



**ANNIE BESANT**



**THE  
CASE FOR  
INDIA**



*Introduction*  
**Rajendra Bhatt**

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Rajendra Bhatt

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# **PREFACE**

## **Self-Government for Self-Respect and Dignity**

### **A summary of the presidential address by Annie Besant in the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress (1917)**

#### **Annie Besant: A great life in brief**

Annie Basant (1847-1933) was a myriad genius – a fiery socialist and staunch democrat, a fearless activist for women’s rights, an enlightened theosophist, an innovative educationist, and an ardent supporter of both Irish and Indian self-rule. Whatever she ventured, she did with honest resolution and fearless commitment.

Born as Annie Wood in London, she was the daughter of William Burton Persse Wood and Emily Roche Morris, and got married to a cleric – Frank Besant at the age of 20 years. The marriage could last only for six years due to the staunch secular and radical views of Annie. For more than a decade, she remained a fiery and

fearless orator and propagated the ideas of atheism, socialism and scientific materialism, She was a crusader for women's liberation, better and dignified living conditions for the poor, the Irish self-rule, In her times of later nineteenth century, she campaigned for even birth control measures. She was not an arm-chair socialist, but quite often, came to streets, fearlessly took part in protest marches and faced police brutalities.

The turning point came in his life in 1890 when she met Helena Blavatsky, a Russian mystic founder of the Theosophical Society and became a member of the Society, Theosophical Society was deeply influenced by the philosophical wisdom of the orient, especially Tibetan theology and Buddhist Theravaad. Besides spiritualism, the Society has serene philanthropic undertones of universal brotherhood and empathy. She travelled to India in 1993. She established many institutions, including the Central Hindu School in Banaras (now Varanasi) that later became the first constituent college of the Banaras Hindu university (BHU). She supported Madan Mohan Malviya's efforts

in establishing the BHU. In 1907, she became President of the Theosophical Society, whose headquarter was, by then, was at Adyar, near Madras (now Chennai). She was the mentor of one among the most towering philosophers of our times – Jiddu Krishnamoorthy in his early years. Though, he chose a different path, independent of the Theosophical Society later, he always treated Annie Besant as her foster mother.

In India, Besant joined the campaign for more democratic rights to Indians, spearheaded by the Indian National Congress. Besides the political cause, she raised social issues like casteism and women's rights including her opposition to child marriage. When World War broke out in 1914 and the British sought India's support, Annie Basant, through her newspaper New India, asked the British government for a clear and decisive move to give self-rule to India. She had the firm view that India was not being ruled for the welfare of its people, but for the benefit of the British and being treated as a conquered race.