately produce betterment for all.

That she truly understood the ancient religions, in particular Hinduism, is attested by many who came in contact...
with her. To her the uniqueness of the ancient Indian civilization consisted in the fact that it was essentially of a spiritual type. Her project of regenerating India and making it politically autonomous was three fold. Firstly, she proposed to revive confidence in the ancient religion and secondly, to establish an educational institution combining traditional learning with western education and lastly to enter politics. While Benaras became the centre of her early educational and cultural activity, Adyar was to become the base of her political and theosophical work in later years.

It may be said that she was a visionary whose ultimate aim was to establish a universal theocratic state based on the ideal of brotherhood keeping this in mind she constantly warned us not to look upon our ancient culture as an irretrievable ruin, and in our despair throw away into the dust heap the rich and accumulated experience of the past, treating it as mere putrid waste. Till the end of her earthly life, she kept on reminding us that if India could be regenerated, purified and re-spiritualised she (India) would become the "priest people of Humanity" and fulfill her mission. She further laid stress that it would be useless just to tread only on the foot-prints of the past. In this connection she laid down three fundamental principles:

1. That it was impossible for any nation entirely to produce its past, but it was possible to re-establish certain principles which in their application could be adapted to the demands of new conditions and circumstances.

1. Annie Besant, India, Bond or Free (Putnam's, 1926), p. 161.
2. That national ideals could be useful effective only when they were in harmony with national genius and character.

3. That nations, like individuals, embodied a fragment of Divine Life and had their respective distinctive line of evolution, and therefore it would be disastrous for one nation slavishly to follow the evolution of another nation.

Obviously, her stress on the special value of the Hindu tradition was of equal importance for Indian culture as her condemnation of British imperialism for Indian nationalism.

In her long and devoted service to this country and in her ceaseless and tireless efforts to rebuild the India of the future, her object was not only the attainment of political and national freedom, (although she strenuously worked for it with unflinching determination) but also the building up of a mighty and efficient spiritual organisation for the uplift of humanity as a whole.

In order to understand the nature of her contribution it is essential to discuss her views on Indian society, culture and polity.

Her Observations of Indian Society and Culture

Annie Besant's views on Indian society and polity are scattered in her writings and speeches and not knitted systematically. Thus, it is not easy to construct a well-argued account of her observations. However, there is enough evidence that she had gathered her knowledge about India from varied means.
and sources. She toured India extensively by train, sleeping at 
dak bungalows or camping at rail junctions. While travelling she 
learnt and observed a lot. She gathered her knowledge about 
popular religion from her pilgrimage to Prayag and Kumbha mela. 
She acquired knowledge of Indian culture as a scholar of 
classical literature. After coming to India the first task Annie 
undertook was to learn Sanskrit and as early as 1895 published 
an English translation of the most beautiful ancient text 
Mahabharata and Bhagavadgita. According to her, the central idea 
of the Gita was that spiritual man need not be a recluse "that 
union with the divine life may be achieved and maintained in the 
midst of worldly affairs." In other words, Gita's teaching 
embraced that sense of social duty Besant was determined to 
arouse among Indians. Gradually she developed a deep love for 
Indian way of life and culture.

Her initial reaction about Indian society is well-
explained by her biographer A.H. Nethercot who described her 
first visit to Benaras, where she stayed with Dr. Bhagwan Dass, a 
prominent citizen and one of the most learned men in India. He 
has remarked that Mrs. Besant tried to live the life of the Hindus 
as fully as possible, though separate meals had to be cooked for 
er, as a foreigner, and she could not use the family silver 
because it was believed that the metal would become impure and 
unhealthy if touched by an alien. Her Autobiography does not 
2. The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Annie Besant (n.p., 1895) 
refer to her reaction. This omission, is, perhaps indicative of her eagerness to be accepted by the Hindu society on its own terms.

Annie Besant formulated her views on the organisation of Indian society. She criticised the existing caste system in India. She has praised the origin of caste system and its flexibility in the ancient times. Regarding its future she said, "While caste system has a glorious past its work is over and it must pass away." In her opinion the caste system was a harmful institution, which should be destroyed, and 'not merely reformed'. She even advocated practising of inter-caste and inter-racial association, dining and wedding. Perhaps her liberal views on these issues encouraged her fellow Theosophist to give up their obsession with the caste system. For example George Arundale married Rukmini Devi and her Lieutenant C.Jinarjadiasa, the theosophist married Dorothy Graham.

In her writings she frequently commented upon the low status of Shudras called Panchamas in South India and lack of equal opportunities for them. Regarding the condition of Shudras she wrote in her book *Make up India*.

You complain, and justly, of the harsh and rude manners often shown to you by your English rulers, but are they one-hundredth part as insolent to you as you are insolent to this race whom you in the past have brought under your yoke.

Regarding the origin of the F'anchamas she remarked in an article in the *Indian Review* dated February 1909 "It springs from the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, conquered and enslaved by the Aryan invaders, but has a civilization behind it, in this differing from its English congener." She described these people as gentle, docile, industrious, with a bright though generally very limited intelligence. At the Bellary Social Conference on 22nd October 1916, while moving the first resolution, Annie said that the question of the amelioration of the backward condition of the low castes in this country was of vital importance to India as a Nation.6

She had advocated separate schools for those classes until they had raised them to a position where their presence would not spread disease and lack of morality among children brought up among happier surroundings. The superior most in the Hindu rituals hierarchy, the Brahmins, were strictly vegetarian, especially those of the South with whom she had close association through politics and theosophy.

Delving deeply into this matter one learns that Mrs. Besant's perception of society and caste is based on textbooks like other British ethnographers and administrators.

It seems that she had no clear idea about the nature of Indian Society which was largely a rural society. More than four fifths of India's people were counted as villagers. Traditional -

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urban society in India was also basically similar to village society in organisation. She also did not differentiate between Varna and caste system. Regarding its social organisation Annie Besant had inadequate knowledge about the evolution of the caste system.

The society was divided into four Varnas - the Brahmins, Kashtriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Commenting upon the origin of Varnas, a recent scholar has remarked, "The fourfold Varna system had definitely not been brought to India by any group or wave of Aryans. It was an indigenous development and was not a reality in the Rigvedic period." In the later Vedic period (1000-500 B.C.), was seen the rise of the fourth Varna of Shudras from the conquered aborigines and the defeated and dispossessed sections of the Aryans. The Varna system was from the beginning hierarchical. In North India the Vedic theory of Varna is realized at least to the extent that we find castes claiming Brahmin, Kashatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In South India there are no Kashatriyas or Vaishyas, so all castes are either Brahmins, Non-Brahmins or Untouchables. Annie Besant had no knowledge of this major difference in the caste organisation.

7. The term Varna occurs in the Rig Veda a number of times and is initially used to distinguish Arya from Dasu and Dasyu. The difference may initially have been both ethnic and cultural. For further information read Romilla Thapar, A History of India vol.1; A.L. Basham, The Wonder that was India.


between the North and the South. With births and heredity becoming increasingly important factors in this division of labour and specialization of function, (literally caste) also developed during this period.

In her writings, Annie Besant has shown no awareness about the valuable role played by family in socio-cultural life of Indians. Family in India is a corporate group whose members act together to meet their common purposes. Each person learns the fundamentals of his culture and society from his family. The family is also a principal unit in village organisation. When labour or money or participation is needed for a village purpose, one man or one amount is levied from each family household.

She had also commented on the Hindu way of life. Though she advocated Brahmacharya she vehemently opposed the orthodox view of child marriage by quoting the registered death rolls of girls at different ages. "The death rate of married girls shoots up suddenly at the age of 15 ... and sacrifices the fairest and sweetest women in the world on the altar of child marriage."

For the upliftment of society she stressed upon the work of social purification and the removal of injustices—denial of rights especially to women and low castes, exploitation of workers, discriminations based on caste. She was aware that social injustice was not confined only to India; it was prevalent in other parts of the world including England as well. In her lectures and articles she brought out the hollowness of the English wealth, luxury, and splendour. She spoke of the frightful and miserable conditions of labourers there: "...little children of four or five tied in their high chairs at a table and then employed in making match boxes hour after hour, till they dropped asleep over their work." She pointed out that such horrible conditions did not prevail amongst the poor in India. Famines may kill thousands but the slow starvation of thousands of poor children of London was more terrible than the rapid action of the famines. She warned Indians to save India from labour exploitation and told them that while setting up new industries "... do not treat men as machinery. Remember that no country is really rich, where many of her people are miserably poor."

She made extensive observations about Indian culture. She felt herself well qualified to teach the Mahabharata and Ramayana and took classes of it in her Central Hindu College at Benaras. Her contemporaries namely Swami Vivekanand opposed her and criticised this action of hers for he thought her knowledge was superficial, which one collegian confessed he thought she talked nonsense on these occasions.

How far her knowledge of scriptural religion was accurate is not known for she talks of popular culture in her writings which seeks to manipulate reality. She talks of saints, avatars, miracles, myths, legends, animals and nature worship. In her own house at Benaras she had the Ganesh, the elephant headed God looking down from an outside wall. Not only this her fascination at seeing the Kumbha mela gives a glimpse of her fascination for popular religion. In Allahabad she visited the Hindu religious festivals of Prayag by riding on an elephant. She saw "... not one fight, not one liquor booth or drunken person, as would have been all too common in such a western crowd."

So deeply was she influenced by Indian culture that she also led a life of an Indian Yogi or a Brahmacharya. George Arundale her later disciple says:

She wore Indian dress, ate according to strict Hindu regulations of cleanliness, and performed Puja or the ritual of the religious ceremony, as the most orthodox Brahmin would perform it. 16

When Mrs. Besant came to India, it was a backward, demoralized and prostrate Nation. It was no longer a mighty, prosperous and wealthy nation that it used to be thousands of years ago. In her past ages she observed that there had been in India a system of free education carried on by learned men, both Hindus and Muslims, who were supported by the rulers and by gifts from the general body of houses holders. Scholars from all parts of the country came to these centres of learning namely Nalanda, Taxila etc. and there they were sheltered, fed, clothed and taught.

Seated under a tree ...the children learned to trace the letters of the alphabet with their fingers in the sand or recite in monotonous tones their spellings or a multiplication table which extends far beyond the twelve times twelve of the English school room.17

Regarding to the high literacy rate in ancient India she remarked that

18. Ibid., p.52.
She discussed the issue of India's cultural degeneration from a broad perspective. She saw how India degenerated from its former position. She referred to the decline of arts and manufactures, lofty and creative intelligence that gave to India its majority, literature, philosophy, drama and spiritual knowledge. She remarked 'the danger of India lay in the lack of public spirit, lack of true and enlightened patriotism, lack of that love of country which is the inspirer of every noble action without which there is no citizenship.'

Commenting on contemporary Indian society she pointed out that there could be no liberty in India whose people were hained by shackles of selfishness and narrow and isolated views. Thus, no liberty was possible until character was built. This could grow out of religion, as it fans the public spirit.

She emphasised on the need of scientific education which would revive the Indian industries and improve agriculture. She commented upon the inadequate utilization of the rich natural resources of India:

You have mineral wealth beneath your soil; your hills are crammed with mineral wealth all over the country; it is possessed of the precious metals and of coal, iron and other useful and valuable ores waiting for the working.20

Annie perceived a crucial link between the decline of Indian society and the low position of its women. She thought that the English education of the husband and sons with the neglect of Sanskrit and vernacular totally created a mental barrier between the husband and wife. The wish to save their sons from the harmful materialistic effects of English education she awoke a keen sympathy among Indian mothers and they raised a voice to make Hinduism an integral part of education. It was perhaps, the first movement in modern days which aroused in all parts of India a keen interest. Women had lost their knowledge while retaining their devotion.

Annie Besant's Views on Social and Cultural Regeneration

Seriously concerned with the social and cultural regeneration of India, she emphasised the central role of women in the entire process. That was why she reminded the people that knowledge was a birthright of the daughters of India as it was of her sons. She wanted the Indians to "look at the past only as an inspiration for the work of the present." Talking about the education of Indian girls she writes:

It was desirable for Indian girls to acquire religious and moral education. All the great heroines of Indian History should be made familiar to them with their inspiring examples and elevating influence.

She emphasised that women needed not only literary education of vernacular both in reading and writing but also

22. Annie Besant, For India's Uplift, p.65.
scientific, artistic and physical education. The scientific education would enable them to run household scientifically; artistic education would make them spend their leisure time fruitfully whereas the physical education would train them to strengthen the body. Such a balanced education would train them to be "lights of the home."

Believing that education of women was an important means of cultural rejuvenation and inculcation of pride in Indian heritage, she commented upon the urgency and purpose of educating them. She said "Women should be educated so as to be able to form sound judgement on all subjects requiring intelligent thought on matters concerning the progressive development of the country." Having experienced personal unhappiness in married life and by being fully aware of the problems in life of a woman she was sympathetic towards their cause. Being a radical and having propagated population control devices in the notorious 'Knowlton Pamphlet' she remained silent on this issue in India when it was the need of the hour. Was it her fear of losing political leadership? May be she wanted to play safe after having lost her leadership in England owing to her radical views - being frustrated or wanting to make a new start she used her foothold in the Theosophical Society which would bring with it leadership and recognition. This was the reason for her being a traditionalist in a conservative country. Unlike a radical she endorsed caste and did not oppose it tooth and nail but spoke on widening the caste system "to render it more flexible to get rid of all recognition of sub-caste in dining and marriage, rather


than roughly to destroy.

For future improvement in the society and to remove the evils prevalent in the society she propagated revival of religion along with education. She can rightly be called a bridge builder as she propagated that all religious are sisters; each one giving a celestial message of our divine heritage. In the realm of society activity, she projected dharma as the main note of the future civilization, where duties would come first, and rights afterwards, the recognition of a duty to a larger self, the organised Nation, the state and duty to the whole humanity. A friendly collaboration of all classes, nations and races was necessary for a world Government.

She believed that Theosophy could help build a state which would have at its foundation Brotherhood in which every child is given a right to be surrounded by conditions that would help him to develop every faculty that he is born with. Elaborating this idea at the Theosophical Convention at Lucknow on 27 December 1916 she said:

... a theosophist must be a peacemaker outside his Nation and also within his Nation, drawing communities together into one, and outside his Nation trying to draw Nations into Brotherhood so that there might be no more war and none of the misery through which the world was passing today.26

Annie Besant talked about the Indian polity in ancient past in a general way without showing any knowledge about its political institutions and administrations. However she had developed her own cultural perspective on Indian polity.

Relating the importance of religion and politics, she reminded the Hindus in her lectures about the Rishis who took active part in Indian politics. They went round the country visiting the kings, asking whether the artisans had materials, whether they looked after the widows and orphans of those who had died in the battle field. Was that politics or not? It depends on how one uses the word. Party politics, she felt, was the business of individual, but the life of a nation—true politics—is the business of every citizen in the Nation, whatever his religion may be.

In this context Annie Besant pointed out, "On the liberty of a nation depends its self respect, its dignity, its life."

Hinduism in a very depressed condition, and among the English educated classes materialism was rampant. The Theosophists were only seeking to serve the Motherland by bringing up her sons and daughters in their own faith, and in true patriotism.

They give their work, time and love ungrudgingly and without expecting any reward. Referring to Hindu polity in ancient India, she observed that:

.... Hindu polity is built up on its religion. The whole of the mighty civilization of the past is the outcome of its religion. You have not only the Vedas and the Upanishads showing a mighty intellect, a marvellous spirituality, you have also a set of books, known as Dharma Shastras, laying down the conduct of the people and giving a definite line of evolution which the people should follow. You find the very foundation of modern science laid down as part of the Hindu philosophy, whether in philosophy or in science this mighty Hindu religion has moulded Indian life, has inspired Indian thought, has stimulated Indian action.

Annie Besant had formulated her views on the evolution of India as a Nation. Her ideal was an Indian Nation "composed of individual units, fit and efficient in their respective communities; the communities fit for cordial cooperation in the welfare of the whole." In the process of developing her entity as a nation, India, according to Annie Besant, faced a number of problems. She pointed out the difficulty of India was, the

29. The Commonweal, 23 February 1917.
existence of diverse religions and races within its borders. She called it "an immature world". In other countries the population was, on the whole homogeneous. However, she conceded that this difficulty was also India's privilege. It would be creditable if India would succeed in evolving a rich unity out of this diversity.

She evolved her views on Nationalism and defined it in this manner:

Nationalism is a certain body of thought and feeling, and to some extent of effort, which, tends to bring a number of people or tribes together so that they may form a Nation. Everywhere before a Nation is formed we find a large amount of public feeling and thought which we may call Nationalism, which disappeared after the Nation was fully formed and reappeared in the form of Patriotism.

Continuing further she said:

The four principal factors that build up a Nation are Religion, Language and Literature, History and Fine Arts. Annie Besant believed that in ancient times India was a nation.

This claim has been endorsed by other nationalist writers like

31. Ibid.
32. The Commonweal, 13 November 1914, p.380
33. Ibid.
34. For their respective viewpoints see Bisheshwar Prasad, Changing Modes of Indian National Movement (New Delhi,1966); R.C. Majumdar, History of Freedom Movement in India 3 vols. (Calcutta, 1962-63); Amales Tripathi, The Extremist Challenge (New Delhi, 1967).
B.Prasad, R.C. Majumdar, Amales Tripathi who felt that "Nationalism was generated by the rediscovery and revival of interest and pride in the glories and greatness of India's past."

She claimed that India had for centuries a unity of spirit and continuity of culture. She was willing to concede that the national unity imposed by the Aryan civilization was to an extent disrupted by the advent of Islam which introduced new material into Indian polity that was yet to be wholly assimilated.

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36 Annie Besant, How India Wrought For Freedom (Delhi,1975), p.XXIV. For a slightly different perspective on this issue see Subhas Chandra Bose, The Indian Struggle 1920—1934 (Calcutta,1948), pp.10-11. While conceding the fundamental unity of India Subhas Chandra Bose has pointed out the positive, unifying factors were its character of being geographically, 'self-contained unit' and the development of 'one common culture and tradition'. In the ancient period the latter were the result of Hindu religion, 'the most important cementing factor' He focussed on the positive result of the mixing of two cultures i.e. Hindu and Muslim, which was the most important cementing factor for the Indian nation. Through mutual co-operation, a new art and a new culture was evolved which was different from the old but which nevertheless was distinctly Indian.
Lajpat Rai, a well known nationalist leader and writer was fully aware of the historical dimensions of the problem. He had said in 1908:

India was hitherto said to be only a geographical expression. It has now begun to aspire under the guidance of an all wise Providence to a unified political existence and to a place in the comity of nations.... It is true that communities are divided from communities, sects from sects and provinces from provinces by differences of religion, language and customs. The wave of western civilization, however, with its unifying influences is levelling down these differences and creating a community of interests and feeling which is the precursor of a new dawn in our life.37.

Lala Lajpat Rai was conscious of the limitations of this point of view and the nationalist writers' motive underlying it. This was primarily in counter the imperialist jibes that Indian nationalism was illegitimate and without a foundation in reality. Annie Besant, however, may have known

38. Lajpat Rai, Young India: An Interpretation and a History of the Nationalist Movement From Within (Delhi, 1965), pp. 32-5; also see p.38. Lajpat Rai further elaborates this point by arguing that even European states were formed as modern nations states only in recent times. He maintained that Fundamentally India has been a nation for the last 2,000 years, in spite of the fact that at times it has been divided into several kingdoms and principalities, sometimes under a common empire and at others independent of each other.
it but it is not evident from her writings and speeches. She does not seem to differentiate between ethnocentrism and nationalism in modern time.

In spite of the absence of the reference to political aspirations in her writings as one of the factors for building a nation, Annie Besant insisted upon India's right to self-government. Her demand for self-government revealed that she was a mixture of Moderate and extremist nationalists because she was convinced that reconciliation between the Moderates and Extremists was essential to draw Indian youth away from the path of violence. Firstly, like the moderate nationalists she laid down "... that the struggle for freedom was to be peaceful and bloodless". This point is clarified in her article. "To my Brothers and Sisters in India" in which she writes "... we stand by the principles for which England stands in Europe, and ask peacefully and constitutionally for responsible self-government."

39. In Ethnocentrism 'power' and 'value' in the cultural group which is the vessel wisdom, beauty, holiness, culture. It sees the nation as "the centre of the world". It reflected the traditional, exclusive and Solipsist conception. For difference between ethnocentrism and nationalism see A.D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London, 1971).
40. Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (Delhi, 1979), p. 125
Secondly, she had a limited goal of securing for India the status of an equal partner in the Empire. Her ideal was a self-governing India within the British Empire. This point is clarified by A. Rangaswamy Iyer who said that Mrs. Besant's

... method to attain freedom for India was by way of intense and well organised constitutional agitation, educating the masses politically, and seeking their enthusiastic support for the cause, and presenting in the name of the united Indian Nation a Swaraj constitution suited to Indian genius and Indian conditions with the sanction of the Indian people behind it would compel the British parliament to pass.42

Like the Extremist leaders, she too had:

an infinite faith in the power of the masses in action and in the Indian people's capacity to bear the strain of prolonged political struggle against imperialism. They believed that suppression by the Government would not throttle the mass movement. It would, instead, educate the people, arouse them further, strengthen their resolve to overthrow imperialism, and lead to a heightened political struggle.43

Mrs. Besant, Tilak and others did talk of the people but

their people turned out to be the educated and semi-urban petty bourgeoisie and, most of all, the educated youth among them. "Lajpat Rai too frankly acknowledged in 1908 that the political movement in India had to depend on the educated because of the backwardness and apathy of the masses". Annie Besant's fundamental message writes C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar (a lawyer who worked with Mrs. Besant closely in the field was that:

Laws may be corrupt, Laws may be wrong, but the way to proceed about the business of rectifying them was to strive to educate public opinion, to rouse popular conscience, so that the laws may be modified or eradicated.45

Her extremist tendencies can further be examined because like the extremists she drew "... sustenance from India's heritage and appealed to Indians by invoking religious patriotism".

On the basis of her perception of the nature of the British rule she severely condemned the imperialistic policies of the British. She regarded that:

The British rule in India was unjust, that India was held down and could only be held down by a mass of coercive legislation, by deportation of Indians, and by their imprisonment without trial.47

44. Ibid., p.127.
47. Annie Besant, Personal File no. 18 B II 'Winning Home Rule Open Record', pp.5-7.
Her knowledge and writings of the early Indian history served as a vehicle of her sophisticated analysis of the evils of colonial rule. She wrote:

...that England found India an educated nation and has reduced her masses to illiteracy; that England found the Indian people free, prosperous and rich, and has reduced her to terrible poverty.48

She further discussed the deliberate English attempts to "raise a few Indians thereby creating a class of people unconcerned about their country as a whole." She had eloquently analysed how England destroyed Indian village life and communal feelings by introducing a "Western sense of egocentricism as opposed to Eastern sociocentricism." 49

She also spoke and wrote about how England had hindered the development of the native industries of India. While discussing the textile industry in India, she compared its demise at English hands with what the English did to the industry in Ireland. 50

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49. Marcia Duncan, 'Annie Besant and the Outer Court' in *Indo-British Review* vol.15, no.1., Special Issue, p.115.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid. This point can be better understood by comparing India’s economic exploitation with the British policies in Ireland during the 15th century. For example in 1494 Ireland was not allowed to send its woolen cloth abroad lest it should compete with the English cloth. Thus Irish manufacturers were ruined. The six countries of Ulster became the plantations of England, and Ireland lay prostrate and bleeding at England's feet. For a detailed discussion see Tara Chand, *History of The Freedom Movement in India* (Delhi, 1961), p.231.
Moreover, the destruction of village industries and crafts wrecked the local economics and aggravated agricultural difficulties. As a result of the subordination of the Indian interests to the imperial interests India was paralysed economically. Her incisive understanding of these problems provoked her to propagate against the British policies by writing forceful articles and by giving fiery speeches. In one of her articles "To my Brothers and Sisters in India" she wrote:

The World will learn how India is governed, and that while England asks India to fight against autocracy in Europe, and drains her of her capital to carry on the war, England's agents use all the methods of autocracy in India, in order to deceive the world into the idea that India is well-governed and content.52

Thus, Mrs. Besant perceived a crucial link between India's goal for self-government and education of the people. For her education was the major instrument through which India could achieve her cultural rejuvenation and political salvation i.e. self-government. The following Chapter discusses her work in the field of education in detail.

52. New India, 15 June 1917, pp.7-8.