Chapter IV
Dr. Besant -- An Educator
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DR. BESANT- AN EDUCATOR

India owes a special debt to Dr. Annie Besant, one of the celebrated educationists of the modern world. She had been actively interested in educational reform in Britain for long and that enthusiasm continued unabated in India. For she had been a pioneer educationist on the London School Board and after coming to India she became the mother of a University scheme for India and the major architect of the Central Hindu College at Benaras. When she came to India, she found educated Indians a little ashamed of their own culture and their own past. That was why she engaged herself in reviving their interest in ancient religious ideals of India which had been buried under the dross for quite sometime.

Annie Besant fully realized that it was only through education that she would be able to infuse confidence in the "subject race". "The essential thing which makes a country great and its people a great nation is that the people should work in harmony with the spirit of the country", which can only be done when they completely identify themselves with it. In her view, "the four principal factors that build a nation are Religion, Language and Literature, History and Fine Arts."  

1. The Commonweal, 19 October 1916, 'National Education'.
2. Ibid.
Criticism of British Education System in India

Annie Besant had envisaged a crucial role for education in the revitalization of India's socio-cultural heritage and political liberation. The existing English education system worked against the Indian milieu and its creative impulse.

There is no denying the fact that education in India was made up of "worn-out and cast off clothes cut and sewn by Western tailors of a bygone generation". "What India needed was clothes of her own "fashioned on her own models and fitted to her own needs."

The education system in British India, which had laid more emphasis on literary education with the sole aim of preparing young men for subordinate government posts, had failed to develop a sense of citizenship among the students.

Every foreign Government is always desirous to crush its subjects to such an extent that they may not be able to raise their heads and live only as a 'subject race'. The British rulers in India were no exception. The British officials seemed to regard education as though it were some potent medicine to be administered only by the most skilful physicians and even that with caution and misgivings. She was highly critical of the indifference of the colonial rulers to the education of the masses. She elaborated her point in her Presidential Address to the Indian National Congress Session, 1917:

3. *The Commonweal*, vol. 8, no. 209, 28 December 1917 'The Outlook'
If you educate the proletariat .... You prepare the ground for the dissemination of all kinds of disloyalty, you make people critical and impatient of official control and worst of all, you teach them to be independent and to think for themselves quite possibly on lines which officials regard as pernicious.

This was Annie Besant's rationale for removing illiteracy and ignorance, aggravated by the British education system.

The elitist nature of British education, the neglect of Indian languages and cultures and the concentration on literary education, the neglect of technical and scientific training had become major sources of Indian complaint.

Since Annie Besant found that the British education system did not suit Indian needs, she tried to evolve an alternate system of education which would be more suitable for shaping a new India.

What were the underlying aims and objects of her educational philosophy and plan?

The major aim of her educational philosophy was to develop the child's every faculty and potentiality that he brings with him and then to try to coax that child to turn all his or her abilities, powers, capacities to the service of the community to which he or she belongs. In the early formative years of a child,

5. Annie Besant, File B6/2/2 'Annie Besant - 1917 Indian Congress Presidential Address', pp.67-68. (T.S.A)
the family could play a major role. In this context she appreciated the joint family system for the first seven years. From 7-14 years child’s "Emotion and memory should be trained by narrating stories of bravery and heroism of Motherland and of other countries so as to inspire enthusiasm and spirit of service." From 14-21 years she advocated training of intellect for students. She did not want the Indians to educate their sons on Western lines, as it was not advisable to ignore totally, Hindu religion and moral education. She posed a relevant question:

Why not place within their reach the priceless treasures that the past has bequeathed? By all means give them the jewels of Western learning... But do not deprive them of the diamonds of the Eastern faith in which all colours are found, blended into one pure ray of light... which is your priceless heirloom? and which India cannot afford to lose.

Annie Besant felt that the training of the mind had mistakenly been regarded as the sole purpose of education whereas the value of the training of the intelligence and emotions had been underestimated.

Annie Besant had attributed the lack of patriotic feelings among Indians to British educational policy. In England, patriotic instinct of the boys was deliberately intensified by...

books on history which they were obliged to study and in which they read of the great men of the past, the heroes that won them their places in the world and the martyrs that sacrificed life for securing liberty to their land." Moreover, in England history was taught by persons who shared that feeling with the students. By this gradual process, the young men that came out of the colleges of England were fired "with a zeal to serve the country at any sacrifice and if need be to lay down their lives." But what did one find in India? History being taught as a chronicle of events with no emphasis on their glorious past history. So how did one expect such teaching to strengthen one's love for his country. She felt that patriotism could never be reared up in government or missionary school or college, where the teachers were aware of and felt pride in the greatness of a foreign country rather than India. She flouted Lord Macaulay for introducing English as the medium of instruction as nothing is more "denationalising a people as the imposition upon them of a foreign tongue." The need for moral education, (which prevailed in the ancient system) was greatly required in the present context.

Such like articles created suspicion among the Britishers of her intentions. Mrs. Besant's articles created awareness among the Indians.

British Reaction to Annie Besant's Educational Work in India

She mobilised Indian opinion by creating among them awareness by praising Indian culture, society and history. Mrs. Besant played her cards well and intended to make Central Hindu College (CHC) a National University. Making use of her old friendship with James Dunlop Smith, who was the Private Secretary to the Earl of Minto and Curzon's successor as Viceroy, she tried to put forth her plan. But before receiving her Minto took advice from Francis Younghusband, who was both a mystic with profound knowledge of Eastern faith and a high official of the Raj. Younghusband attended her lectures, even in far off places and reported to Minto that she was sincere but dangerous. By praising Indian ancient knowledge she was encouraging the Hindus to believe themselves as superior to Europeans, which, in the present circumstances was endangering peace. He found her to be neurotic and felt that her real object was to turn all her followers into theosophists. He further told Lord Minto to commit himself to nothing more than kind words of sympathy for her "real and genuine desire to improve the lot of Indians."

But she was too strong to be moved by platitudes. In February 1910 she attacked the British for 'racial prejudice'. Her 'Appeal' which was published in CHC magazine was provoked by praising Indian ancient knowledge she was encouraging the Hindus to believe themselves as superior to Europeans, which, in the present circumstances was endangering peace. He found her to be neurotic and felt that her real object was to turn all her followers into theosophists. He further told Lord Minto to commit himself to nothing more than kind words of sympathy for her "real and genuine desire to improve the lot of Indians."

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by an incident where a vulnerable Theosophist was turned out of a first class train carriage by an Englishman. This created a sensation and she wrote calling upon Minto "speak strongly as only you can do to these lower English who are destroying your work and undermining the British empire. Bid your officials to guard your Indian children and shield them from outrage and from wrong."

The aftermath of this brought great popularity for Besant on one hand and fear of deportation and danger of Anglo-Indian's wrath, on the other hand.

Gokhale and other Indian leaders thanked her for her outspokenness. The Governor of Madras told her "You write as you speak - I am thinking how your words may be used to stir the impressionable youths of India to revolt." The British were suspicious of her intentions. They vaguely resented that a woman of their own country was unpatriotic and that was why CHC became a target of the British fury. The evidence of their hostility towards Annie Besant was very obvious when the CID officers searched the CHC for seditious literature.

On this issue she followed a dual policy by writing a confidential letter to the Viceroy apologising for the trouble

13. Minto Papers, 7 October 1910 (NMML).

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caused by explaining that she moved to issue the Appeal to
"soothe the spirits of the college boys who were seething with
resentment at their treatment by CID officers when they searched
the college for seditious literature. She also foresaw the
violent outburst of members of Benaras City Council whom the
Commissioner had insulted. She had chosen the example of the
train as the least provocative in the circumstances" There is
obviously an evidence of double dealing on her public posture and
confessions to her letter to the Viceroy.

Her letters to Minto reveal her cunningness as well as
bravado. It could only be, that she wanted to win the admiration
of the Extremists who had become violent from 1898-1905 due to
Lord Curzon's arrogance. She felt Curzon's attitude was
responsible for nationalist aspirations. But on the other hand in
1905 she refused to allow the staff and boys of CHC (who had
come barefooted) to join in the day of mourning called to protest
against Curzon's decision to partition Bengal, on the pretext of
discipline. She made it a cardinal rule in every institution
under her control that discipline should be based on love and
respect and free from fear. To inculcate discipline and to build
up character she founded the Scout Movement as a worthwhile part
of the co-curricular activity. She founded the Indian Boy Scouts
Association in 1917.

15. Minto Papers.(NMML)
While Minto at times found Besant's intentions honest but he was disturbed by her over enthusiasm and said "I do not want to drive her into enemy camp, but at the same time I can't possibly support her administration of CHC as it seems to exist."

Another issue, that agitated the peace of CHC management, concerned the dismissal of Bhagwan Das, Secy. of CHC. In July 1913 the trustees of the CHC refused a request from the Principal, George Arundale and over a hundred of her supporters of the teaching staff called for the dismissal of the college Secretary Bhagwan Das, a good friend of Besant. His offence was that he openly criticized the cult of personality, which for the last three years, had been urged upon the very boys about whose welfare Besant expressed concern to Montagu and Chelmsford. In 1910 students and staff at CHC, who were already encouraged to venerate Besant, were pressed to commit themselves to exaggerated expressions of esteem for Krishnamurti whom she regarded Alcyone. Bhagwan Das felt fuss of the most absurd and mischievous kind over the introduction of the Order of the Rising Sun, whose members were taught to expect the coming of the World Teacher in the person of Krishnamurti. This created friction between Besant's supporters and professors and teachers who, endeavouring to keep aloof, saw their authority undermined. When

in 1912 the trustees finally resolved that Hindu boys ought not to be exposed to Krishnamurti's working she disbanded the Order of the Rising Sun and introduced the Order of the Star in the East, (OSE), whose head was Krishnamurti and she Protector. When the Theosophists at large pressed her to explain, she annoyed many of them into leaving by declaring that OSE had nothing to do with Theosophy but was an embryo of an entirely new religion. When trustees retained Bhagwan Das as Secretary, Arundale and Besant's supporters on the staff resigned.

Their departure solved an important question regarding the future of GHC. At the same time Besant had petitioned the King for a Charter for a National University, a leading Indian National Congress member Madan Mohan Malaviya, produced a scheme for a purely Hindu institution of higher education. Government sanction for this seemed beyond dispute in the light of its recent approval of a Muslim College at Aligarh.

Fearing communal jealousy along with the need of support of majority Indians i.e. Hindus at the outbreak of war in Europe, Government ceded to the demands of the Hindus. British officials responsible for the decision argued that any establishment connected with Besant was endangered of becoming cheap degree factory, in which education would take second place to political propaganda. Her defeat over the dismissal of Bhagwan Das proved a boon as Malvayia's plan was preferred to hers. The Government made it clear from the beginning that they desired to
retain all control over the University in their own hands. This posed to be yet another great problem as promoters of the University would not waste their money on an institution where their voices would not be heard. Thus a meeting was held in the palace of the Maharaja of Darbanga and they all agreed to the following points:

1. That the name of the University shall be the Hindu University.
2. That the First governing body shall consist of representatives of the Hindu Community. Mrs. Besant and representative Trustees of the CHC.
3. That the Theological Faculty shall be wholly in the hands of Hindus.
4. That the CHC shall be incorporated with the University.
5. That the Petition for a charter now before the Secy. of State for India shall be withdrawn.

Thus the petition for a charter was withdrawn and the Hindu University was constituted by an Act.

One wonders, as to what kind of education was imparted in Hindu University? Did it delete English education altogether? The answer to the queries is that subjects like Indian History, Hindu Religion and Philosophy and Economics as applied in India was taught. Western thought was utilized to the maximum but only to enrich and not to supplant as:

...it is not for the root stock of the Aryan race ... who gave her philosophy to Greece, her recognition of Dharma to Rome her language as the root of European tongues, it is not for her to take as beggar, at the hands of her Daughter Nations, the dole of learning, as though she were a pauper at their gates.

17. Annie Besant, File BS/2/2/Part I, 'Echoes of the Past.'
Thus, the Hindu University tried to preserve the Hindu culture so that the unborn humanity could be enriched with treasures which would otherwise sink into the earth with mud and mire.

Rationale for Integrating Religious Instruction with Education

Annie Besant's rationale for integrating religious instructions with the education system was rooted in her appreciation for the ideals and wisdom underlying the educational system in ancient India which assigned religious education the central place in the life of the student. Spiritual training or character building was considered to be more important than physical or intellectual training. The goal of education was self-realization. The spirit of religion permeated every aspect of life. Annie Besant's religion was classless and casteless. There was no question of caste and creed in her theosophy. A human being is a brother to every other human being.

In the ancient medieval periods, religious education was a very essential part of education as it could help in teaching human values. She believed that education must provide the students a code of behaviour based on fundamental principles of ethics and religion. The emotional and ethical development of the pupil was very important as the purpose of Education was...
harmonious development of the pupils. Her contemporary Hindu and Muslim public men and leaders like Rash Behari Ghosh, B. G. Tilak, and Lala Lajpat Rai also admitted the desirability and the need of her cultural and educational mission. That was why she advocated the need of a new curriculum, drafted and published it. In order to make Indian education really Indian, she spoke, wrote and worked to make it free from the non-spiritual influences of the West. In India, during the British period, the Government remained neutral but the Christian missionaries were against such neutrality. In 1813, they succeeded in getting a resolution passed by the House of Commons, which enabled them to spread the teachings of Lord Christ among Indians. The intention of the Government was the free exercise of religion and that religious instruction to be given out of school hours and the inspectors were not expected to take notice of it during their periodical visits.

She took a leading part in preparing text books of Hindu religion and ethics which were called Sanatana Dharma Series. In these books she put together the essentials of Hindu faith weaning out the superstitions.

Besant's highly dynamic and multiple role as an educator can best be explained by her effort to arouse nationalist

19. Yudhistera Kumar, Annie Besant as an Indian Educator (Gwalior, n.d.), pp. 3-4.
consciousness through inculcation of faith in India's cultural heritage by establishing Central Hindu College at Benares.

At first the tendency was too much towards a somewhat blind admiration of all English things and a wholesale adoption of English ways. But this, surely, prevented a truly national movement and thwarted the natural and spontaneous development of Indian genius. Thus, this adverse tendency was checked by the great revival of Eastern religions, under the double influence of Theosophical Society and influence of the Arya Samaj. Theosophy was an inseparable part of Annie Besant and even in education she injected her theosophical ideals as theosophy in education would give direction, purpose and goal to human life. She said that first lesson taught to a child be that of 'Reverence' followed by a lesson of 'Brotherhood' and 'Service' respectively.

**Grading of Education**

To rebuild the nation on national lines, she felt that free and compulsory education must be started under Indian control. With this in mind she categorised education into Primary and Secondary level.

She emphasized primary education for children till 9-10 years. This would consist of teaching them reading, writing and simple arithmetic. It would she felt "stimulate the curiosity of the child, enabling the child to try experiments and work them out." She emphasised the value of emotional training from the age of seven to fourteen years.

Primary education would automatically be followed by Secondary education. She advocated manual training in arts and crafts, during the span of school education, as it would help in emotional and intellectual growth.

It was her belief that every student should be left free from the age of fourteen years onward to pursue intellectual studies. In her scheme of education there was provision for specialisation also. In the ordinary school with arts, science and teachers training division, the Commercial High School, the Technical High School and Agricultural High School would culminate in the University with all these departmental subjects. This was a complete picture of a perfect all round education for the young men and women of free India.

Her graded scheme of education suited each type of unit to be educated. For example village education, supplying to the needs of a village especially handicrafts and agriculture. Regarding it she said:

Teach in the village schools higher agriculture, the teaching of simple chemistry, of the nature of soils and the suitable measures, which will enable them to learn how to improve the soil on which they live.21

ascend tier after tier, till it culminated in the National University subserving the purpose of the whole nation according to its natural genius.

The promotion of national education was started by the devoted leaders of the nationalist movement. Various organisations like Arya Samaj, represented the new nationalism of Hindus by opening DAV College, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan set the idea of denominational educated and opened Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College as a symbol of nationalism. Similarly the Central Hindu College founded by Annie Besant in Benares all embodied the ideals of their founders, which were limited and sectarian at that time. All these institutions professed to provide its own kind of national education. The educational facilities were provided to all persons irrespective of creed, colour and religion yet, the nationalism aimed at was in disguise denominational.

While Muslim and Hindu colleges professed and encouraged vernacular languages but they emphasised most on University course and examination. Both were started under the patronage of leading aristocracies of their respective communities. Besant's Central Hindu College (CHC) provided all the components of religion, language, literature, history and fine arts that help to build up a Nation. Mrs. Besant started this work of national education from 1896 onwards by criticising foreign.

education. She strongly felt that national education must be controlled, shaped and carried out by Indians. It must not be separated from the home of the nation and must meet the national temperament at every point to develop national character. Emphasising on national education she rightly said "If you serve India in industry, in agriculture, study science of the West and study the art of India. Study sanitation, hygiene and adapt what Westerners have to teach to the conditions of our towns and villages."

Thus Besant's experiment of inculcating national education in the CHC bore fruit when she became Indian National Congress President in 1917. She gave a trial to this scheme by establishing a National University at Adyar with Rabindranath Tagore as its Chancellor between 1917-23. Regarding the medium of instruction at primary and secondary level she emphasised the use of mother tongue as was evident from her observation "I am strongly in favour of our (Indian) language being used as the medium of instruction from the lowest to the highest class."

Explaining the reason for her advocacy of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the school stage she said the enforced use of a foreign language cramped the intellect and due to lack of insight into the heart of a foreign language, the

24. Home Political (A), File 36-53 and KW. October 1916, p.34; also in New India, 9 October 1915.
student was unable to grasp the subject. She has made casual reference to the evaluation of learning and achievement of students. She fought the educational superstition of sparing the rod and spoiling the child as discipline by fear was artificial and temporary. She felt that the best in a child can be drawn by supplanting the theory of educating children by leading them to develop themselves by the path of love and understanding.

While restructuring the educational system as a part of educational reform, she pleaded for flexibility and even for decreasing the number of examinations. She felt that "examinations should be as easy and as little nerve racking as possible."

In the entire process of education she assigned the central role to the teacher. Like Gandhi, she too said that a teacher should always be a model in dress, manner and conduct. The important being the character of a teacher. For one who doesn't have a good character is not fit for this job as he will do more harm than good. His labour must be one of love if he is to succeed. And if he is a great teacher he will mould the lives and tastes of the best of his students for the rest of their existence. All the latent good in the three bodies of a child i.e. "physical, emotional and mental, should be harmoniously and intelligently drawn out by the teacher through positive education."

27. Representative Indians and Europeans, Tributes to Dr. Annie Besant (Madras, 1924), p.12.
Establishment of Central Hindu College

She soon gathered round her eminent Indians who were keen to work for the regeneration of the people. In 1898, after much planning, she founded the Central Hindu College in Benares and Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru helped her greatly in this attempt. Many theosophists from Britain and United States came to help her in the work of the College (later in the Chapter referred as CHC). It was the first of its kind and was a premier centre of Hindu culture. The college issued a series of religious and moral text books which gained India-wide circulation within a short span of five years.

It served as the nucleus of the Hindu University. She helped in imparting a spiritual basis to reform in Hindu social customs and habits. Thus Dr. Besant established a vital link between education and social rejuvenation. The outlook for the CHC was transformed when the Lt. Governor of the United Provinces denounced her this initiative as a disloyal act for it was felt by Sir Anthony Macdonald that she was using education as a cloak for politics. This warning was warmly received by Secy. of State for India, Lord George Hamilton. The CHC stood for genuine Indian patriotism and religion. It encouraged the older boys to study and discuss social and political questions, as they were not yet mature enough to participate actively in such demonstrations. She also founded a CHC Parliament based on the model of Westminster and intended to teach them democratic and constitutional methods of procedure.

This she felt would train the boys to debate, discuss and talk over the problems. The object of education according to her was:

...not to enable a man to earn forty or sixty rupees a month but to raise the intellect of man to understand the problems of life, to make him fit to be a citizen of a mighty Empire. Education is no education which trains the memory, but does not evolve the reasoning faculties.29

But Mrs. Besant seems to have overlooked an important aspect of the time. The need of the hour at that time was self-employment of people. But, since her hands were bound, as she was no political leader at that time it was a small start for a big achievement. The existing British educational system in India was not geared to train students intellectually and emotionally for regenerating Indian society and culture.

Another branch of educational work of the Theosophical Society was that of Panchama (low caste later called Harijans by Gandhi) schools in South India, "admittedly models of their kind." She interested herself keenly in the problem of educating the Panchamas and was instrumental in starting schools and other institutions for their welfare. Truly National Education began with these school.

Female Education

Dr. Besant along with her co-worker Countess Wachtmeister devoted themselves to the education of children especially girls, because it was Annie Besant's firm conviction that India's greatness would bloom fully when its womanhood obtained a larger, freer and fuller life and that was why she stressed on the education of women saying that:

...educational advance among women is the only means to social reform and unless men come forward to help the women in this direction all tall talks of political rights and privileges will fall flat upon the ears of all those who are prepared to help and guide.31

She pointed to the need for educating women so as to be able to form "sound judgement on matters concerning the progressive development of the country. She felt that:

The treasures of philosophy, literature, science, art must be thrown open to her as to man... women's wisdom as well as men's is needed to dig deeply and build strongly the foundations of the New India.33

Not only this, she even laid down the essentials of education for Indian girls and established the Central Hindu Girls School in 1905.

Teachers from India and the West were sought to teach in her institutions. Service of Western teachers in school and the Humanities were secured for a very small pittance or for nothing at all. This practice was in keeping with the ancient Indian ideals of teachers and professors. The management made up the

31. The Commonweal, 17 January 1919, 'Women's Movement in India.'
32. The Commonweal, vol.6, no.151, 17 November 1916, 'Women Education in India'.

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yearly deficit by collection from Indian public i.e. princes and rich Indians. It had also been the policy of the Theosophical Society in India to bring Indian and English workers together on a footing of perfect equality. This was clearly evident in the CHC and Theosophical School at Benares"...where the boys learned to love their English masters and professors as much as their Indian teachers ... living like a big family, wherein the colour of the skin was a matter of indifference."

It may be conceded that the mingling of the East and West broadened the horizon of India from Nationalism to Internationalism as from the East have come all the great religions of the world and from the West have come all the great scientific inventions. Like Annie Besant, even Gandhi had, later on, advocated the inculcation of an international outlook through education.

For funds and financial help she made appeals in the paper asking the people for monthly subscription. In her newspaper she wrote:

We started the Central Hindu College, Benares, by a few of us banding together to subscribe as could per mensem-each a definite sum which might be exceeded, but not diminished, without notice. Will friends kindly send us word how much they will give every month regularly? Large donations are quite welcome also! And scholarships for boys taking the commercial course.35

In all her numerous educational activities she received liberal support from many a Indian princes and noblemen. She had a brilliant band of workers gathered round her to make the CHC, the type of what an Indian educational institution should be.

Its prominent workers were Messers Bhagwan Das, Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti, the Late P.K.Telang, and many others who worked in honorary capacity and in a spirit of whole-hearted and dedicated service. Mrs.Besant had to face much opposition as most of the sectarian orthodox Hindus posed problems for her. The Indians preferred the danger of boys and girls being converted by Christianity to that of the broadening and vivifying influence of Theosophy on Hinduism.

In its practice, the college was broad-based on the scientific and psychological foundations of right education as clearly practised in the ancient times in India. Free education

36 Dr. Bhagwan Das was a chief citizen of Benares, and a very learned man of India who was a friend, adviser and collaborator of Annie Besant. He helped Mrs.Besant in translating and editing the Bhagavad Gita. Prof.Gyanendra N.Chakravarti was a guru and an old friend of Annie Besant. He belonged to Allahabad. P.K.Telang, a wealthy young graduate, who like a few others on the staff, was giving his service free to college.

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if possible, was the aim, but to suit the times, very low fees were charged. She aimed at making the younger generation not only proud of their country and its past achievements, but also to lead well-disciplined lives, to build a strong and noble character, and to devote their talents to the service of their country. 'Service' has been the central plank of her educational philosophy. She believed that all the powers of a child should be developed and the child should be made socially, morally and spiritually fit so that after leaving school he may be able to earn an honest livelihood and serve the humanity in the best way. Her education scheme was more life-centered, vocation oriented, nationalist in spirit. She foresaw the fissiparous tendencies endangering the rise of a united nation, and like a far-sighted statesman, she recognised the necessity for bridging the widening gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims which was at that time accentuated by the communal electorates created during Lord Minto's Viceroyalty.

Donations

Dr. Besant was always full of encouragement for the young people. It is noteworthy that one of the maxims which she continuously followed in practice was to distribute scholarships, charitable gifts and donations to worthy institutions, out of whatever money she got during the course of each year. From 1914-31 she got several lakhs of rupees from various people.
around the world. She said "If you do not regard money as possession but as an instrument of service, you will never be in want". Elaborating the point, she remarked,

To give money to education is the best investment that a Nation can possibly make. It is only by education that Nation will be redeemed. It is an investment against poverty ... against war and gradually we may hope that our statesmen will learn that it is better to give money for education than for armies and navies. I do not say you can do without these in the present state of things; but I do say that you can defend yourselves much better as an educated one.37

She did all that she could to make religious teaching and worship an integral part of education, because there is no department of human life into which religion should not enter and spiritualise that department. The great duty of the teachers in every sphere whether of science, or of religion, was to spiritualise each department of politics. So that, education may be, the politics of noble and upright men and no excuses be made for political expedients to cover falsity, or perjury, or wrong. To spiritualise labour, so that the man who produces may fill his vocation in the Nation and realise that to labour honourably, truthfully, well is as spiritual a vocation as that of any priest or minister of religion.

Only in that way shall one learn the law of Brotherhood or the Law of Sacrifice, for every vocation in a Nation is honourable, provided it is honourably done and carried out uprightly and righteously. Besides, she organised the National Board of Education to put education on a thoroughly national basis. Referring to her contribution to National Education Dr. Subramaniam Iyer rightly observed, "There are few Empire builders [like Annie Besant] who can show such a record of work in so brief a time".

In her institutions education was cheap, scientific, literary and technical. This was a momentous and firm step that would change the policy of the British Government which recruited educated Indians only into clerical jobs and closed other avenues of progress and intellectual development.

Did Annie Besant ignore education altogether after entering the political arena?

After entering politics all of a sudden in 1915 and onwards during the period of the First World War, she founded a Society for the Promotion of National Education. This Society was transformed by the former CHC Theosophical Educational Trust with a view for reconstructing education throughout India. She borrowed this idea from the National Education Movement of 1906

during the Renaissance Movement in Bengal where Sir Gurdas Banerjee, Satish Chandra Mukerji and Aurobindo Ghosh were leading the movement of education, as the foundation of the National movement. She used the Society for the Promotion of National Education as an important platform. Through this Society she preached boycott of foreign educational institutions in this country for the purpose of promoting National Education. This task that she left behind was taken up by Gandhi.

Establishment of Social Associations

To work for political, social, moral and educational advancement of the Hindu Community a 'Hindu Sabha' was inaugurated on 1st March 1914 at Benares, the reason for it was:

The need for the Hindus to cooperate with each other for self-protection in order that they may preserve all that is noblest in their inheritance which self-governing and united India would enjoy in days to come .... It will hold up Hindu culture in the face of the world as the distinctive and priceless thing it is and then stretch out hands of brotherhood to every other group of Indians for common service of the country.41

40. For recent perspective on Renaissance Movement in the 19th century read Barun De 'Critique of Renaissance analogues for 19th century India' in Barun De (ed.), Perspective in Social Sciences (Calcutta, 1977), vol.1, pp.178-218. In this article he evaluates the major approaches to Indian Renaissance. He has made two major points. Firstly, he has maintained that the term Western European Renaissance cannot be applied to India in the 19th century in a blanket fashion. Secondly, he has pointed out that the Renaissance Movement was not merely a Hindu phenomenon but it occurred amongst the Muslim culture also though comparatively.

Annie Besant's forceful personality left an indelible impression on every institution she created or into which she came, but nowhere so permanently as in Young Men's Indian Association (Y.M.I.A) Madras. This association was the Indian counterpart of the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.). The Y.M.C.A. was a part of her gift to the young men in Madras. It was started in order to build an attitude of ready service in young men. It worked on the pattern of the Y.M.C.A. This Association did such excellent work that within a year its four hostels "provided residential accommodation for 110 students" and the credit of this good work in such a short span of time goes to Annie Besant. The Y.M.I.A. and the great Hall named after the illustrious patriot Gokhale go together. She foresaw the times ahead, when there would be difficulties for her expression of opinion for want of a hall whose managers were prepared to resist official pressure and let it be used freely even if it was to severely criticise the policy and methods of the Government. Besides, The Madras Y.M.I.A. started Night College on 1 May 1917. Instructions here were given free of cost.

42. *New India*, vol. 56, no. 278, 27 November 1914, p. 10.
43. *New India*, 5 September 1917.
and all those who had been studying in the sixth form or the Intermediate class were eligible for admission. The public life of South India soon began to centre around the Gokhale Hall. The Hall even reminds us of the master voice of its founder, and no one associated with it can ever forget the inspiration of that voice. India owes eternal gratitude to Dr. Besant for her invaluable services rendered in providing a platform for free speech and elevating thought.

In the face of much opposition and ridicule, Annie Besant demonstrated the strength that only a cause of righteousness can give to its adherents. She had used education as a means of familiarising Indians with the moral bankruptcy of the British rule. Annie Besant tried to build a bridge between politics and religion by educating the Indian elite to liberate themselves from the non-spiritual influences of the West. She had also familiarised the educated youth with the democratic and parliamentary methods of governance and strove to dissuade them from unconstitutional methods of protest.

Thus the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and others were assimilated and given a final shape by Annie Besant. By her activities and strategies she speeded India's march to freedom as only a literate nation could seek freedom.

Another important dimension of her multi-faceted plan for socio-cultural rejuvenation was her crusade for awakening Indian women. Her innovative work in this sphere has been discussed in the following chapter.