



High Courts in Madras, circa 1905 (Wikipedia)

### **When Leadbeater Went to Court:**

#### **Views on Justice Bakewell's Opinion of CWL at the 1912 Court Case in Madras**

Compiled by Pedro Oliveira

After C.W. Leadbeater discovered the boy Krishnamurti on the beach at Adyar, Madras, probably in April 1909, and it was established that he was suffering violence at the school on the part of his teacher, Annie Besant authorized that the father and his sons should move the compound of the Theosophical Society at Adyar.

Sometime later the father of the boys, G. Narayaniah, agreed that Dr Besant should become the guardian of the two brothers, Krishnamurti and Nityananda, and make provisions for their education. Both boys were eventually sent to England.

Both CWL and Dr Besant were convinced that the young Krishnamurti would one day become the vehicle for the World Teacher, the Boddhisattva Maitreya. That announcement brought about reactions on the part of some members of the TS, including Bhagavan Das, in India, and Rudolf Steiner, who was the General Secretary of the German Section of the TS, among others.

Later on, unhappy with the developments around his older son, Krishnamurti, G. Narayaniah filed a lawsuit in the High Court of Madras in 1912 for the restitution of the guardianship his two sons, J. Krishnamurti and J. Nityananda, from Mrs. Annie Besant. The reasons invoked by him included alleged indecent acts performed by Leadbeater on his son, Krishnamurti. Counsels for Narayaniah presented as evidence in Court the documents pertaining to the 1906 case against Leadbeater, both from the United States as well as from England. That case has been extensively documented in the book *CWL Speaks – C. W. Leadbeater's Correspondence concerning the 1906 Crisis in the Theosophical Society*.

Annie Besant in the end lost the case at the High Court of Madras and also lost the appeal regarding the original decision, but eventually won the case in the Privy Council in London.

One of the papers presented in the link below – *For Private Circulation* – housed in the Adyar Archives, was produced in 1913 and carries the views of a number of TS members, including Annie Besant, regarding the opinion offered by Justice Bakewell that ‘Mr Leadbeater admitted in his evidence that he has held, and even now holds, opinions which I need only describe as certainly immoral and such as to unfit him to be the tutor of boys, and taken in conjunction with his professed power to detect the approach of impure thoughts, render him a highly dangerous associate for children’.

Also included in this article are a letter from Ernest Wood, personal secretary to CWL at that time, to a newspaper, and a statement published in a local newspaper, *Madras Standard*.

[http://www.cwlworld.info/For\\_Private\\_Circulation.pdf](http://www.cwlworld.info/For_Private_Circulation.pdf)

[http://www.cwlworld.info/E\\_Wood\\_1913.pdf](http://www.cwlworld.info/E_Wood_1913.pdf)

It is no surprise therefore that publications aligned with the ‘received tradition’ about CWL would end up quoting Justice Bakewell as having proclaimed him to be an *immoral person*. This was certainly done in Australia during the relentlessly defamatory campaign against him initially led by Thomas H. Martyn and carried forward by publications like *Dawn* and *Truth*.

However, Justice Bakewell, in his judgment, on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1913, declared in relation to the alleged acts performed by Leadbeater:

At the settlement of issues I enquired what charges the defendant desired to make against the plaintiff, and the 9<sup>th</sup> issue as to the fitness of the plaintiff was intentionally limited to the plaintiff’s knowledge of the facts in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> issues. I have found that the alleged acts were not committed. Since I have found that the alleged acts were not committed, there is no allegation against the fitness of the plaintiff to be the guardian of his children. He has, in my opinion, attempted to strengthen his case with lies, but that cannot be said to render him unfit.

Source: *Mrs. Besant and The Alcyone Case* y Veritas, Goodwin & Co., Mylapore, Madras, 1913.

Online version of the above mentioned book was accessed at the Internet Archive on 7 July 2018 at:

[https://archive.org/stream/mrsbesantalcyone00veririch/mrsbesantalcyone00veririch\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/mrsbesantalcyone00veririch/mrsbesantalcyone00veririch_djvu.txt)

A modern, though brief, view of that legal case is given by Justice V. Ramasubramanian in his article in *The Hindu*, 8 February 2012 ('When Annie Besant came to court'):

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/when-annie-besant-came-to-court/article2869838.ece>