

ANNIE BESANT

HER PASSIONS AND HER RELATIONSHIPS - PART I

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There have been many controversial issues highlighted in Theosophical literature over the years. Certain issues surrounding Annie Besant seem to elude analytical objective review. Much of what has been written about her life deals with her many accomplishments. One period of her life which deserves closer examination is the period from 1888 to 1896, the years which include her early involvement with the Theosophical Society, her inner development and motivation, not only as a teacher and leader but also as a shrewd and skillful manipulator, or as one who may have been manipulated.

More books have been written about her than any other Theosophist, with the exception of Mme. Blavatsky, yet there have been aspects of her life which have evaded close scrutiny, such as her relationship with William Q. Judge. That relationship has been mostly ignored, or maybe purposely shrugged aside in the belief that old wounds are better closed — even with pieces of infectious material left inside — with hope that the whole body will heal. However, there were other relationships which have been crucial to the evolution of the Theosophical Movement. The influences of powerful men in Annie Besant's life is one aspect which warrants further exploration.

Palm readers have been used, especially in the orient, for hundreds of years. Both Madame Blavatsky and William Q. Judge have been known to utilize their services. During Mrs. Besant's first visit to India (late 1893 to early 1894), while on her lecture tour,

. . . at Kumbakonam Annie Besant was interviewed by a 'palmist.' She says, 'they gave a very accurate sketch of my life with one or two details never printed — and then went on to the future, with reasons for future taken from events in past births. . . .'¹

In this article I propose to outline some of the events in Annie Besant's life which highlight her interests,

tendencies and relationships, and to explore how these came to affect the Theosophical Movement, followed by a recent reading by a palmist, using a copy of a print of Besant's hand taken on April 22nd, 1894. It is interesting to learn what an individual's palm can reveal. Mrs. Besant was a complex person and this is reflected in the reading.

It was Annie Besant's involvement with William T. Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1888 which brought her in contact with Madame Blavatsky. Stead, as editor, needed someone with a quick and sharp intellect to review *The Secret Doctrine*. Mrs. Besant and her friend, Herbert Burrows,² had both spent some time investigating séances and the phenomena of spiritualism when the opportunity came for them to have an audience with Madame Blavatsky. Both socialist in nature, they were drawn to the philosophy of Theosophy. Annie Besant was more a materialist socialist³ than Burrows who approached Theosophy more as genuine philosophy which could help him understand humanity's social/moral problems, and could nourish his quest for answers to his complex bewilderment. Mrs. Besant became enthralled with Mme. Blavatsky and quickly seized the opportunity to join the Theosophical Society, sitting at HPB's feet and absorbing all she could from her new-found guru.

After reviewing Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, Besant felt that she had finally found her niche in life. Mr. Stead commented "that book was the turning point"⁴, which consumed her for the rest of her life. Besant wrote to him:

Could find no answer to problems of life and mind in Materialism, especially as touching —

1. Hypnotic and mesmeric experiments, clairvoyance, etc.
2. Double consciousness, dreams.
3. Effect on body of mental conceptions.
4. Line between object and subject worlds.
5. Memory, especially as studied in disease.

¹ *The Irish Theosophist*, Vol.II, No.5, February 1894, p.59.

² One of the founders and leaders of Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and active with Annie Besant in leading the Match Girls' Strike of 1888.

³ In her August 30th, 1891 lecture at the Hall of Science, Mrs. Besant explained that there were two different schools of Materialism. One is the Materialism which cares nothing for man but only for itself and the other is known as a philosophy so selfless in its noblest forms that few are grand enough to grasp it and live it out. ("CHARACTER SKETCH: OCTOBER, Mrs. Annie Besant". *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.366).

⁴ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.366

6. Diseased keenness of sense-perception.
7. Thought transference.
8. Genius, different types of character in family, etc.

These were some of the puzzles. Then Sinnett's books gave me the idea that there might be a different line of investigation possible. I had gone into spiritualism, I went into it again, and got some queer results. But I got no real satisfaction until I got the "Secret Doctrine" from you to review, and then I was all right.

I ought to add that I had long been deeply troubled as to the "beyond" of all my efforts at social and political reform. My own Socialism was that of love, and of levelling up; there was much Socialism that was of hatred; and I often wondered if out of hatred any true improvement could spring. I saw that many of the poor were as selfish and as greedy of enjoyment as many of the rich, and sometimes a cold wind of despair swept over me lest the "brute in man" should destroy the realisation of the noblest theories. Here Theosophy, with its proof of the higher nature in man, came as a ray of light, and its teaching of the training of that nature gave solid ground for hope. May I add that its call to limitless self-sacrifice for human good — a call addressed to all who can answer it — came to me as offering satisfaction to what has always been the deepest craving of my nature — the longing to serve as ransom for the race. At once I recognized that here was the path to that which I had been seeking all my life.

The result was the final repudiation of Materialism and the adoption of Theosophy.⁵

Besant had tried her hand at expressing herself with the pen before. She had written articles for other papers: *The Link*, the *National Reformer* (a paper not as supportive to her socialistic views), and *Our Corner*, a small monthly paper. Besant felt that in Theosophy she had found the philosophy that satisfied her enormous appetite for logic and reasonable scientific deduction, and which could finally satisfy

both her craving for understanding life as well as her exacting morality.⁶

Mrs. Besant was showing great promise and appeared to be much dedicated to the cause of Theosophy. She was in her forty-second year when she joined the Theosophical Society on May 10th, 1889, shortly after writing her book review on *The Secret Doctrine*. She was quickly brought in as a pledged⁷ member of the Esoteric Section. Shortly before her passing, HPB, recognizing Mrs. Besant's dedication and hard work, sent out an Order stating:

I hereby appoint in the name of the Masters, Annie Besant Chief Secretary of the Inner Group of the Esoteric Section & Recorder of the Teachings."⁸

Interestingly HPB could have appointed any other very competent worker, such as G.R.S. Mead, Claude Falls Wright, Alice L. Cleather or others. The question is why Annie Besant?

Mme. Blavatsky was impressed with Mrs. Besant's work and quickly promoted her as co-editor of *Lucifer*. In March 1889 Mme. Blavatsky had consulted a palmist named Cheiro. Cheiro confirmed that she did not have many years to live. Knowing this, HPB had hopes that Mr. Judge and Mrs. Besant would meet before she passed away. We can only venture a guess that HPB wanted Mr. Judge's opinion about Mrs. Besant. HPB consulted with Judge on many things. Annie Besant had just been appointed Chief Secretary of the I.G. of the E.S. & Recorder of the Teachings and could eventually become active internationally. Mrs Besant was well known in England for her public speaking abilities and her skills could easily be utilized to relieve H.S. Olcott of that heavy burden which he had been carrying for so many years. Theosophy was finally being accepted world-wide and competent speakers were few.

Mme. Blavatsky seized the opportunity and decided to send Mrs. Besant to America to attend the Theosophical Society's American Section Convention scheduled for April 26th and 27th, 1891. Mrs. Besant was to represent Mme. Blavatsky as her special

⁵ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.366.

⁶ An example of her exacting morality is her clear-cut solution for population control. Mrs. Besant advocated the Malthus doctrine (Thomas R. Malthus, 1766-1834): "that the increase in population is greater than the increase in the means of subsistence and that unless birth is controlled, poverty and war must serve as a natural restriction of the increase" (*Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 1975). Besant and Bradlaugh (see footnote no. 16) were convicted, sentenced to heavy fines and imprisonment for publication of a pamphlet advocating birth control. Upon appeal the sentence was set aside on a technical point. Within weeks of the close of the trial, in 1877 she published *The Law of Population: Its Consequences and Its Bearing upon Human Conduct and Morals*.

⁷ "The Meaning of A Pledge" (said to have been written by Dr. Archibald Keightley), *Blavatsky Collected Writings* Vol.12, pp. 506-511. William Q. Judge was a member of the Esoteric Section and the only person who Mme. Blavatsky did not demand take the Pledge.

⁸ Esoteric Section Order, signed and sealed by H.P. Blavatsky, on April 1st, 1891, which was "Read and Recorded" by William Q. Judge on April 11th, 1891 — *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol.12, p.485.

delegate and also deliver her personal message. On March 27th, 1891 HPB wrote to Mr. Judge:

She is not psychic nor spiritual in the least — all intellect⁹ and yet she hears the Master's voice when alone, sees His Light, and recognises His Voice from that of D ____.¹⁰ Judge, *she is a most wonderful woman*, my right hand, my successor, when I will be forced to leave you, my sole hope in England, as you are my sole hope in America.¹¹

This passage has been the cause of great confusion. It is a paradox. How can this seeming paradox be resolved? How could Mme. Blavatsky say that Mrs. Besant was her apparent successor for Europe and yet not have been spiritually developed in the least? In her Theosophical writings Mme. Blavatsky went to great lengths to describe those who have developed the intellect at the expense of the spiritual. From *Isis Unveiled* to later writings Mme. Blavatsky was consistent on spiritual successorship, calling it “a gross and palpable fraud.”¹² One can have a successor in mundane affairs, such as a president or other offices, but how can one succeed another at the spiritual level?

From her childhood, growing up without a father, to her marriage to a curate,¹³ Annie Besant had been brought up naïve of life and its pitfalls. After marriage it seems that her “illusions of life had vanished”,¹⁴ her innocence gave way to doubt with its ensuing struggle against un-belief. She had been a sensitive, dreamy, enthusiastic child believing in the ecstasy of a moral and uncorrupt society. Life tested her and as faith in the Almighty Father was being threatened by doubt, her thoughts drifted to that of an almighty demon. She claimed:

No one who has not felt it knows the fearful agony caused by doubt to the earnestly religious

mind. There is in this life no other pain so horrible.”¹⁵

She drifted from being a Theist to an Atheist and quickly became involved with Mr. Charles Bradlaugh.¹⁶

Mr. Bradlaugh may have been the first man to completely captivate Annie Besant. He offered her a position on the staff of the *National Reformer*, she adopted the nom-de-plume “Ajax” and started her journalistic career. Thus began the “almost ideal affectionate friendship”¹⁷ between Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant which some say never terminated even upon his death. Perhaps an observation from another woman can put Mrs. Besant in proper perspective. In *Review of Reviews*, part of a letter from an unidentified woman is quoted:

One thing in Mrs. Besant makes me wonder. She is a far stronger, more intellectual person than I, a giantess in a certain sense, and yet I see in her what seems a weakness, one which I, though an inferior person, was never tempted to fall into. I mean that way of going to man for light and guidance instead of God. In the deepest darkness and agony of spirit, in the moment when she felt the world was slipping from beneath her feet (I know well the suffering she describes), she went after Pusey, Arthur Stanley, Bradlaugh. It was always a good man, but a man, and she got nothing from them. Naturally to a mind like hers it was only feeding on husks to hear the advice of even the best men. . . . The question comes to me, “How could so powerful and independent a being as Mrs. Besant stoop to go for spiritual aid to a man, if she at all believed there was a God?” . . .¹⁸

Mr. Bradlaugh was not the last man to influence Mrs. Besant.

⁹ See *Theosophy*, Vol.3, May 1915, p.323; and *H.P. Blavatsky A Great Betrayal* by Alice Cleather (Calcutta:Thacker, Spink & Co.,1922) p.73 for comments regarding this statement.

¹⁰ D____ must have referred to Damodar. This code name is significant for many reasons. Only Mr. Judge would have known its significance at that time since he most likely received communications from Damodar in the same manner as did HPB. Mme. Blavatsky knew that Mr. Judge could distinguish between Damodar's voice and those of the Masters. Using code names and signs also became part of Mr. Judge's way of communicating with some of his trusted co-workers. Refer to footnote no. 27 regarding Judge's occult abilities.

¹¹ *The Canadian Theosophist*, Vol.27, January 1947; p.340.

¹² *Isis Unveiled*, Vol.2 (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1972) p.544.

¹³ Annie Wood married Reverend Frank Besant, a schoolmaster, on December 28th, 1867 at the age of twenty. Six years later, in 1873, the deed of separation was filed.

¹⁴ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.354.

¹⁵ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.355.

¹⁶ Mr. Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891) was involved with the National Secular Society, an organization for the propagandism of Freethought. Mrs. Besant “wrote to Mr. Bradlaugh, was accepted as a member and on August 2nd, 1874, went to hear him for the first time at the Hall of Science.” (*Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.360).

¹⁷ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.360.

¹⁸ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, pp.360-361.

Mrs. Besant was a very inquisitive person. She had a very strong desire for knowledge, especially about things abstruse. She had expressed her views on religions and politics through newspaper articles and a number of books.¹⁹ Even though her moral views at the time were strong she declared that from 1886 to 1889 she suffered from acute distress over her philosophy of life. All that seemingly changed when she reviewed *The Secret Doctrine*. She left a note to Mr. Stead,

I am immersed in Madame Blavatsky! If I perish in the attempt to review her, you must write on my tomb, "She has gone to investigate The Secret Doctrine at first hand".²⁰

When she came to Theosophy she had been accustomed to taking control of situations and controlling her environment, that is, once she was convinced and truly believed in a cause she set her course of action, stepped on her podium and swayed people.²¹ Mrs. Besant had the gift of speech and her skills were well known in England. She could win over the confidence of others. Mr. Stead stated:

To me the essential miracle is the conversion of Mrs. Besant from Materialism to a firmly based belief in the reality of the spiritual world. We all tried our level best to work that miracle, but we failed. Madame Blavatsky succeeded.²²

Mrs. Besant devoted herself completely to the Theosophical Movement, although careful not to come on as strongly as she had done with all other organizations that she had previously been involved with. She had decided to bide her time and not push for her way, believing that eventually she would be able to write, lecture and teach, which were her passions.

There were two reasons for this unique pause. She was finding for the first time an adequate emotional fulfillment. Secondly, she was finding it necessary to make a considerable mental readjustment. Fresh from her work in laboratories and reviewing and translating scientific works, she had acquired habits of rational thinking along empirical lines. With her gift for

analysis and logical organization, she stood on the threshold of a subject which defied all such mental habits.²³

Although careful not to push her ideas at first, patience gave way to need, and in 1889 she published her first theosophical work, *Why I Became A Theosophist*. Shortly after Mme. Blavatsky's death, she went back to her Freethought platform where she delivered her farewell address on August 30th, 1891. This was published as *1875 to 1891 - A Fragment of Autobiography*.

Just as you can't change the spots on a leopard, sometimes people can't change from their previous dispositions. Only two months after Blavatsky's death, Besant published *Theosophy and the Law of Population*.²⁴ Not long after, she and Herbert Burrows compiled *A Short Glossary of Theosophical Terms*. Besant had issues which she wanted to promote and now with her guru gone there was no one to restrain her. No one, that is, except William Q. Judge in America. She was not concerned with Henry S. Olcott, the President, because he seemed quite taken by her intellect and she could probably work quite well with him for the time — besides, he was much older.

Mr. Judge was, you could say, HPB's right hand man. She had even wanted Judge to take her place in India after her departure in 1885. On July 27th, 1886 Blavatsky had written to Judge:

I know that you could do a lot of good in India. Take my place Judge. You will make up in devotion what you lack in occult knowledge. I will give you my share of *The Theosophist*. . . . Replace me at Adyar. . . . Even if I am dead you can always get 10% from *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Theosophist*.²⁵

By the time *The Secret Doctrine* was published, Judge had gained much occultly and had progressed to the point that HPB depended more on him. He had been asked to write *The Book of Rules for the Esoteric Section* under the guidance of Master M. and HPB. Mr. Judge was quite an unassuming man, with great

¹⁹ She had written *The Law of Population: Its Consequences and Its Bearing Upon Human Conduct and Morals* in 1877; *Marriage: As It Was, As It Is, And As It Should Be* in 1879; *Why I Am a Socialist* in 1886, shortly after she had joined the Fabian Society in the Spring of 1885; and *Why I do not believe in God* in 1887, as well as other titles.

²⁰ *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams (New York: Coward McCann, 1931) p.184.

²¹ In 1885 Mrs. Besant wrote: "Never have I felt one hour's regret for the resolution taken in solitude in January, 1875, to devote to that sacred cause every power of brain and tongue that I possessed. Not lightly was that resolution taken, for I know no task of weightier responsibility than that of standing forth as teacher, and swaying thousands of hearers year after year." *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.361.

²² *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.366.

²³ *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams, pp.202-203.

²⁴ This was another attempt to promote her views on population control. See footnote no. 6 regarding her earlier attempts to publish *Law of Population* which had been "withdrawn", most likely for its political and dogmatic views.

²⁵ *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*, by Josephine Ransom (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938) p.237.

organizational skills and a sharp mind for details and accuracy. Although trained as a lawyer, Judge claimed that he was “totally unfitted for any other business but Theosophy and Buddhism”.²⁶ Mr. Judge was the only individual to receive copies of the notes from the Inner Group meetings although he never attended physically. One suspects, however, that he was there observing all the details.²⁷

At first Besant and Judge seemed to work well together. In September 1893, Chicago hosted the World’s Fair for the Parliament of Religions. Mr. Judge had procured an assignment for the T.S. which would give them a great opportunity to advance their cause. Theosophical speakers from many countries were invited to attend. Included was Gyanendra N. Chakravarti, who was a Hindu scholar, a Brahman member of the T.S. from Allahabad, and professor of mathematics. Chakravarti, although a Theosophist, had never joined the Esoteric Section and, therefore, was not bound by its pledge. He was, in a way, the head of a cult of his own and was skilled in hypnotism and had psychic powers.²⁸

When the Theosophical Congress at the World’s Fair ended the overseas members returned to England. Chakravarti continued on to India in early October and was followed by Annie Besant and Countess Wachtmeister a week later. Mrs. Besant and the Countess arrived in Colombo, Ceylon, on November 10th and were met there by Colonel Olcott. This was Annie Besant’s first visit to India. Since September 1891, Adyar had been trying desperately to induce Mrs. Besant to visit India but she had been warned not to go. In a letter to Judge, Vera Jelihovsky, HPB.’s sister, explained that she had written a letter

to her daughter, Vera Johnston in London, asking her to transmit to A. Besant “that Mrs. Besant must not go to India, because the results of her voyage would be bad, dangerous, harmful, and disastrous to the extreme”.²⁹ On November 27th, 1891 Mrs. Besant announced that she had “been compelled to postpone her visit to India for this season, her physician having forbidden her to make the visit this year, and recommended a brief holiday; she has utilized this by a brief visit to New York.”³⁰ Actually she capitalized on this opportunity to cross the Atlantic to beseech Judge to bring accusations of grave immorality against Col. Olcott.³¹

En route to Chicago, Chakravarti reached London in August and took up residence in Avenue Road.³² It was at this time that Chakravarti and Mrs. Besant became close friends. Mrs. Besant, being of high intellect and now with her intense desire for occult knowledge, was very much attracted to Mr. Chakravarti.³³ Mr. Chakravarti was affiliated, in Allahabad, with a group of Brahmins who had occult ties. In a Mahatma Letter,³⁴ the famous Prayag letter dated Nov. 1881, under Master M.’s dictation, HPB warned Mr. Sinnett of the impending problems developing in Allahabad.³⁵ (That Lodge eventually changed its rules and its name to the Prayag Psychic Theosophical Society in 1883.) Vera Jelihovsky’s warning to Mrs. Besant grew fainter and Chakravarti’s influence grew stronger. Mr. Judge warned Mrs. Besant for a second time not to go to India but that only generated more doubt in her mind about him and his abilities.

Dr. Archibald Keightley narrated his observations in London during Mr. Chakravarti’s visit in 1893:

²⁶ *The Theosophist*, Vol 52, October 1931; p.68.

²⁷ John Patrick Deveney’s *Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society* mentions Mr. Judge’s ability in this regard. (Theosophical History Occasional Papers, Volume VI, 1997).

²⁸ *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams, p.211.

²⁹ *The Path*, Vol.10, April 1895; p.25.

³⁰ *Lucifer*, Vol.9, December 1891, p.344; and *The Vahan*, Vol.1, December 1891; p.8.

³¹ Mrs. Besant’s charges against Col. Olcott and her later charges of fraud against Mr. Judge caused Mr. Herbert Burrows, her close friend and co-worker, to resign from the Theosophical Society on October 2nd, 1895. Mrs. Besant had strong suspicions, but hardly any facts to substantiate her claims. She alleged that Col. Olcott had had an affair with Miss Henrietta Müller when Olcott was in England after Blavatsky’s funeral.

³² *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* by Arthur H. Nethercot (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) p.390.

³³ Through the process of affinity Mrs. Besant had always surrounded herself with intellectuals with similar interests, from C. Bradlaugh, W. T. Stead, G.R.S. Mead to Bertram Keightley. Now we start to see somewhat of a change in her; she is not only interested in high intellectuals but also people who show signs of occult abilities, and her interest shifted to dominant men such as Mr. Chakravarti and later C. W. Leadbeater.

³⁴ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* compiled by Trevor Barker (Theosophical University Press, 1975, 2nd ed.) pp.461-464.

³⁵ Some Brahmins in India were concerned that the T.S. was an organization for the promotion of Buddhism. The past President of the Prayag T.S. had sent Mr. Judge a copy of the Prayag letter. Judge, aware of their concerns and of the Master’s message in it, “that unless a man is prepared to become a thorough Theosophist, i.e. to do what Damodar did — give up entirely his caste, his old superstitions . . . he will remain simply a member of the Society, with no hope of ever hearing from us.” Mr. Judge insisted that the letter was genuine and felt that it should be published. He published the Prayag Letter in *The Path*, March 1895, under title “A Mahatma’s Message to some Brahmins.”

I lived at Headquarters during Mr. Chakravarti's visit there and knew from Mrs. Besant, from him and from personal observation, of his frequent magnetisation of Mrs. Besant. He said that he did it to "coördinate her bodies for work to be done". . . . And I soon saw the mental effect of this in Mrs. Besant's entire change of view, in other matters besides those of H.P.B. and Mr. Judge.³⁶

Mrs. Besant was determined to go to India, stating "*I am ordered to go.*"³⁷ She claimed to have received a message from the Master. The message was delivered through Chakravarti, now her new guru. Her new guru had become her "especial guardian".³⁸ He guided her studies and guarded her door at night against outside influences. "He spread before her the glories of India's golden age, the pride of blood and position of India's Brahmin caste as the most aristocratic lineage in the world."³⁹ Mr. Judge had reminded her that her occult relationship with her new guru had aroused comments and was in violation of E.S. rules.

During her first India tour, Mrs. Besant applauded the Hindu caste system and denounced western civilization. She was bewitched by India and adopted Ani Bai as her new name. Wm. Emmette Coleman wrote:

Mrs. Besant has publicly embraced the Hindu religion as a whole, and requested that she be called by her new Hindu name of Anna or Ani Bai, instead of her European one. She tells the people that she was and is a Hindu, — that in her prior incarnation she was an Indian pandit, and she is now "visiting her own land after a sojourn in the West, where she was re-incarnated to know the nature of the materialistic civilisation of those regions."⁴⁰

There were also claims that she had bathed in the sacred Ganges at Benares.⁴¹

Although "Anglo-India was annoyed by her breach of their own caste"⁴² Mrs. Besant was not criticized much in India. She was able to captivate her audiences wherever she lectured and soon became the darling of the Indians. But there were a few highly educated Hindus who held a different opinion. The

following quotation provides a good indication of how she proceeded in her first visit to India following Blavatsky's death:

S. Saththianadhan, M.A., LL.B. (Cantab.), in an Appeal to his "Countrymen" on Theosophy, states that her popularity as a lecturer in India "does not depend so much on her eloquence or her learning as on the trick of enlisting the sympathies of the audience by posing as a martyr, and on the outrageous flattery in which she indulges." This flattery, he says, is being resented by the more thoughtful of his countrymen. "Nothing . . . has been a cause of such incalculable harm to the cause of progress and truth in this country as the flattering [of] the vanity of the Indians, by referring, in season and out of season, to the greatness of their ancestors and their civilisation. Such talk only helps to keep them in a fool's paradise." Although in dense ignorance of the religion and philosophy of the Hindus, except a slight smattering derived from popular literature, "Ani Bai" hesitates not to instruct (?) the natives relative to their religion. As Mr. Saththianadhan remarks: "Mrs. Besant's acquaintance with the ancient literature of the East in the original is even less" than that of Madame Blavatsky, "but her presumption in expounding Vedic philosophy is even more astounding." Another Hindu scholar thus speaks of her assumptions: "She is extraordinary in being able to build up the most daring conclusions on the flimsiest basis of facts, with the aid of the crudest hypotheses and the most far-fetched analogies. She can talk glibly of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Linga Sariras, the Akasa, and all the endless terminology of Hindu philosophy and religion as if she were a profound scholar of these subjects. But beneath all this show of knowledge one can detect that it is from a cursory perusal of translations and magazine articles that the little modicum of information she possesses has been gathered. It is, therefore, extraordinary to find that on this slender substratum of information she can pose as a leader of Hindu thought, and pretend to have crossed the ocean to instruct the Hindus and revive their ancient greatness."⁴³

³⁶ *The Path* Vol.10, June 1895, pp.99-100.

³⁷ *The Path*, Vol.10, April 1895; pp.25-26.

³⁸ *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams, p.211.

³⁹ *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams, p.211.

⁴⁰ *Light.*, Vol. XIV, April 14th, 1894; pp.176-177 — "Mrs. Besant and Indian Civilisation", by Wm. Emmette Coleman.

⁴¹ Col. Olcott issued a "CARD" published in *The Path*, Vol.9, May 1894, p.65, denying these alleged stories about Mrs. Besant, adding "The April *Theosophist* will contain an article by myself upon the First Besant Tour". See footnote no. 45.

⁴² *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams, p.228.

⁴³ *Light.*, Vol. XIV, April 14th, 1894, pp.176-177 — "Mrs. Besant and Indian Civilisation", by Wm. Emmette Coleman.

Returning to England from India Mrs. Besant found new rumors circulating about her having converted to Hinduism and having adopted their costumes. Even before her going to India, in newspaper articles Annie Besant had been featured in cartoons. *How to Become A Mahatma* was one that circulated in September 1891 in the *St. Stephen's Review*, in which she was depicted at the various stages of her life: marrying a vicar, preaching family limitation with Bradlaugh, expounding socialism, in Hindu garb, then with Mahatmas whispering in her ear.⁴⁴ *The Theosophist* published a denial of these rumors:

In the story as to Mrs. Besant's bathing in the Ganges there was not a word of truth; it was a pure invention of hostile Anglo-Indian newspapers. Nor has Mrs. Besant appeared anywhere in Hindu dress. Nor has she been converted to Hinduism since she came to India, nor changed her position towards it.⁴⁵

In an interview by *The Westminster Budget* on May 3rd, 1895, in "the private room in Avenue-road, where in years gone by Madame Blavatsky received the privileged visitor" Mrs. Besant presented herself in "[c]reamy white silken stuffs and a pearly grey shawl of the East. . . ."⁴⁶

Mrs. Besant asserted her belief in the genuineness of the Mahatma Letters, except the Prayag Letter. In March 1895 Mr. Judge challenged her to make her view public and stated "[i]t is now time that this important point be cleared up."⁴⁷ She denied the authenticity of the Prayag Letter saying "I do not regard the letter as genuine, but I have never attributed it to H.P.B. . . ."⁴⁸ She continues:

The publication of the letter, if it should be regarded as from H.P.B., may do some harm to the Theosophical Society in India, and will certainly injure her memory, as it is in flagrant contradiction with her definite and published teachings.⁴⁹

Her conviction at the time clearly indicates her naivety regarding the genuineness of Mahatmas' messages and their teachings, and demonstrates Chakravarti's occult influence upon her.⁵⁰ Her de-



Mrs. Besant dressed with what appears to be a shawl wrapped around her in an eastern way. The photo is by O Shannessy and Co., Melbourne. (*The Westminster Budget*, May 3, 1895; p.14).

fense of the Hindus also becomes apparent. Later I will illustrate that Chakravarti's occult influence appears in her hand.

Mrs. Besant's sincerity in her believing what she did at the time was never questioned. She could therefore always walk away from any situation, either when being questioned at the podium or confronted by interviewers. Mrs. Besant always evaded being accused of being either the instigator or the target when controversy arose. Her convictions and sincerity deterred imputations.

It was during her first visit to India, while she stayed with Chakravarti, that her doubts about Mr. Judge's abilities surfaced⁵¹ and on February 6th, 1894 she wrote the President of the Theosophical Society, Colonel Olcott, to formulate and lay charges against . . . continued on page 92

⁴⁴ *Review of Reviews*, October 1891, p.362; and *The Passionate Pilgrim, A Life of Annie Besant*, illustration facing p.224.

⁴⁵ "Annie Besant's Indian Tour." *The Theosophist*, Vol.15, April 1894, p.443fn.

⁴⁶ "MRS. BESANT AND THE MAHATMAS. HOW THEY LOOK AND HOW THEY ARE SCENTED." *The Westminster Budget*, May 3rd, 1895, p.14.

⁴⁷ *The Path*, Vol.9, March 1895, p.431.

⁴⁸ *Lucifer*, Vol.16, July 1895, p.375.

⁴⁹ *Lucifer*, Vol.16, July 1895, p.375.

⁵⁰ Mr. Judge stated that when Mr. Chakravarti was in New York in 1893, he had expressed his opinion that the letter was a "forgery or humbug". Mrs. Besant later expressed a similar view. *The Path*, Vol.9, March 1895, p.431.

⁵¹ In my soon to be published compilation of information on "The Judge Case" I will present details pointing to the fact that Chakravarti was not the only person who presented Mrs. Besant with information which convinced her to pursue having charges laid against Mr. Judge.

. . . **Besant** continued from page 83

Mr. Judge, the Vice-President of the Society. During her condemnation of Mr. Judge, she accused him of writing missives (bogus Mahatmic messages) on margins of letters and, therefore, of fraud. Mr. Basil Crump, Barrister-at-Law, reviewed her prosecutor's brief and declared it a sad failure. He stated:

If this case were being tried before a proper tribunal, there would certainly be no defence required. But, alas! it is being tried by lynch-law. And what *proof* have we in this 'brief'? . . . THERE IS NO PROOF.⁵²

She could not produce documentary evidence⁵³ in support of her accusations, claiming that she had

⁵² *The Case Against W.Q. Judge*, 4 page circular, May 5th, 1895.

⁵³ I am also going to present in my compilation of "*The Judge Case*" what was considered exhibit "A" in Annie Besant's charges against W.Q. Judge.

. . . **Samkhya** continued from page 86

therefore only to be expected that a system would arise to deal with reality from this standpoint, just as we have another system to deal with reality from the standpoint of ultimate unity.³¹

The Sāṃkhya teaching of *puruṣa*, or spirit, is of course analogous to the Theosophical teaching of cosmic ideation, the other aspect of the one reality. Sāṃkhya posits a plurality of *puruṣas*, spirits or souls. However, in a few places *puruṣa* is said to be one.³² Modern scholars have considered these to be wrong or unreliable readings. But *The Secret Doctrine* explains that spirit is a compound unity; that is, both one and many:

. . . *Īśvara* or *Logos* is Spirit; or, as Occultism explains, it is a compound unity of manifested living Spirits, the parent-source and nursery of all the mundane and terrestrial monads, *plus* their *divine* reflection, which emanate from, and return into, the *Logos*, each in the culmination of its time.³³

This teaching of spirit as both one and many reaches its logical conclusion in the important doctrine of the Wisdom-Religion: the teaching of the preservation of individuality even when merged in unity.

. . . I maintain as an occultist, on the authority of the Secret Doctrine, that though merged entirely into Parabrahm, man's spirit while not individual *per se*, yet preserves its distinct individuality in Parinirvana. . . .³⁴

The fundamental doctrine of Sāṃkhya is the universe as *prakṛti* or matter. It posits the evolution of the universe from the principle (*tattva*) of *prakṛti*, when in proximity with the inactive *puruṣa* or spirit (as if this were mere polarity). *Prakṛti* then evolves

destroyed all messages and letters before leaving for Australia. How, therefore, can one believe her claims, after HPB's death, that she saw the Masters? How can one sort the facts of a truly occult experience from a magnetization or other external influence? How can one appraise Annie Besant's good intentions? Did HPB make an error of judgment or did she provide Mr. Judge with an accurate appraisal of Mrs. Besant?

In Part II we shall look at what evidence can be found in Annie Besant's palm. 

into twenty-three other principles of matter, together comprising the universe. This, the system of Kapila, founder of Sāṃkhya, and the system of Manu, are specifically stated to be the basis of the Theosophical teachings on evolution:

It has been repeatedly stated that evolution as taught by Manu and Kapila was the groundwork of the modern teachings [of *Esoteric Buddhism*, as opposed to Darwinism]. . . .³⁵

Both Occult and Eastern philosophies believe in evolution, which Manu and Kapila give with far more clearness than any scientist does at present.³⁶

Although these teachings on matter and on evolution are not found in Buddhism, there do exist similarities between Sāṃkhya and Buddhism. In fact, some of these are so marked that earlier Western scholars long discussed the question of Sāṃkhya influence on Buddhism. For example, the first verse of the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* states that the reason for undertaking this inquiry, that is, the rationale of the Sāṃkhya system, is suffering (*duḥkha*). This, of course, is the first Noble Truth of Buddhism. The text also indicates that scriptural means are insufficient to get rid of suffering, so it proceeds to use reasoning rather than scriptural authority to determine how to do this. Again, this emphasis on use of reasoning is a distinctive characteristic of Buddhism. It has also been noticed that Gautama Buddha's birthplace is named Kapila-vastu, the place of Kapila (founder of Sāṃkhya). More recently, research on Sāṃkhya has moved away from comparisons with Buddhism. At about the same time that research on pre-canonical Buddhism began, an important book on early or pre-classical Sāṃkhya was published,³⁷