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**Prem Shankar Srivastava**  
Principal, V. B. College of  
Education, Bhagalpur, Bihar

## Dr. Annie Besant's views on spiritual education

**Prem Shankar Srivastava**

### Abstract

The paper deals with the spiritual education with special reference to Dr. Annie Besant's views in which her life and social philosophy as well as Theosophical philosophy influence spiritual education. The paper also deals with her theosophical philosophy based on the principles of 'The Unity of God' and of 'The Universal Brotherhood' which are the integral part of spiritual education. In this paper an attempt has been made to recognize, comprehend, find out, analyze, synthesize, evaluate and critically examine the dominant factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education regarding Dr. Annie Besant's views. The paper concludes 'Spiritual Education' as "it is education which helps to fulfill the inherent capacity of the individuals through the Theosophical Idea of Education based on the Unity of God (Universal Source of all existence) and Universal Brotherhood, Self-control, Self-analysis, Self-respect, Control of mind, self-realization, self-interview, spiritual policy, Love and Sympathy, Service, Freedom, God-realization Patience, Peace and Tolerance and to prepare them to solve the everyday problems for life creatively and constructively in the new situation of the socio-psycho-physical environment for attaining the highest knowledge and wisdom, if the teachers enable to modify such kind of behavior patterns of individuals, - this is spiritual education."

**Keywords:** Spiritual Education, Dr. Annie Besant's Views.

### 1. Introduction

Why does the journey start from Dr. Annie Besant's life and social philosophy to spiritual world necessary?

Dr. Annie Besant (1847-1933), the second President of the Theosophical Society, was one of the greatest literary figures of the world. She was a writer, a spiritual leader, a spiritual guide, a religious leader, a great teacher, a philosopher, an outstanding orator, an educator, a social reformer, a champion of human freedom, a leader of Theosophist movement, a revolutionary, a thinker, an educationist, a mastermind of educational and spiritual renaissance, a karma yogi, a humanitarian, a leader of thought and action, an author, a philanthropist, and above all, also a great spiritualist.

In this connection, Sarojini Naidu (1947) significantly quotes as, "As a writer Annie Besant had done great service to India. She translated the Bhagad Gita in English and spread its message in the west. 'Hindu Dharma', 'Hindu Ideals', 'Message of Upanishad', 'Sons and Daughters of India' and through many other books on similar subjects, she tried to open our eyes and awaken us. She continued to write over a period of 60 years, books covering a vast range of subjects. Her books and pamphlets number over 400".

Annie, popularly known as Dr. Annie Besant, was born in 1847 at London in United Kingdom. Her father's name was Sri Wood belonged to Devonshire and her mother was Irish. Her father was died when she was at the age of 5 years. Miss Marryat made arrangement for her primary education. She was influenced by her mother who taught her simplicity and piety. She was very much influenced by Miss Marryat, the teaching and philosophy of Madam Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society in London and Charles Bradlaugh. Annie Besant had a great education from the early years. She studied several books related to philosophy and religion. In 1866, she married with a clergyman Mr. Franck Besant but her marriage tie was broken in 1873. She left the church and became a thinker. She came India in 1893 and made India her home. She came to India as a leader of the Theosophical Ideal of Education and founded many schools and colleges on its principles. She worked for progressive education and founded Hindu College in 1898 and later it is established as Benaras Hindu University by the outstanding attempt of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1916. She wrote several books and pamphlets on religion, politics, socialism, education and the women status. She studied Hinduism, and its philosophy, Bhagadgita, the Mahabharata and other spiritual thought and action for respect

**Correspondence:**  
**Prem Shankar Srivastava**  
Principal, V. B. College of  
Education, Bhagalpur, Bihar

and understanding of India's religion and cultural heritage. Dr. Annie Besant supported the movement for Independence of India and became active participant in the Indian Freedom Movement from her Theosophical Society's headquarters in Adyar, Madras. She had always been criticized the conduct of British Rule in India and she had always in favour of India's aspiration and struggle for freedom against the British Rule. She regarded India as her adopted homeland.

Dr. Annie Besant significantly remarks in her Autobiography, "I regard the great change which has come over English thought- the turning away from materialism and the revival of mysticism- as due to that great wave of spiritual life of which the Theosophical Society is the crest.....The Indian work is, first of all, the revival, strengthening and uplifting of the ancient religion- Hinduism, .....The success with which this has been accomplished by the Theosophical Society is acknowledged on all sides, friendly and hostile, and this revival of the old faiths has brought with it a new self-respect, a pride in the past, a belief in the future, and, as an inevitable result, a great wave of patriotic life, the beginning of the rebuilding of a nation. The work, in the second place, has been educational, and the note of this has been the wedding of Western education with Eastern religion and Eastern ethics, and the carrying on of colleges and schools under the control of Indians, instead of under the control of Government or of missionaries- the sole educationists until the Theosophical Society stepped into the field."

Dr. Annie Besant's publications on Education are 'Legends and Tales (1883)', 'Some Lessons From the Mahabharata (1899)', 'Sri Ramchandra, the Ideal King (1901)', 'Education as a National Duty (1903)', 'The Education of Indian Girls (1903)', 'Hindu Ideals (1904)', 'Sanatana Dharma (1904)', 'The Universal Textbook of Religion and Moral (1914-15)', 'Principles of Education (1915)', 'Theosophical Education Report (1917)', 'Education for the new Era (1919)', 'Lectures on Political Science (1919)', 'Civilization's Deadlock and the Keys (1924)', 'Kamala Lectures: Indian Ideals in Education & Philosophy, Religion and Art (1925)', 'World Problems of Today (1925)', and 'India Bound or Free (1925)'.

### Need and Significance of the Study

Besides cognitive competence and skills, there is a need of social skills which will build up spiritual development. National Curriculum for School Education, NCERT (2000) has observed that curriculum has to provide learning experiences which will improve individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. Very few researches have been developed to study spiritual education with respect to Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy in India and its contribution to the field of education, spiritual education is less explored. The study is philosophical in its nature because it indicates normative aspect of education with respect to aim of education, curriculum, and method of teaching, discipline, students, teachers and schools. This study has sociological bases of education because of being related to social needs according to society. This study covers psychological aspect of education for instance growth and development of the students, learning, motivation, personality development and adjustment, etc. The study is also scientific It is well known to all that Indian society is a spiritual based society. Some of the scholars felt that after independence the spirituality gradually disappear and it will have no impact on

Indian educational system. India is a neither developed nor undeveloped country but where development is required in each and every sphere of human life. Spiritual education and its implications are increasing day by day. For the appearance of the spirituality in the development of the educational system, in this connection, Kothari Commission (1966) points out, "In the development that we envisage in the future, we hope that the pursuit of men, material affluence and power would be subordinated to that of higher values and the fulfillment of the individual. This concept of the mingling of 'Science and Spirituality' is of special significance for Indian Education."

The article indicates that an analysis of the various problems of spiritual education in India in the philosophical, sociological and global perspectives, may be accepted by the researchers and practitioners of spiritual studies for carrying out research on what is required is that the individuals as well as society internalize the understanding of the Spiritual Education and bring about a dynamic change in their living patterns. It seems that in a country like ours programmes of identification and nurturing of talent should receive a very high priority. In a nutshell there is need and significance that we subscribe to the emerging spiritual culture. It is clear that Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy is playing a significant role in determining the process of spiritual welfare of mankind within the framework of modern spiritual society.

In this paper an attempt has been made to recognize, comprehend, find out, analyze, synthesize, evaluate and critically examine the dominant factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy and its impact on education of today and tomorrow in Indian society. This study may help the students to understand and to solve the problem of education more efficiently. They may flower into excellent of our nation. Hence the investigator has decided to conduct the present study.

The study is needed and significant from several points of view not only in bringing excellence among individuals but also in revealing the probable interplay between cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of education.

### Statement of the Problem

On this background, the problem for the purpose of investigation may be stated as: "**Dr. Annie Besant's Views on Spiritual Education**"

### Delimitation of the Study

Keeping in view the limitation of time, resources and energy, the study is limited to one aspect of the subject which is spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's Views. It is entirely based on the secondary data as for examples-books, journals, periodicals, newspapers etc. this constitutes a major constraint of the study as the journals and periodicals are sometimes subject to manipulations and information available in them is in historical nature.

### Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To find out Dr. Annie Besant's contribution regarding Indian Philosophy and its philosophical outlooks in the field of spiritual education

2. To recognize factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy
3. To critically examine factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy
4. To analyze factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy
5. To comprehend factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy
6. To synthesize factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy
7. To evaluate factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy

### **Methodology**

Methodology takes a significant role in any type of research as the reliability and validity of the findings depend upon the methods adopted and applied in the study. This paper is descriptive in nature. It is mainly based on secondary data and is largely collected from different sources like books, journals, articles, and periodicals. This study is conducted mainly by drawing upon the works of Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy by applying analytical cum descriptive method for the research. The investigator has made effort to express spiritual education in the light of Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The concept, meaning, aims, directions and principles in the term of spiritual education have been dealt with clarity and deep insight. Before we discuss the factors responsible for strengthening spiritual education in Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy, it is essential for us to know the meaning of spiritual education. The special focus is on the realization of the aspirations, ideals and values as Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy. The term 'spiritual education' has different meanings to different thinkers in different context. According to Dr. Annie Besant, "education is the development of the child's inherent capacities." She gave emphasis on the freedom and spiritual commonwealth of humanity.

Her philosophy aims at producing a realized spiritual personality to develop the mind, heart and spirit that adequate control over negative emotions enjoys positive emotions for spiritual happiness and reconstruct and recreate spiritual society as whole in our country. She prescribes the spiritual development, cultural development, character formation, acquisition of knowledge, and performing duties is the highest aim of life.

Modern education, however, lays great emphasis on moral education. Perhaps, this is precisely the cause why the learner seeks only to learn and study about the Great Soul. With this consideration of mind, Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy based on Theosophical Ideals, is purely and surely to please the modern learner. It is, however, a spiritualized education in which there is emphasis on education is the development of the natural man's inherent capacities to become a good citizen of the nation. Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy helps a lot in curriculum development and transaction in modern education regarding spiritual learning.

### **Major Findings**

To be quite honest and fair, the field of spiritual education with respect to Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy is too much vast and

it is not easy to achieve a well balanced perspective of what is really happening and what is lacking in our research work. The study under consideration has been carried out with the recognizing, comprehending, examining critically, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating that the spiritual vision of Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy has great relevance to the present-day inside schools, colleges, and universities or outside and it can bring about a dynamic change in the educational system not only of the country, but also the world. Here, the impact of modifying patterns of the Indian educational system in the light of Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy in the terms of 'The Theosophical Ideal of education' has been analyzed in depth and thus it can contribute in solving the everyday problems of individuals' life creatively and constructively in the new situation of the socio-psycho-physical environment for their wellbeing. The spiritual gains of light, bliss and power and its impact in the field of education- the concepts which have been identified based on the analysis of Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy are mainly based on the essential metaphysical epistemological and ethical doctrines in the Theosophical Ideal of Education.

### **Conclusion**

After reviewing the related literatures on Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy, it is felt that there is a great deal has been done by Dr. Annie Besant to trace the development of philosophical and non-material thought and action with special reference to spiritual doctrines and assumptions, much has also been done to spiritualize education at The Theosophical Society, Headquarters in Adyar, Madras, and then at others to draw in broad an outline of spiritual wealth and much has so far been also done to investigate the spiritual intelligence of children's work at The Theosophical Ideal of Education for recreating and reconstructing a spiritual society in our As a social reformer and spiritual leader, Dr. Annie Besant was naturally concerned with spiritual education. All her constructive and creative works are correlated with spiritual education. A great importance was given on the democratic concept of education as the means of discovering truth. Greater emphasis is being paid to spiritual world and a great deal has also been done.

In her writings, she made a considerable contribution for attaining of the spiritual goal of education. Thus, the Dr. Annie Besant's viewpoints based on The Philosophy and teachings of Theosophical Ideal is therefore, a knowledge-hub of spiritual education. All the books and writings of Dr. Annie Besant, of course, yield useful information regarding spiritual learning and guidance, and also give details of spiritual basis of education as well as help in progressive basis of education for the betterment of the pupils of the spiritual society as a whole.

Although, the author, has no much intelligence, competence and skill to evaluate the Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy with special respect to spiritual wealth and essence and its subsequent doctrines and assumptions as well as its development, yet when he thinks of the Dr. Annie Besant's philosophy, the feeling science arises in his mind that Dr. Annie Besant's viewpoints based on virtues of universal brotherhood, self-realization, self-interview, self-respect, self-analysis, Control of mind, Wisdom, Tolerance, peace, patience, Control of senses, love, as well as sympathy significantly remarks, of course, she was a practical Spiritualist.

To have an access to the realization of thought and action with respect to Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy which serves as a foundation of nurturing spiritual education, which reflects spiritual education for achieving highest aim of education and beneficial for human engineering and soul doctoring. Keeping in view the Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy, the author concludes the 'Spiritual Education' as "it is education which helps to fulfill the inherent capacity of the individuals through the Theosophical Idea of Education based on the Unity of God (Universal Source of all existence) and Universal Brotherhood, Self-control, Self-analysis, Self-respect, Control of mind, self-realization, self-interview, spiritual policy, Love and Sympathy, Service, Freedom, God- realization Patience, Peace and Tolerance and to prepare them to solve the everyday problems for life creatively and constructively in the new situation of the socio-psycho-physical environment for attaining the highest knowledge and wisdom, if the teachers enable to modify such kind of behavior patterns of individuals, - this is spiritual education."

Let us conclude with the words of Smt. Sarojini Naidu on her Birthday Tribute, "She set in motion the thought currents which have spiritualized modern civilization. Her dominion has been worldwide and her influence deep and constructive. It is truly said she died because the old must die but her work endures."

She lived in India from 1893 to 1933 and worked for the cultural and spiritual renaissance of the country. She organized the Home Rule Movement and the Theosophical Society for inspiring Indians with a dynamic vision of India's future.

Thus, her philosophy is a looking glass that reflects the ever-changing faces as well as the cerebral aspect of spiritual science and its implication to the society. It not only encompasses all the ideas of spiritual essence in the field of cognitive science, but also equally concentrates on affective and psychomotor sciences.

Dr. Annie Besant was successful in building a new system of education and emphasized much importance to spiritual development and believed that a spiritual revolution would take place in the country. Her spiritual vision based on Theosophy, is considered as scientific instrument in bringing about a peaceful and silent spiritual revolution in terms of harmony, peace, love and sympathy, patience, progress and prosperity. There, of course, would be a revolution in the field of the spiritual education in the way of Dr. Annie Besant's Philosophy. That is why, therefore, it may be said that she appears to have made a considerable progress and development by bringing before us the light of Theosophical knowledge and wisdom to spiritual instruction, spiritual learning, spiritual training and spiritual teaching as well as spiritual education. So, therefore, she was a great spiritually intelligent and competent personality not only in India, but also in the world.

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