

October 2022



Dear Club Members,

Your fibre this month is inspired by Annie Besant, who was born 175 years ago this month. She was born in London to a middle class family, however the death of her father, when Annie was just 5 years old, left the family almost penniless. Annie's mother made ends meet by running a boarding house for boys attending Harrow School, but Annie was sent to live with a family friend; Ellen Marryat. She ensured that Annie was educated, and also laid the foundations for the values Annie would hold throughout her life, a strong sense of duty, and the knowledge of what it's possible to achieve as an independent woman. Despite this Annie married, aged 20, to an Anglican clergyman, and they had two children. As time went on the marriage began to break down, Annie became increasingly political in her views, supporting Irelands right to home rule, and unionisation, as workers looked to gain better pay and conditions. Annie also lost her faith, and finally in 1873 Annie left to go and live in London.

She became a close friend of George Bernard Shaw, who at the time was still a struggling author, but a leading figure in the Fabian Society. He considered Besant to be "the greatest orator in England". Besant was a speaker and activist for many of the issues that were critical to the working members of society, often bringing her in to conflict with authorities. She helped the London match girls establish a union to improve pay and conditions, the match companies were very powerful at the time, in a period without electric lighting, every household was reliant on a regular supply of matches. The workers who made them were paid a pittance, and were victims of numerous health conditions as a result of the chemicals they had to work with. The London match girl strike of 1888 lead gained pubic support and the companies backed down. In the same year Besant was elected, as a socialist, to the London School Board, her manifesto was simply "no more hungry children".

By 1906 Annie had been elected as president of the Theosophical Society, which bought her in to increasing contact with India, and activists within the country campaigning for home rule. As far back as 1902 Besant wrote "India is not ruled for the prospering of the people, but rather for the profit of her conquerors, and her sons are being treated as a conquered race."

In order to reverse the damage done by colonial rule she actively worked to encourage Indian national consciousness, and was also highly critical of the caste system, and child marriage. She also campaigned for improved education.

By 1916, together with Lokmanya Tilak, she launched the All India Home Rule League. The first political party in India that had home rule and regime change as its main aim. By 1917 the authorities had enough, Besant was arrested, and interned. This arrest focused protests from the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Many wrote letters demanding her release, including Mahatma Ghandi. Throughout her life she continued to campaign for Indias independence. She travelled India working to gain support, but also gave speaking tours back in Britain. By this point she had developed her own modified version of Indian dress, a strong visual image on the speaking platform that accompanied her strong persuasive speeches.

By 1931 her health deteriorated, and she died in India in 1933, aged 85. It took a further fourteen years for India to gain its independence in 1947, by which time British exploitation had reduced India from being one of the wealthiest countries in the world (Under British rule, India's

share of the world economy declined from 24.4% in 1700, down to 4.2% in 1950), to one of the poorest. She's not forgotten in India where there are parks and roads named after her, and she regularly features in history textbooks. In her native country she's much less well recognised, no doubt due to her talent for making herself unpopular with those in authority who were happy with the status quo.

Your fibre colour pays homage to India's flag after it gained independence.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label  
week

62.5% Corriedale

12.5% UK Alpaca

10% South American Wool

2.5% Viscose Tweed Nepps

Further Reading-

India's exploitation by British rule-

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/12/19/how-britain-stole-45-trillion-from-india>

Rebels against the Raj, book focusing on seven non-Indians who fought for India's independence

<https://harpercollins.co.uk/products/rebels-against-the-raj-western-fighters-for-indias-freedom-ramachandra-guha?variant=40027211825230>

More on Annie Besant-

<https://romanroadlondon.com/annie-besant-match-girl-riots-bow/>

<https://eastendwomensmuseum.org/blog/annie-besant-a-stormy-public-much-attacked-and-slandered-life>

<https://heritage.humanists.uk/annie-besant/>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uj\\_1xtvQl6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uj_1xtvQl6Q)

<https://fabians.org.uk/annie-bessant-1847-1933/>

Annie Besant on silent film in 1926

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twCFBzhNzM8>

Featured person from BBC radio In Our Time (available worldwide)-

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm-xQVY\\_CZc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm-xQVY_CZc)