

NIVEDITA OF INDIA



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FOREWORD

Sister Nivedita loved India as her own land and served Indians as her own people, but we are yet to comprehend the magnitude of her contribution to this country. If ever we are able to do so, we would certainly wonder whether such a person really existed. In response to Swami Vivekananda's call, she came to India in 1898 and began to work for the education of girls following the lines of India's national ideals. To commemorate the centenary of this historic event we published in 1998 a booklet in Bengali entitled *Bhārater Nivedita*. The present booklet is the English translation of the same. Several persons have contributed to the translation of this volume. We acknowledge our indebtedness to them and also to those who helped bring out the Bengali original.

We hope the story of Nivedita's dedication and self-sacrifice will instil a spirit of patriotism and a sense of dedication in the hearts of our people—especially in the youth.

March 2002
Kolkata

Swami Prabhananda

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A BRIEF LIFE STORY

Nivedita was born Margaret Elizabeth Noble on 28th October 1867 in the small town of Dungannon in North Ireland. Her father, Samuel Richmond Noble, was a priest, and her mother was Mary Esabel Noble. Margaret lost her father at the tender age of ten, and was brought up by her maternal grandfather Hamilton. Hamilton was one of the first-ranking leaders of the freedom movement of Ireland.

Inspired by the influence of her father and forefathers on the one hand and the ideals of her maternal grandfather on the other, she developed in her character truthfulness, religious zeal, patriotism and also an attraction for politics.

Margaret spent her early student life in a Church boarding school in London, which was marked by rigorous discipline. A sharply intelligent student, Margaret used to study extensively beyond the school syllabus. She studied with equal eagerness literature, music, arts, physics and botany.

Margaret became a teacher when she was only seventeen. Before that she had successfully completed her formal education. Within a short while she opened a school at Wimbledon and

started to teach students following her own methods. Shortly her name as a good teacher spread far and wide. Side by side she started to contribute articles in various papers and periodicals. In no time she established herself as a powerful writer in the then intellectual circle of London. Besides, she regularly participated in Church-sponsored service work. She had developed an attraction for religion from her very childhood.

In spite of fair success in her external life, the formal Church-regulated religious life could not give her the peace she had been longing for. She tried to understand the truth about religion by studying books. But the desired peace ever eluded her and she was feeling dejected.

This restlessness in her heart was not set to rest until she met the Indian *sannyāsin* Swami Vivekananda. On a cold afternoon in November 1895, Swami Vivekananda was explaining Vedanta philosophy in the drawing room of an aristocratic family in London. Margaret met Swamiji here for the first time. She was charmed by the philosophical exposition and the personality of the *sannyāsin*. Thereafter she attended several other lectures and question-answer classes of Swamiji in London. She listened to all the lectures with rapt attention, raised questions one after another to resolve her doubts and constantly meditated on them. At last she

realized that this Indian sannyāsin would be able to lead her to the truth she had been searching for. Margaret accepted him as her Guru. And during this period, Swamiji also became convinced of Margaret's truthfulness, determination and above all, her heart full of kindness.

Swamiji used to feel unbearable pain at the sorrows and sufferings of the common people of a subjugated India. He felt that in order to raise India it was necessary to improve the condition of the common mass and that of women. The only way to improve the condition of women was to give them education. With the spread of education, they would become self-confident and would be able to solve their own problems. Swamiji thought Margaret would be eminently suitable for this task. He invited her for the task of spreading education among the common mass of India, women especially. He wrote to her : 'Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man, but a woman—a real lioness—to work for Indians, women especially. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.'

Margaret left behind her motherland, friends and

relations, an established life and everything, and reached India on 28th January 1898 to join Swamiji's task of nation-building. But first of all it was necessary to know India. So day after day, patiently and with delicate care, Swamiji explained to her India's history, philosophy, literature, life of the common mass, social traditions, and also the lives of great personalities, both ancient and modern. Swamiji held before Margaret the matchless image of the eternal India, rich in her spiritual heritage, great in renunciation and *tapasyā*—the eternal India that lay behind the poverty-stricken, superstition-riddled, subjugated India. She began to love India and developed an irresistible urge to accept the Indian life. Gradually India and she were merged together, as it were, to become one.

Within a few days of her arrival she got the audience of Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi. The Holy Mother accepted Margaret spontaneously as her daughter. Margaret realized : Sri Sri Ma was an incomparable personality of love, purity, sweetness, simplicity and knowledge, a marvellous creation of Providence. Margaret felt sanctified by being the loving *Khooki* (baby) of the Mother.

After a short while Swamiji formally initiated Margaret in the vow of *Brahmacharya* and gave her the name 'Nivedita'. He advised her to maintain

strict continence and to dedicate her life for the good of others, like Buddha.

Henceforth, the sole purpose of her life was to serve India. She realized the truth of Swamiji's words that the world's good was dependent on the good of India and that India's spirituality would show the path of beneficence to the entire world. So she deemed her service to India to be the service to the entire mankind indeed.

As desired by Swamiji she set up a Girls' school at Bosepara Lane and started the work of women's education following the national ideal of India.

In 1902 Swamiji left the mortal plane. But Nivedita did not take the time even to mourn. Many unfinished tasks of Swamiji remained to be attended to. India, the ever-adored deity of her Guru, was to be awakened in all directions. Since her arrival in India, Nivedita had personally witnessed the nature of British torture in the name of administration. She was sad and angry to see Indians suffering indignities and oppression in the hands of the British. It appeared to her that the main obstacle of India's development lay in her dependence. She realised in the core of her heart that foreign rule was responsible for the moral degradation and weakness of the Indians. In her forceful desire to free India from the British rule she actively associated herself with politics. Swamiji's direction is unequivocal—

the Ramakrishna Math and Mission cannot have any relation with politics. But in Nivedita's perception the topmost priority for India was to gain national freedom, so she could not disassociate herself from politics. Therefore the only way left was to sever her formal relationship with the Ramakrishna Mission. It was the most painful of all decisions, but she had to take it. However, her inner relationship was never cut off. She always maintained a respectful and loving relationship with Sri Sri Ma, the spiritual Mother of the Order, the Math's president, Swami Brahmananda, and other brother disciples. And she always identified herself as 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda'.

From now on Nivedita became restless to give concrete shape to the great India that Swamiji had dreamed of. She tried her utmost to enthuse the entire India with the nationalist ideas. Nivedita's conception of nationalism was to awaken a nationalistic consciousness in all the areas of national life—education, literature, science, history, arts and folk culture.

Carrying afloat the banner of Swamiji's ideals, Nivedita now set out on lecture tours throughout India. She appealed to the countrymen to forget all differences of caste, creed and culture and come forward united to serve the motherland. Herself the image of selflessness, renunciation and austerity,

Nivedita's sincere appeal touched the hearts of the people and enkindled patriotism in many a heart. She especially associated herself with the youths and student community. She urged them to become honest, hard-working and brave. Being born in the land of the heroic sannyāsin Vivekananda, they should never be cowards. And, above all, they should love and adore their motherland and hold her cause over everything else.

The Bengal Partition Act 1905 of Curzon triggered the Swadeshi Movement in India, more specifically in Bengal. For the first time the people started to oppose the British rule in India. Nivedita helped the leaders and the workers of the movement through all possible means. The British tried to crush the movement ruthlessly by resorting to police torture, repression, arrest, deportation and stringent censures against the newspapers holding nationalist ideals. When the British repression crossed all limits, people's wrath took to secret revolutionary paths. Many patriotic Indian youths were involved in secret murders and terrorist activities. Nivedita maintained very close relations with Sri Aurobindo, the chief of the then revolutionary movement and other revolutionary leaders and workers. She was ever alert to save these selfless people, dedicated to the cause of the motherland, from the royal wrath. She would secure secret news from the Government

sources through her friends, and cautioned the revolutionaries well in advance. She also helped them through her counselling and made sure that the anti-people activities of the British Government were publicised in England, and that a strong public opinion was built against such activities.

She was in touch with most of the front-ranking political leaders throughout India. Her foremost effort was that the Indians should unitedly fight against the foreign rule without creating divisions amongst themselves. But she never had the least intention of assuming the leader's role in political movement; rather she thought, as Vivekananda felt, that such a role was reserved for those who were Indians by birth and tradition. Nivedita's active role in politics evoked suspicion of the British and to elude the eyes of the police she sometimes had to move about in disguise.

Nivedita accepted India, the motherland of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, as her own country. She served the people of India in their days of sufferings and distress, caring even the least for her own life. In 1899, when plague broke out in Calcutta she plunged into relief work with the band of sannyāsins of the Ramakrishna Mission according to Swamiji's desire. Under her leadership, nursing of the ailing patients began, and side by side as remedial measure to fight the disease, the cleaning

operation of rubbish and refuse of the localities continued. Nivedita herself took in her hand broomstick and basket to clean the rubbish and also nursed the patients. The thought never occurred to her that she herself might contract plague for such personal involvement, and that plague was as good as death. Following her example many local youths joined the relief work.

While living at Bosepara Lane Nivedita always stood by the side of her ordinary neighbours in their hours of pleasures and pain. Her sincerity made the neighbours feel that she was one of them. Still she never crossed the social barriers regarding touch and food.

Gopaler Ma holds a unique position among the women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Hailing from a Brahmin family, she was a widow with very orthodox habits. Throughout her life she worshipped *Bālagopāla* (baby Krishna) very sincerely; and she had Bālagopāla's vision in Sri Ramakrishna and therefore, used to address him as *Gopāla*. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sri Ma respectfully treated her as their mother. When in her old age she became ill and infirm, Nivedita brought Gopaler Ma to her own residence and nursed her. Gopaler Ma who was so strict in her orthodox habits, did not hesitate to accept Nivedita's nursing.

Nivedita's love for Indian masses was

matchless. When East Bengal was ravaged by a terrible flood, followed by a famine, she rushed there with her people for relief work. Wading through water and mud she reached the doorsteps of the common people and began to serve the distressed mass of people. Those distressed people also regarded Nivedita as their own and accepted her service without any reservation.

According to Swamiji, cultivation of science was very important for India. He used to feel that the ideal India would grow with proper synthesis of Vedanta and scientific knowledge. Vedanta would purify man's inmost beings while science would beautify man's external life. At the time of Swamiji, the Indian scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose created a sensation in the world by his original scientific work. Swamiji used to feel very proud about Jagadish Chandra Bose. But in a dependent India, Bose had to carry on his work under extremely unfavourable conditions. The contemporary scientists of the world were unwilling to offer him the honour he richly deserved. He had to carry on his work amidst scores of anxieties, depressing conditions and financial stringency. The foreign government was in no mood to help him. Nivedita knew Bose's worth. With a mother's heart she came forward to help him. By exerting her influence, she secured for him many facilities and assistance from

the Government. On the other hand, she relentlessly carried on propagation work through newspapers and periodicals so that his scientific inventions were credited with due honour. As his research work entailed substantial expenses, Nivedita helped him financially also, and when Jagadish Chandra Bose fell ill in a foreign land, she even nursed him. Nivedita regarded Jagadish Chandra as a national asset and loved him as her child and called him 'Khoka'. In fact she became a member of the Bose family. Without Nivedita's inspiration and active help, Jagadish Chandra could hardly have continued his scientific research.

Not only in the field of scientific research, but she made a unique contribution in developing an art movement in the national lines. This movement, that grew with Havell and Abanindranath and culminated in Nandalal Bose, owes much to Nivedita. In the same way she greatly encouraged eminent personalities like Romesh Chandra Dutt and Jadunath Sarkar in writing history conforming to the nationalist ideals.

Nivedita was an extraordinary orator and a powerful writer. Even before she came to India at the age of thirty, she had established herself as a writer in the English intellectual circle. When she arrived in India and dedicated herself to the awakening of India's nationalist consciousness, she

came to realize that her pen would be her main source of power. She started contributing articles on religion, literature, sociology, arts and various relevant issues in both Indian and foreign journals, The Statesman, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Dawn, Prabuddha Bharata and Bal-Bharati being some of them among the Indian newspapers and periodicals. She also wrote several books, the most remarkable of which are: Kali the Mother, The Web of Indian Life, Cradle Tales of Hinduism, The Master As I Saw Him. Many distinguished personalities of the day used to visit her Bosepara Lane residence regularly. Her versatile genius and knowledge in various subjects would charm everybody.

About her small school that was founded according to Swamiji's ideals and consecrated by the Holy Mother, she had the conviction that their blessings were ever with it. She believed that in future Maitreyīs and Gārgīs would emerge from amongst the students of this school.

During those days Nivedita had to work in an extremely conservative society. The parents were not all agreeable to educate their daughters. So Nivedita had to walk from door to door to enlist her students. She used to teach the girl students history, geography, natural sciences and a little bit of English. She would also teach them sewing, drawing and handicrafts. She also encouraged them

to take up physical exercises. Above all, she helped them increase their innate sense of religion and introduced them to the Indian culture

She also made arrangements so that elderly married ladies and widows might have a little learning and know the art of sewing and other handicrafts. She gave special instructions to a few educated ladies in order to make them good teachers.

Occasionally, in the evening hours she would invite the ladies of the locality and hold meetings. In the open courtyard Swami Saradananda would sit on a cot and recite from the *Chandī*. He would also sing the name of the Divine Mother and did *kathakatā* (reciting with a set tune various tales and episodes from the Purāṇas). Nivedita and Sister Christine would sit in one side of the courtyard with the small girls. Women would sit behind the mat-screen.

She often took the students to Dakshineswar, Belur Math and Holy Mother's house at Udbodhan. She also took them to the Zoological Gardens and the Museum. She was very fond of feeding her girl students and when she would do that, she would herself serve them. She would give them fruits and sweets in small packets made of *shāl*-leaves and afterwards, personally collect the used packets in a basket and throw them away. Thus she served her dear students.

She had to earn money from her writings and giving lectures. But she spent all to meet the expenses of the school. She was ever unmindful of keeping even the barest for herself. Many a day she had to go without food.

All this hardship and the tremendous heat of the summer told heavily upon her health. She began to fall ill repeatedly.

With a view to recuperating her health, she was persuaded to go to Darjeeling in 1911 along with the Bose family. But she became further ill there and finally she passed away on 13 October. Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda left the mortal plane after furnishing her mission here. She was then only forty-four.

Never did any foreigner love India so much as did Nivedita. Never have we come across any foreigner who felt so proud about India's religion and culture as she did or so committed to India's national awakening as she was. By totally dedicating herself to the service of India, Nivedita proved true the name that was gifted to her by her Guru.

INCIDENTS FROM THE LIFE OF SISTER NIVEDITA

In a small town in far off Ireland the devout wife of a priest became very tense at the time of giving birth to her first child—would the child be born safely? She vowed to God that she would offer the child to his work if it was born safely. The child who was thus consecrated at the feet of God while still in her mother's womb, later became Sister Nivedita—the spiritual daughter of the world renowned *sannyāsin*, Swami Vivekananda.

* * * *

Margaret was brave even as a child and had tremendous confidence in herself. She had lost her father very early and had to shoulder many responsibilities of the family since her young age. We are describing one incident of this period here. Margaret was then only thirteen years old living with her mother, brother and sister. In order to economize the family expenses it was decided that her three-year-old brother would be supported by her maternal grandfather in Ireland. But who would escort him there? Nivedita's mother could not do that as she had other family obligations. Ultimately, the responsibility fell upon the shoulders of young Margaret. To escort a simple child, negotiating land and sea voyages, is not an easy task even for any

grown-up person. But the thirteen-year-old school girl, without being the least disconcerted, kept the child in good humour throughout the long journey and safely escorted him to their grandfather's residence in Ireland. Perhaps, God puts those select persons, who are predestined to do something noble within a small period of time, to such tests in order to strengthen them. Margaret completed her formal education at the tender age of seventeen and chose the profession of a teacher. Very soon she established herself as an educationist and a writer of repute in London.

* * * *

It was November 1895. After preaching Vedanta in America, Swami Vivekananda had reached London only two months earlier. On a cold November afternoon, in the drawing room of an aristocratic lady (Lady Isabel Margesson) at the West End, a talk of Swamiji was organized. Margaret went there invited. The invitees, numbering about fifteen, sat in a semi-circle while Swamiji sat facing them. Margaret was charmed by the loftiness and child-like simplicity of the bright Indian sannyāsin at the very first sight. Swamiji explained in his deep sonorous voice the Vedanta philosophy. He also explained the Sanskrit verses from the *Gītā*, translating them into English. Margaret noticed that he laid greater emphasis on

the word 'realization' than 'faith', and now and again he was repeating the mantra—'Shiva', 'Shiva'.

Margaret could not understand all the words of Swamiji on that day. But she could sense that they were different from other commentaries on religion she had heard so far. Swamiji's words created a stir in her discerning mind; she started to think about the words. She did not know then that this event would bring about a complete change in her life, and the talented Margaret Noble, who was already established in the intelligentsia of London, would soon turn into *Brahmachāriṇī* Nivedita, dedicated to the service of India.

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Responding to the call of Swamiji, Margaret reached Calcutta on 28th January 1898. On 22nd February, Margaret visited for the first time the holy shrine at Dakshineswar, the place of Sri Ramakrishna's *sādhana*. Sri Ramakrishna's birthday anniversary was being celebrated there on that day. The entire temple-garden wore a festive look with the assembly of saints, monks and devotees. Being a European Christian lady she was not permitted to enter the temple. She and her companions alighted at Chandney ghat and moved around looking at things. They sat on the cemented embankment. People noticed that. They started to discuss about the right of admission of the foreign ladies. While

some argued in favour, others said against it. Most of them appeared favourable. At last, the fences of rules and prohibitions fell apart before man's innate love and sympathy. The door of Sri Ramakrishna's room was opened and the foreign ladies were invited inside.

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11th March 1898. Swamiji arranged a public meeting at the Star Theatre to introduce Margaret to the people of Calcutta. In introducing Margaret to the people, Swamiji said: 'England has sent us another gift in Miss Margaret Noble.' In her wonderful speech she spoke at length about the influence of Swamiji in spreading India's religious thoughts, and on the newly founded Ramakrishna Mission. Then she expressed her desire to serve India, saying: 'Yours is the conservatism of a people who have through that long period been able to preserve the greatest treasures for the World, and it is for this that I have come to India to serve her with a burning passion for service.' Her lecture charmed everyone present there. Swamiji was also very much pleased. He said that Margaret's soul was indeed noble, her heart was pure and generous. She had really come to serve India and not to patronize. In a letter to a brother-disciple he wrote: 'Miss Noble is really an acquisition.'

* * * *

17th March 1898. It was one of the most memorable days in her life. She recorded this day in her diary as 'A day of days'. On this day Margaret met Sri Ma Sarada Devi for the first time. She went to see the Mother along with two other European lady devotees of Swamiji. The Holy Mother greeted Margaret affectionately as 'my daughter' and thus she became Mother's loving *Khooki* from that very day. She felt that with the Holy Mother accepting her as her daughter, she had already had entry into the Indian society.

* * * *

On 25th March 1898, Swamiji initiated Margaret into *brahmacharya*. Swamiji took her to the chapel of the Math and made her worship Shiva. Then she was initiated into *brahmacharya* and given the name 'NIVEDITA', the dedicated. Swamiji said to her: 'Go thou and follow Him, Who was born and gave His life for others five hundred times before He attained the vision of the Buddha.' Margaret felt that though addressed to her, these words were meant for all who had come to Swamiji and who would come to him in future. Nivedita recorded in her diary that it was the happiest morning in her life.

* * * *

While living in England, like most of the English people, Nivedita thought that the British rule was beneficial to India. She thought that both England and India would be able to love each other, which would do good to both the countries. Even after her coming to India, she initially maintained that stand.

So, the day after her initiation when Swamiji asked Nivedita, 'To which nation do you belong?' Nivedita proudly declared her loyalty to the English flag. Swamiji realized how deeply the western tendencies and ideas had taken root in Nivedita's mind. He started to teach her so that she might be fit to serve India. He impressed upon Nivedita's mind the eternal image of India in her pristine glory; side by side he uprooted the die-hard western tendencies latent in her mind. But he did not forget to make her aware of the areas in which India was weak and where India would need to learn from the West.

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It was during this period that Nivedita one day told Swamiji in a context: 'It is necessary to beautify the city of London.' Swamiji sharply retorted: 'And you're buffeting the other cities into cremation grounds.' Nivedita could not realize the significance of Swamiji's words, and felt hurt. But the words used to ring in her ears for many days. Later when she witnessed the British exploitation of India in the name of administration, she came to

realize the truth of Swamiji's words. She developed a deep bitterness for the British and at the same time a great respect and love for India.

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The main reason why Swamiji invited Nivedita to India was to spread education to the women of the country. So when Nivedita was prepared to open the Girls' School at 16 Bosepara Lane, there was no end to Swamiji's enthusiasm. A meeting was organized at Balaram Bose's house on the issue of opening Nivedita's school. Many lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, including Mastermashay (Sri M., the chronicler of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna), Suresh Dutta, Haramohan, and a host of others, were present. In her lecture, Nivedita explained the plan of the proposed school and appealed to everybody to send their girls to study there. Nivedita did not notice that during her talk Swamiji entered the hall and took his seat behind everybody. Suddenly she saw that Swamiji was pushing others and prompting: 'Ye, get up, get up! It's not good enough to just become girls' fathers. All of you must cooperate in the matter of their education as per national ideals. Stand up and commit. Reply to her appeal. Say, "We all agree. We shall send our girls to you ."' ' When no one really stood up, Swamiji forced Haramohan, saying: 'You must agree' and spoke on his behalf: 'Well, Miss Noble,

this gentleman offers his girls to you.' Nivedita became exceedingly glad to see Swamiji and hear his words. She started to dance, clapping her hands joyfully, as if she were just a child.

* * * *

13th November 1898. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi came to open the school of Nivedita. After worshipping Sri Ramakrishna she consecrated the school and blessed it, saying: 'I pray that the blessings of the Divine Mother may be upon the school and the girls; and the girls trained from the school may become ideal girls.' Nivedita became extremely delighted and recorded her feelings later as this : 'I cannot imagine a grander omen than her blessings, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future.'

* * * *

Nivedita placed the Holy Mother in the inmost core of her heart. She was Mother's dear 'Khooki'. She would be overwhelmed in joy whenever she would come in Mother's presence and behave like a child, basking in Mother's affection. One day Nivedita came to the Mother's house and sat beside her after saluting her respectfully. The Mother also, as usual, enquired of her welfare and then presenting to her a small piece of woolen fan, said, 'I have knit this for you.' Nivedita was beside herself with joy getting the fan. She at once put it on

her head, then touched it on her bosom and kept muttering: 'How beautiful! How splendid!' She showed it to all others saying, 'Look, how beautiful! The Mother has done it.' Observing her, the Mother said: 'Look, how she's delighted getting such an insignificant thing! Oh, how simple is her faith! As if, the image of a goddess! How devoted she is to Naren! Because he was born in this country, she left everything and came here to serve it, dedicating her own self. What a respect for her Guru! And how dearly she loves this country.'

* * * *

One day the Holy Mother sent word to Nivedita that she would visit her school after a few days. Getting the news, Nivedita's joy knew no bounds. Immediately she dusted and cleaned the entire school premises, decorated the rooms with flowers and tree leaves. She became restless over all the details : what the girls would offer as presents, what poems were to be recited and what songs were to be sung, how Mother would be received, and where she would sit and talk to the girls. Then came the day; from the morning Nivedita was beaming with joy, briskly moving around to see that everything was in order. Like a child she was now laughing and now hugging the girls and even the maidservants. The ever-sharp radiant personality that she was, was gone temporarily ! As if, she was turned into a little girl.

* * * *

The picture of the Holy Mother, which is now worshipped by her devotees, was taken at Nivedita's house. It was the first ever picture of the Holy Mother and was taken at her forty-fifth year. The photograph was made at the eagerness of Mrs Ole Bull and Sister Nivedita. Sri Sarada Devi, shy by nature, did not at first agree to be photographed. Later, when Mrs Ole Bull especially requested her, she finally agreed. Sri Sri Ma sat on an animal skin. Some tubs of plants were kept near her. An English photographer was arranged for the purpose. Before taking the photograph, Nivedita combed Mother's hair and adjusted her dress. Initially, Mother was feeling shy to sit before the photographer and did not agree to look towards the camera. With her look downcast she was lost in herself. The photographer took the first photograph in that posture. Mother thought the photo taking was over and looked towards the camera. Then the photographer took his second shot. This photograph of her is being worshipped everywhere along with the photo of Sri Ramakrishna. Mother's third photograph was taken along with Nivedita. Sri Sri Ma was looking softly towards Nivedita and she in turn was looking towards the Mother—her face shining with joy.

* * * *

It was March 1899. Nivedita had come to see

Swamiji. While talking to her, Swamiji said, 'We are yet to know the real nature of man. When the real *manhood* shall emerge ... then everybody will be free to do great work. My mission is not Ramakrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything, but simply to bring *manhood* to my people.' Nivedita said: 'I will help you, Swami.' Swamiji replied: 'I know it.' We also know that she kept her promise. In fact, she dedicated her life for the purpose.

* * * *

One day Nivedita, accompanied by some of the highly educated ladies like Sarala Ghoshal of the Tagore family and a few others, went to Belur Math to meet Swamiji. In the presence of the ladies, Swamiji asked Nivedita to prepare the hookah for him. Nivedita felt herself blessed by getting the chance to serve her Guru, no matter how small the task was. She immediately prepared the hookah and came back. Those present were surprised. They realized that Nivedita had indeed become a true Indian by totally surrendering herself to Swamiji and his ideals.

Another day Nivedita went to Belur Math to see Swamiji. Her inmost desire was to be initiated into *sannyāsa* by Swamiji. She inquired: 'Swami, what should I do to qualify myself for *sannyāsa*?' Swamiji replied: 'Remain what you are.' She never again asked for *sannyāsa*. Keeping ever alive the

vow of renunciation, she lived as a *Brahmachāriṇī* throughout her life.

* * * *

Shortly after Nivedita had landed in India, Rabindranath asked her to take charge of his younger daughter's education. Rabindranath felt that being a well-educated English lady, Nivedita was eminently suited to teach his daughter through the English medium, following the existing standards. But Nivedita said to him: 'What is the good in imposing foreign ideals and standards? I think the proper education is to draw out that which lies latent as one's individual potentiality, as also the national skill.' So she did not agree, because she had not come to this land to teach Indian women the English language and culture. Her field of activity was completely different. Later, Rabindranath Tagore founded an ashram at Santiniketan and actualized a system of education following the ancient Indian tradition.

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While living at Bosepara Lane, Nivedita had very cordial relationship with her neighbours. She always stood by their side in their hours of happiness and sorrow. The neighbours also accepted her as their own, convinced of her sincere love for them. But she duly accepted the social customs, including those of touching, etc. One night she was

about to take her dinner. Suddenly she heard the sound of wailing from a nearby mud-house. Leaving her dinner she rushed to the spot. Before her eyes the small child of the house died. Nivedita felt as if one of her dear relations had died. The child's mother was piteously weeping. Nivedita took her head on her lap and sat silently. After a long while the child's mother stopped crying. She asked feebly: 'Where has my child gone?' Nivedita said, 'Hush, Mother. She is now with the Mother Kālī' Perhaps, the bereaved mother got a little bit of consolation. She heaved a long sigh but did not cry any more. Nivedita felt that she had no difference with these people; she had become very much one of them.

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In 1899, the plague broke out in Calcutta for the second time. Swamiji entrusted the entire responsibility of fighting the disease to Nivedita. The Ramakrishna Mission formed a Committee of which Nivedita became the Secretary, and Swami Sadananda its Chief Executive. The services rendered by both Nivedita and Swami Sadananda in fighting the plague became memorable in the history of Calcutta. Swami Sadananda moved around with a group of sweeper-boys and took upon himself the responsibility of keeping clean the localities, including the slums of Baghbazar and Shyambazar. And endowed with some superhuman

power as it were, Nivedita coordinated and supervised the entire range of activities. She inserted appeals for help in the English newspapers. At the auditorium of the 'Classic Theatre', she, along with Swamiji, gave lectures on 'Plague and the Duty of the Students.' Hearing their lectures, ten students immediately joined the work of plague-service. On every Sunday evening they would gather near Nivedita to report their activities, and leave after taking further instructions. People were astonished to observe her leadership and her organizing capacity during those days. She would personally inspect every bit of work and followed up if necessary. Moving around each and every locality she used to distribute the printed handbills containing the preventive measures on how to fight the plague. One day she observed that a pile of rubbish was heaped in a locality at Baghbazar. Whereas none appeared to be concerned about it, Nivedita personally arranged to secure a broomstick and basket and started to clean the rubbish. Seeing her, the young men of the locality felt ashamed and took away the broomstick from her hand and began to clean the rubbish and the pathway.

A wonderful and touching picture of Nivedita's service to fight the plague was recorded by Dr R. G. Kar, one of the eminent physicians of those days : 'One day, when I returned home at noon-time in the

month of *Chaitra* , after seeing the patients, I saw a European lady sitting on a dusty chair near the door. She was Sister Nivedita. She had been waiting for me for a long time in order to get some information.’ That morning Dr Kar had been to see a plague-stricken child in a slum at Baghbazar. Nivedita enquired about the arrangements that had been made for the child. Dr Kar informed her that the child’s condition was critical. Not only that, he informed her about the dangers of the disease and asked her to take precautions. When he went to visit the patient in the afternoon, he was astonished to find that ignoring all words of precaution, Nivedita was sitting with the child in her lap in the damp and weather-beaten hut in that unhealthy locality. The child’s mother had already died. Nivedita temporarily left her home and moved to this hut to take care of the child. Day after day, night after night, Nivedita remained engaged in nursing the child ignoring its possible danger. When the hut was to be disinfected she took a small ladder and white-washed the walls herself. After two days, the child died in the lap of Nivedita. Before breathing its last, the child called her ‘Ma Ma’ taking her for its own mother.

Not only in the hut of that child, her merciful presence was a familiar sight in all the localities of Baghbazar, regardless of age, sex or creed. The

services of Swami Sadananda and Nivedita in fighting the plague were so well organized that the then District Medical Officer and Chairman complimented them highly.

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1902, 4th July. Nivedita dreamed that night that Sri Ramakrishna was leaving his body a second time. Early in the morning a monk came from Belur Math carrying a letter from Swami Saradananda, conveying the message that Swamiji had passed away last night. Instantly the entire world became blank before Nivedita's eyes. She immediately rushed to the Math and reached the room of Swamiji. Swamiji's body was laid on the floor. Nivedita sat near Swamiji's head and started to fan him silently. Throughout the morning she sat like that.

On 5th July in the afternoon, Swamiji's body was brought down from his room and carried a little to the south for cremation (where at present Swamiji's temple stands at Belur Math). Swamiji's body was wrapped in *geruā* cloth. Nivedita thought that if she could have that cloth, she would send it as a memento to Swamiji's very dear Josephine MacLeod. She asked Swami Saradananda if that piece of cloth would also be consigned to flame. Swami Saradananda could feel the mind of Nivedita and said she might take it if she desired. But she

was unsure whether the act (accepting the cloth) would be proper or not, and finally she decided not to take it. She sat all the while looking at the burning pyre. It was about six in the evening. The burning flame was about to go out. Suddenly she felt that somebody had pulled her sleeve. Nivedita turned around and found a piece of that cloth lay near her feet. She lifted it with great care.

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Nivedita used to say that her task was nation building. After the passing away of Swamiji she realized that patriotism, in line with Swamiji's thoughts, had to be awakened in the hearts of the Indians. She felt that Swamiji had left this task for herself alone. She began lecture tours throughout the country.

In the month of October 1902, Nivedita reached Nagpur. There, at the local Morris College, she was invited to preside over a meeting, and was made to give away prizes to the participants in the cricket game. After the prize-giving ceremony she took the students to serious task in her lecture. That was the time of the *Dusserāh* festival. Nivedita said that it was indeed a matter of great shame for the students to enjoy joyously a foreign game during the days of *Dusserāh* when they should instead worship war weapons, and invoke strength from the Goddess Durgā by worshipping her. Had she known this

before, she certainly would not have agreed to preside over the meeting. She hoped that in the capital of the great 'Bhonslé' kings, she would see some demonstration of heroic feats of the Marathas. She was indeed sad not being able to see that. Nivedita demanded from the students that on the next day they must demonstrate before her sword-fighting, wrestling and other exercises on martial arts. Most of the college students did not know any such exercise. Somehow a few boys from outside and only one college student were made ready for this; they showed her the exercises as desired by her. She then said to the students that they were lately getting more higher studies, more than the required number of graduates were being turned out from the universities, who with their broken health could hardly protect themselves, not to speak of protecting the dignity of their mothers and sisters. The society would not derive any benefit from these heaps of debris. The country demanded true patriots, powerful in body and mind. The country had no need of those people who would serve their foreign masters while hounding their fellow countrymen. Only powerful patriots could raise the country.

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Two years thereafter in the month of January 1904 she lectured before the students in the same

spirit at Patna. She said, '... I shall be sorry to see immeasurable calm on the face of the boys. ... I should like to see you wrestling, boxing, fencing with each other rather than to see you calm. We want strong men.'

'The hero is one who fights, loves fighting and his supreme joy is to be beaten by one who is his superior after fighting his best. Fight, fight and fight again but not with meanness and not with rancour. ... But by no means be found sleeping when the cry comes for battle.'

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It was during the summer days of 1903. Nivedita was coming to Medinipur. Many people assembled at the railway station to greet her. The moment she alighted from the train, the crowd shouted, 'Hip, Hip, Hooray'. They thought that the white-skinned English lady should better be greeted in that fashion. But Nivedita looked utterly shocked. Waving her hand she asked them to stop. Then she explained that 'Hip, Hip, Hooray' was the victory shout of the English people, and the Indians should by no means use that. She raised her hand and shouted three times: *Wāh Guruki Fateh, Bol Bābujiko Khālsā*. The entire crowd joined her in shouting.

It was noon and so it was extremely hot, as it was the summer session. On reaching her room, she

immediately opened all the doors and windows. Waves of hot air filled the room, but she didn't bother at all. She removed the mattress laid on the cot and unrolled her own small mat and a thin *kānthā* (bed spread) over that. As everybody was struck with wonder, she said, 'I am practising austerity. And I want you to practise it because of the nature of the task you're set upon to perform. No luxury befits those who want to free their country.'

A huge crowd attended her lecture on the first day, but hearing her politically charged words, many people, out of fear, left the meeting before it came to an end. One retired Government employee informed her of the happening. He also expressed his apprehensions that in subsequent meetings not many people might attend. Nivedita replied: 'Don't try to frighten me. My veins still carry the blood of an independent nation. My lectures are not meant for those who feel scared.' Thereafter the attendance really became thin. But, undaunted, Nivedita gave her lectures on all the five days with equal zeal. She opened a gymnasium for the local youths to practise martial arts. She encouraged the youths by herself fencing with the sword, rounding the mace and club and in other exercises. She also taught a girl how to fire a gun.

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11th February 1905. Lord Curzon, while giving

the convocation address at the University of Calcutta, said that truth was given a higher place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East. The educated Indians attending the meeting were hurt, but no one raised a single word in protest. Nivedita was present at the meeting. She became furious at the insult. She just could not silently endure the indignity caused to this country. At the end of the meeting, she forcibly took Sir Gurudas Bannerjee to the Imperial Library. She drew out the book, *Problems of The Far East* by Lord Curzon, and showed him the pages 155-56 of the book where Curzon had proudly described how he had given false statements about his age and marriage to the President of the Korean Foreign Office to win his favour. On 13th February, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, published the excerpts from Lord Curzon's convocation address together with the relevant portion from the book proving his indulgence in untruth. The next day that news item (published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*) was reproduced in *The Statesman* with comments. It triggered a serious movement throughout the country over Lord Curzon's false statements and his unfair allegations against Indians. On 14th February, Nivedita addressed another letter to the editor of *The Statesman*, which was published with a caption 'The Highest Ideal of Truth'. In the letter she quoted

copiously from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the Purāṇas to show how truth was held in an exalted position in this country. She was more pained to see the cowardly silence of the students present at the meeting who did not say a single word in protest. In the letter, Nivedita censured them also : ‘The students to whom these statements were addressed, received them in “a faultless silence”. They did well. Less well, however, must we think it, if they stepped into manhood, remembering charges so levelled at their dead ancestors and their national codes, with never a word offered in defence!’

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Litterateur Dinesh Chandra Sen was Nivedita’s neighbour. He developed a beautiful friendly relationship with Nivedita. Nivedita believed in extremism in politics, whereas Dinesh Babu was rather of a simple and timid type. Nivedita admired Dinesh Babu for his literary quality and goodness but did not approve of his cowardly behaviour. Sometimes she would rebuke Dinesh Babu for this . Dinesh Babu respected Nivedita very much and would always endure her reproaches quietly, for he knew well that her reproaches were not unjust. One day Nivedita, Dinesh Babu and Brahmachari Ganen Maharaj were walking down Baghbazar road towards the bank of the Ganges. Dinesh Sen was

ahead of all, followed by Nivedita and at the end was Brahmachari Ganen Maharaj. Suddenly a crazy bull came rushing towards them. Dinesh Sen immediately took to his heels, fearing for his dear life. Nivedita was left just in front of the bull. Brahmachari Ganen Maharaj quickly stepped in and drove away the bull. When all three of them gathered again, Nivedita laughed and said to Dinesh Sen: 'Dinesh Babu, today you've brightened the image of the masculine rank. Your act of the day should stand as an exploit-memorial.' Immediately her smile vanished from her face. She rebuked Dinesh Sen: 'Dinesh Babu, are you not ashamed of yourself?' What could Dinesh Babu do? Truly, he did not act befitting a man. So he silently gulped down everything.

But at heart Nivedita was very fond of Dinesh Babu. Nivedita used to say that she respected Dinesh Babu because she found true patriotism in him. She helped him much in the publication of Dinesh Babu's book on the history of Bengal in English. For one year she worked on this, going through the entire manuscript minutely and editing it. Sometimes they worked on it from morning till 10 o'clock at night with hardly an interval of a few minutes. Dinesh Sen wrote that if Nivedita would take over any responsibility, she worked thoroughly, involving herself as though it were her own task.

She helped Jagadish Chandra Bose in a similar way with his scientific writing.

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Nivedita wrote these words about Swamiji's patriotism : 'India was Swamiji's greatest passion.... India throbbed in his breast, India beat in his pulses, India was his day-dream, India was his nightmare.'

Such patriotism had manifested in Nivedita also. She used to recite every moment, like a sacred mantra: 'Bhāratvarsha, Bhāratvarsha'. And she would become ecstatic while doing this. She held everything in India as sacred, deserving worship. She would hold a specific practice in high esteem, even if it might have lately fallen into disuse, only because it must have been beneficent for India in the past. Before boarding a boat from a ghat on the river Ganga, she would touch its water to her head like any other Hindu woman. She would always keep her hands folded in the gesture of *praṇāma* whenever she approached any temple or a deity.

One day Nivedita and Christine were invited by Sisir Kumar Ghosh to come to the office of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Some Indian ladies were also present there. Sisir Babu introduced Nivedita and Christine to the ladies. Nivedita instantly became one of them, as though known to the Indian ladies for so many days. In the corner of the room an

earthen lamp was burning on a bell-metal lamp-stand : there was no electricity during those days. Both Nivedita and Christine were totally charmed to see the bell-metal lamp-stand and the earthen lamp. They were intently looking at the objects, after a while they uttered the word *ārati* and made *praṇāma* with their folded hands. All who were present there, ladies especially, were surprised to observe their mood. They were seeing these things since their childhood, but on that day they could feel for the first time how sacred the earthen lamp and the lamp-stand were.

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Giribala Ghosh was a student at the Nivedita School. She was widowed at an early age and was left with a daughter. She lived at her maternal uncle's house. After attending the school just for one year, her daughter was married. On the day of *bāsibiye*, i.e., the day following the marriage, Nivedita went there to bless the newly-wed couple. The thoughts of *HaraGourī* arose in her mind while looking at the bride and the groom. She became ecstatic and kept repeating: 'ShivaDurgā, ShivaDurgā'. Completely oblivious of the surroundings, she sat cross-legged on the ground of the bridal room and kept swaying with her hands stretched out, and repeating continuously, 'ShivaDurgā, ShivaDurgā'. She remained in that

position for a while and then left suddenly engrossed in that mood.

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One day Dinesh Sen pointed out to Nivedita a verse on Shiva, as narrated in *Shūnyapurāṇa*. It ran like this: 'Oh Shiva, why do you live by begging? Begging is a very heinous profession. Someday you may get something while on another day you return with empty bowl. If only you till the ground and raise paddy, your hardship will be over. Oh my Lord, how long will you live naked or wrapped up in a clumsy tiger-skin? If you cultivate cotton and spin yarn, you will get the comfort of wearing woven clothes and be happy!' It never occurred to the mind of Dinesh Babu that this out and out rural verse could contain any extraordinary Indian thought in it. But while reading it, Nivedita became profoundly excited and kept muttering, 'How wonderful! How wonderful!' Dinesh Babu asked: 'Sister, what have you seen in it that makes you wild with joy like a pauper suddenly getting a kingdom?' But Nivedita did not shift her eyes from the verse, as she clasped both of her hands. With her eyes glistening with profound delight and pride she only kept repeating: 'Oh Dinesh Babu, it's a wonderful thing!' A speechless Dinesh Babu thought what could have happened to that crazy girl! Next day he approached one of Nivedita's

friends (perhaps, Sister Christine) and inquired : ‘I couldn’t quite follow what Nivedita got from that verse? Have you any idea?’ She said: ‘Yes, I’ve heard about it from her. Ordinary devotees or worshippers pray for help from their worshipped deities—Oh my Lord, be gracious and grant me wealth, name, fame, grant me good health and a host of other things. But in that verse the devotee, out of his love for the worshipped deity, completely forgot himself, the thoughts of his personal sorrows are totally lost in his mind. The sufferings of his worshipped deity have softened his mind, now his only concern is to see how to remove the sufferings of his deity.’ Dinesh Babu then came to understand why Nivedita was overwhelmed on reading the verse. In fact, Nivedita herself was very much the image of such an idea!

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Nivedita tried to imprint nationalist ideas in the minds of her girl students through all their activities and behaviour including language, dress, education, music, and everything. She introduced everyday singing of the song *Vande Mātaram* in her school. Any national object, no matter how insignificant it might be, was dear to her like a worshipped deity. She tried to infuse this reverence into her students also so that they could view any national object in such depth.

Once the British Government set some political prisoners free from the Andaman jails. Nivedita declared a school holiday to commemorate the event and decorated her school premises, placing *maṅgal ghats* (earthen pitchers with swastika inscribed on their bodies, symbolic of beneficence) supported by plantain saplings at the entrance.

In order to hear the lectures of Surendra Nath Banerjee, she used to take the senior girl students in a carriage to the Brahma School. Surendra Nath gave lectures on nationalist issues in a park and the students heard him standing on the verandah of the Brahma School situated adjacent to it.

One day Lady Abala Bose, wife of Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose, came to her school. Nivedita became very happy and made her students sing the song '*Baṅga Āmār Jananī Āmār*' (My Bengal, My Mother). When the girls were singing, her delight knew no bounds, tears of joy rolled down her cheeks.

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Many of Nivedita's students would not take food from her hand, because she was a foreigner. But, such an attitude shown by the very students who were to her dearer than her own life could not hurt Nivedita. Rather, she respected their firmness to abide by social norms. She never wanted to hurt people's sentiments or give injury to traditional social practices and rituals of Indians.

One day Nivedita took her students in a joyous outing to the Museum. The girls moved around for a long time and felt tired and thirsty. She quickly took out the glass she had brought with her, washed it under a water tap, filled it with water and held it out to one of the girls. The girl was acutely thirsty, nonetheless she could not take the glass touched by a foreigner. Another girl sharply took away the glass from her hand and drank the water herself lest Nivedita was hurt. But Nivedita was neither annoyed with the first girl nor felt hurt.

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One day Nivedita hired a boat and took her students to visit Dakshineswar temple. Alighting from the boat she first reached Sri Ramakrishna's room and spent a long time in meditation with others. Then she took the girls to see *Bhavatāriṇī*. All the girls entered the temple and saluted the Mother Kālī. But Nivedita had no right of admission inside the temple. So she reached the end part of the *nātmandir*, negotiating her way through the *chāndni* by the side of the river Ganga. Standing over there she saw the Mother Kālī. The girls were very sorry that Nivedita had to take a look at the Mother Kālī that way. But Nivedita was not disturbed—she was overwhelmed with joy having had the vision of the Mother even from there.

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When the goddess Sarasvatī was worshipped at Nivedita's school for the first time, She was offered uncut fruits like grapes, date-palms, sweets and not any cooked food items in order to take care of the sentiments of the girls. After the floral offerings, the students carried those fruits to their homes — they did not have the courage to take *prasāda* within the precincts of the school. But Nivedita's love had the power to sweep away these social restrictions to a great extent and a different scene was observed on the next year's *Sarasvatī puja*. The initiative this time was taken by the students themselves. They offered the goddess with fried *luchi* and cooked curry, etc., at the seat of the goddess in the ground floor. However, to maintain the sanctity of the latent tendencies of the Hindu-widow girls, neither Nivedita nor Christine came down to the ground floor even once. But when the puja was over, some of the girls went up and forced them down. Now greatly delighted, all of them sat together and shared *prasāda*.

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In the days of the blind rush for imitating the English, a nationalist education for Indian girls was initiated, ironically enough, through the benign hand of an 'English woman'. We simply do not know the enormity of social obstacles, the physical hardship

and severe poverty that Nivedita had to endure to run her school. Perhaps, we shall never come to know that, because so easily did she involve herself in other people's sorrows and sufferings as equally she was unmindful of her own pains and privations. But truly she had to spend many days unfed and under-fed in order to run the school. Initially no Hindu maid would agree to work in her household because she was a *mlechchha* (foreigner). Even if they would, they would not agree to touch utensils and other household goods used by her. So during those days she had to help herself in this regard. Because of difficulty in cooking food she mostly lived on fruits and milk. As the days passed, her kind behaviour made the womenfolk of Baghbazar locality accept Nivedita as one of their own. Even the natural tendencies of an otherwise illiterate maid-servant were wiped out by the quality of her love. Nivedita's self-sacrifice for the cause of India was so evident that even she thought that indeed Nivedita belonged to India, no matter if she was a *Memsahib*. So, later on, the maid never objected to washing her used utensils. But the utensils used by any other *Memsahib* who might have called on her had to be washed by Nivedita herself.

The premises of 16, Bosepara Lane was her school as well as residence. The house was not at all healthy. Over and above, as Nivedita was born and

brought up in a cold country, she used to suffer greatly during the summer days. The ceiling of the house was low, and during the summer days the rooms would become so hot that anyone staying at the room for a while would develop headache. In those days there was no electric lamp or fan. She had only a small hand fan. During the hot summer days in that room she would keep on writing books with singular attention, her head downcast. Needless to say that during the hours of writing it was not possible to use the hand fan. Perhaps, as she remained singularly absorbed in writing, it made her insensitive to the heat. At times she would come out of the room after writing, to look at things that the students might have been doing. At that time she would be seen with her face reddened with heat. One day while she was supervising the work of the girls, suddenly she took her seat rubbing her forehead with fingers. When somebody inquired, she said: 'It's greatly painful.' After a while she was again absorbed in her writing. Due to living in that home, Nivedita frequently fell ill and suffered from malaria on a number of occasions. In fact the whole locality was unhealthy. But in spite of all requests and entreaties from her well-wishers, she did not agree to leave the house and change over to some healthier place within the town. How could she leave the place that gave her first refuge in India, no

matter how unhealthy it might be? She used to say: 'The place has adopted me, leaving it I will not go anywhere.'

To cap it all, there was financial hardship. She had to meet all the expenses of running the school and maintaining herself out of the earnings from her writings and the monetary help that Mrs Ole Bull used to provide. When she would face financial hardship even after so much of labour, she would first curtail her own personal expenses. Lady Abala Bose (wife of Jagadish Chandra Bose, and who was very intimate with Nivedita and closely observed her over a long period) said: 'Her neighbours knew how the lion share of her income was used to meet the sorrows of the poor, to provide food for the hungry. For this she would sacrifice even her basic needs.' Rabindranath Tagore while reminiscing said the same thing: 'It was not out of donations, not even from the surplus that Nivedita met the expenses of the school. It was out and out part of sharing her food. This is the truth.'

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The twenty-two year old widow, Giribala Ghosh, lived at her maternal uncle's place at Baghbazar with her daughter. She keenly wished to study at Nivedita's school. She enrolled herself there, but had to discontinue due to criticism of the neighbours. One day, on her way to the Ganga for

bathing, her grandmother heard Sanskrit verses in chorus being sung by the students of the school. She liked it so much that she made Giribala rejoin the school. But on the slightest pretext she was not allowed to go to school. Most of the days the school carriage coming to take her would return without her. The driver of the school carriage, fearing damage to it, would not enter the lane leading to her residence and her guardians would object to her walking down the lane to reach the carriage. When Nivedita heard about this, she instructed the carriage driver to pick Giribala up from her house. But one day the carriage dashed against the corner of a house and was badly damaged. Nivedita very much disliked if any loss or damage was caused to anything. So she herself went to Giribala's house. She talked to her maternal uncle for a long time and finally said: 'You may be displeased with me. Call me in whatever terms you may like to, but I beg of you to allow this girl from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. to go to my school. The women members of your family go to the Ganga for bath or to Kalighat. Why can you not send this girl for a few hours even?' While saying this, Nivedita knelt down before that gentleman. The gentleman became embarrassed. Raising Nivedita, he immediately called for Giribala from inside the house and handed her over to Nivedita. She hugged the girl with both hands and

began to say: 'My child, from now onwards you will be able to go to school everyday.' On that day she herself took the girl to the school in her carriage. On reaching her own room she affectionately wrapped the girl with a shawl and said: 'My child, take this and come to the school everyday, covering yourself thus.'

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Before beginning of the summer vacation or any other long vacation, Nivedita used to feed her students. The number of students was not small and she was poor. So it was not possible for her to arrange for good food. She would count the heads of her students well ahead and buy fruits and sweets according to her means. Then she would wrap them in small packets made of *shāl*-leaves and distribute them from a basket, approaching each of her beloved students. Thereafter she would stand in a corner with an empty basket. After taking the food the girls would drop the empty packets in the basket, and with a smiling face Nivedita would watch the entire proceedings. In this way Nivedita would serve her small 'goddesses'.

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Nivedita was a mother to her students in the true sense of the term. Hindu widows were required to maintain many restrictions with regard to their food. So on many occasions they would reach school

without taking any food. Nivedita could tell by seeing their faces who of them had not taken their meal and would be anxious to feed them. She had one young widow student, named Prafulla Devi, who was her neighbour. On every *ekādashī* (the eleventh day after the full moon or new moon, which one spends in full or partial fasting, prayer and worship), she would make this student sit before her, then taking due care to avoid being touched, she would feed her sweets and syrup. On one ekadashi day she had to go to Jagadish Chandra Bose's house on an urgent piece of work. Suddenly she remembered that it was ekadashi and she had not fed Prafulla. She immediately rushed back to her house and called Prafulla and repeatedly apologised, saying: 'My child, I've forgot, what a wrong! I haven't fed you while I took my meal. What a wrong!'

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Nivedita used to lay great emphasis on obedience to rules as a part of education. She closely watched her students to make sure that they performed their duties in proper manner. Besides this, she also taught them with great care the basic rules of hygiene. She observed that her simple, naive students might have other good qualities, but lacked in the basic sense of hygiene. So she laid great stress on it. She strictly watched that each of

them should use their own clothing and bedding separately.

In her room a bed was always kept laid. When she felt extremely tired she would take rest there for a couple of minutes. One day as she entered her room for taking a little rest she found that one of her students (because of her home at Dacca she used to be called as 'Dhakai Ma') was lying asleep on the bed. Nivedita stealthily walked out of the room lest her sleep was broken. But coming out of the room she asked one of her students: 'Look, Dhakai Ma is very much tired today. Please tell her to resume the school after taking a few days of rest.' Everybody got the message that Nivedita was displeased with the girl. On the one hand, she did not like anyone using another's bed, on the other, such sleeping while the school was on, was the cause of her serious annoyance.

But she would not hesitate in the least to break the rule when necessary. A student named Mahamaya was ailing for a number of days and became extremely weak. However, she continued to come to school even in such physical condition. One day she suddenly fell seriously ill during school and started vomiting blood. No sooner had Nivedita seen this than she took the girl on her lap like her own child, and placed her in her bed. She nursed her with delicate care

throughout the school hours and sent her back home cautiously.

Later, it came to be known that Mahamaya was suffering from consumption. Nivedita and Christine tried their best to bring her round by arranging for her medical treatment. An accommodation was arranged at Puri where she rested along with her brother and mother. Both Nivedita and Christine stayed with her and nursed her. But she could not be saved.

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Nivedita's affection for her students knew no bounds. At the same time she never hesitated to take them to task. If any student did anything wrong she would only glare at her with a hard look, which itself amounted to adequate punishment. Shortly after, she would resume her talks in the same affectionate tone. She made a rule that in her classes only the girl who was asked would be permitted to answer the question. One day while teaching in a class she asked a question to a particular student. Another student named Nirjharini Sarkar promptly answered the question. Nivedita glared at her only once. That itself made the girl afraid. To punish the student still harder, Nivedita did not ask her any question for the following few days. The severity of the punishment made the girl weep. A few days later, finding Nivedita in a house performing puja,

the girl ran up to her crying joyfully, 'Sister'. Nivedita took her fondly in her arms, greeting: 'Hello, my child!' The girl happily returned home and told her mother: 'Mother, today Sister looked so beautiful! She smiled while looking at me. I didn't feel the least afraid to see her. Why then, do I at times feel afraid of her at school, mother? Then she is changed into another one.'

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Nivedita was all love and kindness. Her compassion would swell up particularly when she used to come across someone whom nobody loved. On her maiden voyage to India she met a young Englishman on board. The young man was immodest and licentious. That was why he always faced troubles and problems. Therefore his parents wanted to get rid of him by sending him away to India. The fellow passengers on the ship became annoyed with him in no time. No one cared to mix with him. Nivedita's mind was filled with sympathy for him. She one day invited the unfortunate, discarded young man and talked to him in a quiet place. She presented her golden watch to him saying that she hoped he would be able to begin a new life for himself. She presented the watch, the only valuable possession she had with her, as a token of her faith in him. Her mother had presented that watch. Indeed, the young man began a new life

thereafter. One year before Nivedita left the mortal plane, she could know from a letter from the boy's mother that before dying in far off South Africa, the boy remembered her with a deep sense of respect.

Not only human beings, but there was no dearth of her love for the animals also. Normally she would not like to ride in the school's horse-driven carriage. When asked, she would say: 'The horses will be hurt.' Ramananda Chattopadhyaya, the editor of *Pravāsī* and *The Modern Review*, came to meet Nivedita for the first time in a horse-drawn carriage. Getting the news of his arrival, she came out of her house. After an exchange of pleasantries, she advised the coachman to let off the horses and to feed them. She also inquired if the coachman had taken his meal.

Once at the Udbodhan House, a cat was making a nuisance of itself, and an annoyed Golap-Ma took it by its neck with the intention of throwing it out. As Nivedita saw this she cried out, 'Golap Ma, *mrityu* (death), *mrityu* (death)!' She was so highly excited, and coupled with her difficulty to speak Bengali fluently, she somehow managed to convey that the cat would die if thrown out.

* * * *

In mid-July 1906, a famine broke out in East Bengal. Immediately a few sannyāsins and brahmachārins from Belur Math were sent there to

begin relief operations. Gradually, very alarming reports of the famine reached Calcutta, and Nivedita became restless to go there. Only recently she had suffered from brain-fever and therefore, was not keeping in good health then. In spite of that, disregarding everybody's requests, she reached the famine-ravaged areas and joined the relief work already initiated by the sannyāsins, brahmachārins and volunteers. She lived there many days and served the people. She became one with them, particularly with the rural women folk of those areas. They also took her as their own and shared with her their tales of distress and woes, fully opening their hearts. They did not fail to identify her as a true well-wisher. Nivedita moved from house to house to inquire about their welfare. This helped her to update her knowledge of the disaster. But at the same time she was charmed to find glimpses of nobility in those hapless people. When she was leaving a particular village, the entire women folk of the village walked down to the bank of the river to bid her farewell. The boat had sailed past for quite a distance and Nivedita found that they were still standing in the pose of praying. There was no end to their own distress, still they were praying for her ! Tears filled Nivedita's eyes.

The terrible face of the famine cast a deep influence on Nivedita's mind, which she described

in a series of essays in her book named *Famine and Flood*. Immediately after her return from the famine relief work she fell seriously ill. She suffered from malaria for a long period which totally broke down her health.

* * * *

One day Nivedita took her students for a visit to the Museum. Moving from one room to another in the Museum she reached a room with her students, which was being repaired and white-washed. A number of coolies were working there and one among them had fallen asleep on the floor upon a piece of cloth. With extreme care Nivedita walked past him and signalled to her students, putting her finger to her lip, not to make any sound. The students tip-toed across the room so that the coolie was not aroused. In spite of so much of caution, the coolie got up and finding Nivedita just in front of him, stood up and saluted her. He was visibly scared to see a 'Memsab' before him. Nivedita became very sorry and repeatedly asked him to sleep once again. The more she persuaded the coolie to sleep, the more he felt scared. He had never in his life met with such behaviour from any 'Memsab' and he could hardly imagine that any 'Memsab' could make a request in such a manner to an insignificant man like him. He only thought he must have committed some serious crime. It was a wonderful scene indeed!

* * * *

She was soft-hearted no doubt, but when circumstances so required she knew how to be firm. She wanted that her students also should learn to become hard when needed, as softness was very much innate with them. One day she brought down some books for dusting. The white ants had already attacked those books. As the books were being beaten and dusted, the white ants dropped down and began to flee away. She was quick to crush them. While crushing the white ants, she said: 'Indians were extremely kind as a nation. When the enemy, King Alexander, invaded the land near the river Indus, the Indian kings welcomed him because a guest was considered *Nārāyaṇa* (God). Only one of the kings, named Puru, stood to give him a fight. In the same way, Arjuna being a great hero did not want to fight at Kurukshetra initially. But God advised him to shed imbecility. This is indeed what your scriptures teach you. Don't ever be soft while on duty. The insects are fleeing for their dear life. But if they remain alive they will again eat up the books. So these are to be killed. That which is evil should be destroyed without becoming soft in the least.'

* * * *

One day Nivedita asked her students: 'Who is the queen of India?' The girls replied: 'Her

Majesty the Queen Victoria.’ It naturally occurred to them that in the England-ruled India, their queen was Queen Victoria. Nivedita was visibly upset to hear this reply. She was both angry and grieved. She cried out : ‘You don’t even appear to know who is the queen of India!’ Then she explained: ‘Look, the Empress of England, Queen Victoria, can never be the queen of India. Your queen is Queen Sītā. Sītā is the eternal queen of India.’ Swamiji had advised Nivedita that in the matter of women’s education one must not deviate from the traditional spiritual ideal of renunciation and service. The need for education of the Indian women was certainly important, but the spiritual ideal of renunciation and service must be given the top place above everything. Nivedita tried heart and soul to follow these instructions of Swamiji.

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Another day Nivedita asked her students: ‘Of all the women characters narrated in the *Mahābhārata*, who is the most heroic?’ The girls replied according to their own perception and judgement. Most of them named ‘Draupadī’, some said ‘Subhadrā’, yet some others named ‘Kuntī’. Not satisfied with their answers, Nivedita kept looking at the girls inquisitively if any one could give the correct answer. At last she herself explained: She was Gāndhārī Devī, the consort of King Dhritarāshtra.

Incomparable was her devotion to her husband. Her husband was blind, so out of her own volition she denied herself the light of the world throughout her life. But she did not tolerate any of her husband's unjust acts. She was extremely fond of her own son, still when Duryodhana asked for her blessings before the beginning of the great war, she did not bless him to be victorious. She said: 'Let victory be there where there is righteousness.' Even when she knew that death was certain to her dear sons, she could not take the side of unrighteousness.

* * * *

The artist Nandalal Bose was then a student of the Art School. One day he and another promising student of the school, Surendranath Gangopadhyaya, went to meet Nivedita at her Bosepara Lane residence. They took their seat on the sofa in the drawing room. A carpet was laid on the floor. Nivedita asked them to sit on the floor. They did take their seats on the floor but were offended, as they thought that the European lady had insulted them by advising so. But how wrong they were, they realized a little after. Nivedita looked at them intently for a while, then said: 'You belong to the land of the Buddha. I do not feel happy to see you seated on a sofa. Now as you sit like Buddha, I find it so good to look at you.' Then in her happy mood she called Sister Christine and introduced her to

them, and then they discussed pictures and drawings.

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In one of the class rooms of her school a picture of Sri Ramakrishna was hung up. On the opposite wall a world map was hanging. One day Nivedita took away the world map and fixed it under the picture of Sri Ramakrishna and smilingly said to the girls. 'Sri Ramakrishna is the *Jagatguru* (the Preceptor of the World), so the World map should remain at his feet.'

* * * *

One day Nivedita, accompanied by litterateur Dinesh Sen, was travelling in a tram car. An Englishman, noticing her to be white-skinned, was about to sit beside her. Nivedita looked at him with great annoyance. The Englishman, with his head downcast, left to find another seat. Then Nivedita rather wilfully came closer to Dinesh Sen and began to discuss things, smilingly. She made it clear that not the English but the brown Indians were her own people.

Nivedita detested the English people so deeply that she would be angry with anyone who showed undue devotion towards them. One day Jadunath Sarkar was praising one such historian. Nivedita sharply retorted: 'Oh, don't speak of him, he is a flatterer of the English.'

* * * *

Nivedita was returning from Bodh Gaya. The party included Jagadish Chandra Bose, his wife and others. From Gaya station Nivedita would go another direction while the Boses would go to Calcutta by another train. The Boses' train arrived first. They ran from here to there but finding no seat elsewhere they tried to board a first class compartment. Two Englishmen were travelling in that compartment and as the Boses were Indians they did not agree to let them in. The Boses' companions rushed to the Station Master who was unwilling to do anything in the matter. As they returned disappointed they found that Nivedita was blasting those two Englishmen, and finally they were made to open the door. Somehow at the last moment they could make their way inside the train. The train left the station, but Nivedita could hardly restrain her anger. Meanwhile her train reached the station. In that train there were only two first class compartments—one was occupied by an English lady, and another by an Indian gentleman. Her companions wanted to lodge her in the compartment occupied by the English lady, but Nivedita strongly objected and boarded the compartment occupied by the Indian. As they opened the door and entered inside, the Indian gentleman received them cordially. He pushed aside his hubble-bubble and

made the seat for Nivedita. While the train was about to leave, Nivedita called her companions and said: 'Now you see the difference between the barbarous Englishmen and the civilized Indians.'

* * * *

Nivedita believed that the awakening of India would not remain restricted to the fields of politics and religion alone. It would be a total awakening, covering all the fields—science, education, literature, history and arts; and Nivedita directed all her energy to achieve this goal. Especially, she considered that the revival of arts was absolutely necessary for national awakening. She arranged for cultivation of arts for her own students.

The Bengal School of Art began its movement in the first part of the twentieth century, which in no time snowballed to take the shape of an all-India art movement. The movement was initiated by Havell, Abanindranath and Coomaraswamy, whereas Nivedita remained the vibrant centre of this art movement faithful to Indian national traditions. Nivedita learned from Vivekananda the inmost and intricate specialities of Indian art. Indian artists and art critics of the time were hardly aware of those specialities. Directly, and at times indirectly, Nivedita made Havell, Abanindranath and Coomaraswamy understand her special vision of Indian aesthetics and the philosophy of art which

she had received from her Guru. She did not stop there. She always inspired and guided the talented students of the Calcutta Art School to move along the forgotten tracks of ancient Indian art. Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and Surendranath Gangopadhyaya were among them.

Mrs Herringham, an artist, once came to India with the idea of copying the frescoes in the caves of Ajanta. She was in search of Indian artists for the act of copying. Nivedita arranged the services of Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar for the task, through the mediation of Abanindranath. She was eager because the student-artists would get the chance to see the real forms of Indian art if they went to Ajanta. She personally met their entire expenses of board and lodging, and travelling. Thereafter, as the artists were still working at Ajanta, she reached them along with the Bose family. Her presence greatly increased the enthusiasm of the student-artists. Later in their professional careers the artists were immensely benefited by this experience. Their experiences at Ajanta gave them the clear idea of what the true forms and contents of Indian national art should be.

Her tremendous strength lay in her pen. So she was not content by providing encouragement only, she contributed several essays to different magazines and periodicals on these artists and their

art works. Sri Ramananda Chattopadhyaya, the editor of *The Modern Review*, became the chief exponent of the art movement that developed following the Indian traditions. It was Nivedita who first instilled in the mind of Sri Ramananda Chattopadhyaya a respect for the national art. And Sri Chattopadhyay himself acknowledged it.

Nivedita placed such importance on the regeneration of the national art movement that she wrote to Mrs Ole Bull that her fondest dream was the regeneration of the national arts and crafts. She thought that when there would be regeneration of the ancient arts and crafts in India then only would India emerge as a powerful nation. The great historian Jadunath Sarkar also reminisced: 'Nivedita was a great champion of Indian art. She always appreciated and encouraged any original contribution (in this regard) of any Indian. She would criticise the art works of the young artists and make them aware of their lapses. An excellent art connoisseur, she had extensively studied the Western arts. Bengali artists who followed the national traditions, were greatly benefited by her expert counselling. The frescoes of Ajanta would overwhelm her. She also said that she had found the finest expression of true Indian art in the frescoes of Ajanta, and the philosophy of integration of the Hindu religion in the carved image of *Trimūrti* in the Elephanta caves.

* * * *

Nivedita exerted tremendous influence on the life of the famous Tamil poet, Subrahmanya Bharati. Bharati met Nivedita only once. In that single meeting, she inflamed the spirit of patriotism in him that lasted for ever. When Subrahmanya Bharati came to attend the Calcutta Congress in 1906, he met Nivedita. In that first meeting with her, he felt that she was the centre of a great power. In the course of discussions she learned that Bharati was married. She asked: 'Why haven't you come with your wife?' Bharati replied: 'In our society there is no tradition to take out one's wife openly to attend any meeting.' Hearing this, Nivedita flew into a rage and said: 'I am greatly pained to find yet another Indian who doesn't think his wife any better than a slave. What is the value of your education if you cannot raise your women kind to your own level? How can one part of the country achieve independence if the other part keeps it enslaved? From now on do not consider yourself separate from her. As you raise your own hand so also you raise her with the same care, and adore her like a celestial messenger.' Bharati was overwhelmed. He begged to be pardoned by Nivedita and promised that he would follow each word of her advice in letter and spirit. At the time of taking leave, Nivedita said, blessing him: 'My child, drive away all the barriers

from your mind. Get rid of the barbarous separatist tendencies of religion, caste and creed. Fill your heart with love, and one day you'll find your name has made a bright place in the pages of history.' Just one audience! It infused true patriotism in Bharati's heart, and wiped away for ever the sense of caste and sex differentiation. Bharati returned to Madras a completely changed man. Thereafter he appeared as an explosive poet of patriotism. Never thereafter did he admit any caste differentiation. Throwing all the rules and prohibitions of the society to the winds he, being a Brahmin himself, used to dine with everybody. He held the women kind in high esteem and used to involve his wife in all activities, and even walked along the road holding her hand. He would not care for anyone's frowning or criticism. Bharati used to regard Nivedita as his Guru, and dedicated his two poetry selections to her name. In the preface of one of the books he wrote : 'I offer this little book at the feet of my Provider of Learning who, by unfolding the spiritual vision of Mother India, infused in me the love for the Motherland, just as Sri Krishna by showing His Cosmic form to Arjuna conferred on him true Self-knowledge.' The second one he dedicated with the words: 'I humbly offer this book to Devi Nivedita, the spiritual daughter of Bhagavan Vivekananda. Without uttering a single word and within a fraction

of a moment she made me realize the true form of service to the Motherland and the glory of self sacrifice.'

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Scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose was acquainted with Nivedita in the year 1898. Before that he had already earned the name of a scientist and secured D.Sc. degree from London. His research work was appreciated by eminent scientists like Lord Kelvin, and many others. But such a world-renowned genius had to suffer much indignities and harassment at every step because he was one from a dependent country! Nivedita was deeply pained to observe that. She thought it was a sacred national duty to stand by his side. This science-eccentric personality became her friend and child. Though he was ten years senior in age to Nivedita, we find from many of her letters that Dr Bose was referred to as 'Khoka' (child). When Dr Bose would become mentally exhausted having had to fight with a thousand and one obstacles, Nivedita would inspire him with motherly affection. She exerted her influence in many quarters of the Government bureaucracy to remove difficulties standing in the way of his scientific research work. She openly advocated the case of Jagadish Chandra Bose before Miss MacLeod and Mrs Ole Bull and successfully brought them to his side. And she did all these

things as Vivekananda's task. She knew how much importance Swamiji attached to science for the regeneration of India.

In the year 1901, the Royal Society of London stopped publishing Jagadish Chandra's scientific research papers and dissertations. He then decided to publish the findings of his scientific research work in the form of books. From then till 1907, the famous three books that Jagadish Chandra published were not only edited by Nivedita, but also the language was mostly hers. The same is true for most of his other essays. After the publication of those books, Nivedita also contributed essays and articles about Jagadish Chandra to many magazines and periodicals in India and abroad. She also lectured on 'Jagadish Chandra' at many places. Nivedita used to regard Jagadish Chandra as a 'national asset'. Keeping in view Nivedita's contribution to the scientific research work of Jagadish Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore said: 'In the day of his success, Jagadish gained an invaluable energiser and helper in Sister Nivedita, and in any record of his life's work her name must be given a place of honour.'

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It was one of the earnest desires of Nivedita to establish a *Vijnān Mandir* (School of Science) by the Indians, funded by Indians themselves, where

Indian students would get unfettered opportunity to pursue scientific studies. She often used to have discussions with Jagadish Chandra on this issue. That was why, when founding the 'Basu Vijnan Mandir', Jagadish Chandra paid his respectful homage to Nivedita by installing a plaque on the wall displaying a relief model of Nivedita engraved therein. Jagadish Chandra declared that it was Nivedita's dream that was actualized in his 'Vijnan Mandir.' It is known from the reminiscences of Dr Vashishwar Sen that, in accordance with Jagadish Chandra's wish, a small portion of Nivedita's bone-ashes was buried under that relief plaque.

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Though Nivedita's attitude was truly like a warrior, she had a childlike simplicity in her. Sometimes she would be inflamed at the slightest pretext, only to be calm at the next moment. One day she was arguing with the editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Sri Matilal Ghosh, on some issue. She became very excited while arguing, and left the office in a huff. Next day she again came to the *Patrikā* office and laughing like a child, said sweetly in broken Bengali : 'Mati Babu, yesterday I became very *dushtu* (naughty).' Her touching simplicity brought tears to the eyes of Mati Babu.

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In the Ramakrishna Order, he who occupies the

position immediately after Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, is Swami Brahmananda. He was the first President of the Ramakrishna Order. Sri Ramakrishna called him his spiritual child. Sarada Devi said: 'Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) is *Nārāyaṇa* himself.', while Swami Vivekananda said: 'In spirituality, Rakhal is superior to me.' In the Ramakrishna Order, as 'Swamiji' necessarily means Swami Vivekananda, 'Maharaj' or 'Raja Maharaj' stands for Swami Brahmananda. 'Raja Maharaj' was all praise for Nivedita. When Nivedita used to call on 'Maharaj', they would not talk much orally. Both of them would sit in meditation. Thus they would come to know each other's mind. 'Raja Maharaj' used to say that whenever he would come close to Nivedita, his mind would soar high up and dive deep inside.

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Nivedita was an intimate friend of Sri Ramananda Chattopadhyaya, the editor of the periodical *Pravāsi*. At that time she said that the lustre of Ramananda's genius would not limit itself to Bengali language alone, it would find its expression in English language as well, and that he would some day become renowned in whole India. During later days she was a regular contributor to *The Modern Review*, edited by Ramananda Babu.

One day Nivedita went to see the ailing

Ramananda Babu at his residence. She wore a long white gown and a pair of foreign shoes. Before entering the patient's room she unfastened her shoes. All those who were present became astonished to see a European lady unfastening her shoes. Some of them also said that she need not do it. But Nivedita said: 'I know, one has to leave the shoes'.

* * * *

The history of India used to come alive in the imagination of Nivedita. One day she was talking to her students about her visit to Chitor. Nivedita said: 'I went up the hill and sat down on my knees. I closed my eyes and thought of Padmini Devi with her folded hands standing before the burning pyre. I closed my eyes and tried to think of the last thought that might have crossed Padmini's mind....' As she spoke, she became quiet and for a while sat lost in her thoughts. Truly, she appeared to have reached Chitor of the time of Padmini Devi. She completely forgot that she was teaching the girls.

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Once Nivedita and her companions entered a deep forest to have a look at an ancient temple. By the time they reached there, it became dark and there was no scope for return. It was decided to spend the night at the temple yard. With great interest she observed throughout the night the life of

the wild animals. Very early, before daybreak, she took her bath like a pious devotee in the pond near the temple. The soft sun-rays were touching the temple and its precincts, making their way through the leaves and branches of the trees, and a charmed Nivedita looked on its beauty.

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India was a holy land to Nivedita. Each and every person of India was sacred in her perception. One day the milkman who regularly supplied her with milk, asked her to speak something about religion. But Nivedita felt diffident, rather at fault. She saluted him repeatedly and said: 'You are an Indian. What advice do you seek from me? What is that which you do not already know? You belong to the dynasty of Sri Krishna. I salute you once again.'

* * * *

Nivedita was very fond of the Bengali language. Whenever she found it convenient she would pick up small Bengali words. On occasion, she would learn Bengali words from her small girl students also and at that time she would behave like the most obedient student. One day a girl, while drawing a line on her slate, said: 'Drawing the line.' The word 'line' struck the ears of Nivedita who approached the girl and said to her: 'Line is an English word. Speak in your own language.' But none of the girls could say the Bengali word for 'line'. All of them

kept saying: ‘Sister, we always use the word “line”.’ Nivedita’s face turned red out of disgust and sadness and she said: ‘What a pity ! You’ve forgotten even your own language!’ Suddenly a girl remembered the word and shouted: ‘The Bengali word for “line” is *rekhā* .’ Then Nivedita’s joy knew no bounds. She appeared to have found one of her dearest treasures which she had lost, and kept muttering : ‘rekha, rekha, rekha.’

* * * *

During the summer days of 1910, Nivedita, along with others, went on pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badri Narayan. She used to narrate the tales of her pilgrimage to the students. She fondly wished to take her students to the historical and pilgrim centres of India so that the true image of India could be embedded in their minds. But, due to financial hardship, that was not to be. Therefore whenever she visited any place she would narrate her experiences to her students with such minute and lively details that her students could almost visualize the places described. Once she saw an old lady at the bank of the river Alakānandā at Badri Narayan. She was narrating the story to her students: ‘An old lady, her hair all turned grey, just got up from a dip into the cold waters of Alakānandā, but she did not mind the cold. Her clothes were still wet, and she stood there and

offered salutations to the Sun-God with folded hands (saying this she would herself fold her hands). How beautiful! Oh! How beautiful she looked! Astonished, I kept staring at her face from a distance.'

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As Nivedita was walking along the path at Badri Narayan, she met two elderly ladies who were returning from Badri Narayan. They were almost blind and doubled up with age and infirmity. As they were climbing over some difficult boulders, one of them stumbled. Running up to her, Nivedita raised the old lady and showed her concern for her fall, and they replied smilingly: 'What! Is not Nārāyaṇa guiding us in our path? Since He has graciously given His *darshan* what does this matter?'

Yet at another place on the way to Badri Narayan, an elderly lady was moving ahead of Nivedita over the icy path. The ice had already begun to melt, and often the woman was slipping in her steps. Nivedita was afraid that the old woman might fall; so she softly asked her whether she would accept help and allow her to take her hand. A sweet smile beamed on the woman's face as she looked at Nivedita and she slowly walked past, tapping her stick. Irrespective of caste, creed or religion, pilgrims were moving group after group,

some by themselves, telling beads or lost in thoughts. Nivedita was charmed to observe their total devotion and surrender to God. She realized that this was indeed the real image of eternal India.

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Living in Bengal, Nivedita developed a deep sense of respect and devotion for ceremonial worships, festivals and folk rituals. We have already described how she used to worship Devī Sarasvatī in her school every year. Putting the sacred mark of *Homa* (ceremonial fire) on her forehead, she would be joyously moving around on bare feet. Utterance of the word 'pūjā' itself would overwhelm her with emotion.

Once she was invited to the office of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. She reached there walking all the way from her school on bare feet. While climbing the staircase she kept asking everybody with eagerness and simple childlike devotion: 'Where's the puja? Where's the puja?' Everybody then, perhaps, came to realize the true significance of the puja.

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Nivedita would be charmed by observing in the Indian women their characteristic sweetness, magnanimity, selflessness, the motherly feeling and the natural attitude of self-denial. While Nivedita

went to the West along with Swamiji—this was Swamiji's second trip to the West—she said in a lecture in London (February 1901) that perhaps there was nothing on earth more fair than a Hindu household. The ideal of Indian womanhood was essentially self-denial and selflessness. She wished to provide the Hindu women with the secular education of the modern West, but she knew that this must not be done at the cost of their traditional ideals.

She could form this high notion about Indian women due to her intimate association with the inner household at Baghbazar locality, and above everything, by observing the Holy Mother, Sri Sri Sarada Devi. One day Swami Saradananda said rather casually in some context: 'Our women folk are but ignorant....' But Nivedita did not give him the chance to complete his statement. She said rather loudly: 'Indian women are never ignorant. Has any one ever heard such words of knowledge from the lips of the women of those countries (she used to refer to the West as 'those countries')?'

Whenever she lectured, she spoke about Indian women, and held high the banner of Indian ideals of womanhood. She did this specially because of the fantastic stories fabricated and told by the Christian missionaries about the ignorance and oppression of

the women of India. On her return from the West in 1902, she said in her first speech at Madras:

‘...To all who make this statement, we may answer that Indian women are certainly not oppressed. The crime of ill-treating women is less common and less brutal in form here than in other countries. And the happiness, the social importance, and I may say, the lofty character of Indian women are amongst the grandest possessions of the national life.

‘When we come to the charge that Indian women are ignorant, we meet with a far deeper fallacy. They are ignorant in the modern form, that is to say, few can write, and not very many can read. Are they then illiterate? If so, the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Purāṇa stories every mother and every grandmother tell to the babies, are not literature. But European novels and the Strand Magazine by the same token are. Can anyone accept this paradox?

‘The fact is, writing is not culture, though it is an occasional result of culture.... To those who know Indian life, it is easy to see that an Indian woman who has the education of an Indian home—the dignity, the gentleness, the cleanliness, the thrift, the religious training, the culture of mind and heart which that home-life entails—though she cannot sign her name, may be infinitely better educated in every true sense, and in a literary sense also, than her glib critic.’

* * * *

Nivedita, Christine, Rabindranath, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abala Bose and others once went to Bodh Gaya in a group. Every evening Nivedita would meditate sitting under the *Bodhivriksha*. A little away from the *Bo'tree*, there lay a stone-slab with an image of a thunderbolt engraved on it. Looking at that image of a thunderbolt, Nivedita said that this should be admitted as the national emblem. When everybody asked her the reasons for her saying this, she explained: 'When someone renounces all his possessions for the good of mankind, he becomes as powerful as a thunderbolt, and performs divinely ordained tasks. The supreme ideal of India is renunciation, so the thunderbolt should be the national emblem of India.'

The thunderbolt reminded Nivedita of Dadhīchi's tale of self-sacrifice. Dadhīchi voluntarily cast off his body for the need of the gods. The gods killed their enemy—the demon Vritrāsura, using the thunderbolt made of his bone. Nivedita designed the national flag of India with the thunderbolt as the emblem. Later, to honour the desire of Nivedita, Jagadish Chandra Bose engraved the image of thunderbolt on the top of 'Basu Vijnan Mandir.'

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Uruvillā, where Sujātā lived, was situated near

Bodh Gaya. Buddha attained his illumination after he had sat in meditation here, after taking *pāyasam* served by Sujātā. One day Nivedita, with the entire party, visited the village. The village no longer had any sign of Sujātā's house, but Nivedita became wild with joy. She raised a piece of clay from the ground and touched it on her bosom, respectfully saying: 'The entire village is holy.'

Nivedita wept throughout the night before the day on which they were to leave Bodh Gaya. She was remembering the glorious days of the Buddhist age, and simultaneously she was remembering the ignoble position of modern India. When again would come that great awakening that had once made India the pride of the world and the centre of Asia? When would that strength and enthusiasm arouse the Indians? All these thoughts tormented her throughout the night.

* * * *

The best of Nivedita's books on Indian national life, a masterpiece, was *The Web of Indian Life*. As soon as the book came out it created quite a stir in India and abroad. The book is a respectful commentary on Indian culture. Through this book Nivedita tried to give a fitting reply to all the slander and vile representations so far made by the Western scholars of Indian culture and civilization.

But Nivedita did not think that she had authored

the book. She thought it was Swamiji's book. She only recorded the image of India that Swamiji had laid open before her. Dedicating the book, she inscribed the following words, which were favourites of Swamiji—*Wāh Guruki Fateh!* Victory to the Guru! It is not difficult to understand whose victory was thus invoked by Nivedita. Rabindranath Tagore wrote the introduction to its 1918 edition. Immediately after its publication, Nivedita wrote to Miss Josephine MacLeod, her intimate friend and the great admirer and friend of Vivekananda: 'You know that my book is out. I trust you really feel that it was written by Swami, I suppose it is.' In another letter to Miss Macleod she wrote: 'Suppose he had not come to London that time. Life would have been like a headless torso— for I always knew, I always said that a call would come. And it did... Now I look at the book, and say: "If he had not come!" —for always I had that burning voice within, but nothing to utter. How often and often I have sat down, pen in hand, to speak, and there was no speech. And now, there is no end to it! As surely as I am fitted for my world, so surely is my world in need of me, waiting....'

* * * *

About Swamiji Nivedita said that she had observed ever since she reached India till the last day of her Guru's life, that he always suffered from an excruciating pain. That pain was for his

motherland—India. This intense love of Swamiji for India, with all his pride, suffering and hope, was transmitted to his ‘spiritual daughter’ also. And to her, India became synonymous with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Her entire being became India, and she had no separate existence other than India. She considered India’s pride and shame to be her personal pride and shame. Her Guru wanted her to become ‘...to India’s son, the mistress, servant and friend in one.’ She became all and much more. No other foreign lady could accept India’s religion, culture, sufferings and dreams as her own as Nivedita did. No other foreign lady could realize the hopes and aspirations of the Indian people so truly, or recognize the eternal, unblemished image of India’s soul so in-depth as she did. In fact, her sacrifice for the cause of India was so total, intense and sincere that we feel guilty to call her a foreign lady. Never did she utter ‘India’s need’, ‘India’s women’, she always said ‘Our need’ and ‘Our women’. Any reference to India would overwhelm her with emotion. She called India *Edesh* (this land), and called England *Odesh* (that land). Therefore, Nivedita *truly* belongs to India. Indeed that was how the Holy Mother Sarada Devi used to feel. She said : ‘Nivedita belongs to this land; she was born there in that country (West) only to propagate his (Sri Ramakrishna’s) ideas and messages.’

SAYINGS OF SISTER NIVEDITA

* Ramakrishna-Vivekananda—these two lives are the unity of India. All that is necessary is that India should keep them in her heart.

* I believe that India is one, indissoluble, indivisible.

National unity is built on the common home, the common interest and common love.

* I believe that the present of India is deep-rooted in her past, and that before her shines a glorious future.

* ...Our whole past shall be made a part of the world's life. That is what is called the realization of the national idea. But it must be realised everywhere, *in the world idea*. In order to attain a larger power of giving, we may break through any barrier of custom. But it is written inexorably in the very nature of things, that if we sacrifice custom merely for some mean and selfish motive, fine men and women everywhere will refuse to admit us to their fellowship.

* ... *Selfless Man is the Thunderbolt*. Let us strive only for selflessness, and we become the weapon in the hands of the gods. Not for us to ask how. Not for us to plan methods. For us, it is only to lay ourselves down at the altar-foot.

* My object is to make you think and think.... It is for you to determine the aims and functions of education.

* I love the sorrow and the struggle and the divine self-sacrifice that may be ours.

* Each man and woman, that is to say, when perfectly educated, becomes an epitome of the history either of his or her own race, or of Humanity as a whole.

* The hero is one who fights, loves fighting and his supreme joy is to be beaten by one who is superior, after fighting his best.... Fight, fight, fight again, but not with meanness and not with rancour... By no means be found sleeping when the cry comes for battle.

* The idea of safety and repose, usually associated with spirituality, is the most false of all the notions. You, young men, must always guard yourselves against that sham spirituality that dreads trouble and hankers after safety. The spiritual ideal that the Rishis set forth in their lives and in their work was never an ideal of ignoble ease of safety, obtained by a cowardly retreat from the battle-field of life.

* Can we not cultivate in our children and ourselves a vast compassion? This compassion will make us eager to know the sorrows of all men, the griefs of our land and the dangers to which in these

modern days the religion is exposed; and this growing knowledge will produce strong workers, working for work's sake, ready to die, if only they may serve their country and fellow-men.

* Throughout the world the women are the guardians of humanity's ethical ideals.

* Yet again shall come the great re-establishment of Dharma, when the whole of this nation shall be united together, not in a common weakness, not in a common misfortune or grievance, but in a great, overflowing, complex, actual, ever-strong, ever-living consciousness of the common nationality, the common heritage, the common struggle, aye! the common destiny and the common hope.

Education

* Education! Ay, that is the problem of India. How to give true education, national education; how to make you full men, true sons of Bhāratvarsha, and not poor copies of Europe? Your education should be an education of the heart and the spirit, and of the spirit as much of the brain; it should be a living connection between yourselves and your past as well as the modern world!

Women's Education

* Have the Hindu women of the past been a source of shame to us that we should hasten to

discard their old-time grace and sweetness, their gentleness and piety, their tolerance and childlike depth of love and pity, in favour of the first crude product of Western information and social aggressiveness?... An education of the brain that uprooted humility and took away tenderness, would be no true education at all.

The question that has to be solved for Indian women, therefore, is a form of education that might attain this end of developing the faculties of soul and mind in harmony with one another.

* And in this particular respect there is perhaps no other country in the world so fortunately placed as India. She is, above all others, the land of great women. Whenever we turn, whether to history or literature, we are met on every hand by those figures whose strength she mothered and recognised, while she their memory eternally held sacred.

... There can never be any sound education of the Indian woman which does not begin and end in exaltation of the national ideals of womanhood, as embodied in her own history and heroic literature.

Nationality

* The whole task now is to give the word 'nationality' to India, in all its breadth and meaning. The rest will do itself. India must be obsessed by this great conception. ...It means new views of

history, of customs, and it means the assimilation of the whole Ramakrishna idea in religion, the syntheses of all religious ideas. It means a final understanding of the fact that the political process and economic disaster are only side issues — that the one essential fact is realisation of its own nationality by the Nation.

* Throw yourselves, children of India, into the worship of these (the ancient chronicles) and your whole past. Strive passionately for knowledge. Yours are the spades and mattocks of this excavation. For with you and not with the foreigner are the thought and language that will make it easy to unearth the old significance. India's whole hope lies in a deeper research, a more rigid investigation of facts. With her, encouragement and not despair, is on the side of truth!

* Great literatures have to be created in each of the vernaculars. These literatures must voice the past, translate the present, forecast the future.

* No matter what may be the particular line of action adopted by a person, we must honour as a national hero, if only he shows his earnest devotion by real work, by actual sacrifice to the cause of the country.

* O Nationality, come thou to me as joy or sorrow, as honour or as shame! Make me thine own!

TRIBUTES TO SISTER NIVEDITA

● ‘... It is noticed that other Europeans who had accepted work in India as their own life-mission, tried to put themselves above others. They failed to offer with a respectful mind, it was rather marked with a taint of mercy on us.... The life Sister Nivedita gave for us was a very great life. There was no defrauding of us on her part — that is, she gave herself up fully for the service of India; she did not keep anything back for her own use. We learnt from her how noble it was to dedicate one’s heart to the people. Sister Nivedita used to know the people as a living entity like a mother would know her child. She loved this living entity as a special person. She covered this “People”, the entire mass of common people with the pensive feeling of her heart. Were the entity a child, she could have brought it up by her own life, nursing it in the refuge of her lap.

She was in fact a Mother of the People. We had not seen before, an embodiment of the spirit of motherhood which, passing beyond the limits of the family, can spread itself over the whole country. We have had some idea of the sense of duty of man in this respect, but had not witnessed wholehearted mother-love of women. When she uttered the word “Our People” the tone of absolute kinship which struck the ear was not heard from any other among us.’

—*Rabindranath Tagore*

● ‘Nivedita’s every action, her every thought, all her emotions veered round India’s hopes, aspirations and ideals.... It seemed as if the liberated soul of some Rishi of the olden days was reincarnated in her (western) body, so that vitalized by the life of the West, she might once again, amid familiar environments, serve the people of her ancient love. India’s dream was Nivedita’s dream, India’s thinking found its expression in Nivedita.... Each and every letter of her writings display what a wonderful capacity of hers to accept and assimilate the Indian mind!... Her love for India conferred on her the wonderful insight about India.’

— *Surendra Nath Banerjee*

● ‘I doubt whether any Indian loved India the way Nivedita loved her.’

— *Bipin Chandra Pal*

● ‘I learnt to love India by reading Vivekananda and I came to understand Vivekananda through Nivedita’s writings.’

—*Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose*

[He told this to Hemchandra Ghosh, the great revolutionary leader of Bengal. Quoted in *Chintānāyak Vivekananda*, p.939, (1988), published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture.]

● ‘Among all the foreigners who loved India, Nivedita occupies the highest position.’

— *Abanindra Nath Tagore*

● ‘I have only read in the *Gītā* about selfless work, but have hardly come across anyone with detachment like hers. I recognised in her the ideal worker, working without expecting any kind of return.’

— *Dinesh Chandra Sen*

● ‘Nivedita was a humanist and a public worker in every field—patriotism, education, politics, nationalism, industry, history, moral reforms, social service, feminism and what not. During the glorious Bengali revolution (1905-10), Nivedita was a name to conjure with in young Bengalis. She was a colleague of almost everybody who was anybody in the movement of those days in Calcutta.... If Vivekananda had not done anything but import Nivedita into the Indian sphere of activity, his life-work would have still remained exceedingly epoch-making and fruitful. She was his miraculous discovery for India, and grew into one of the profoundest treasures of the Indian people.’

— *Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar*

(An eminent social scientist and intellectual)

● ‘It will be difficult to find out any movement initiated in modern Bengal, be it literary, artistic, archeological or research work on the ancient history, which is not influenced by the writings of Nivedita.’

— *O. C. Ganguly*

(A young artist in the days of Nivedita, later a distinguished Artist and Art Critic)

CHRONOLOGY

- 1867, 28 October : Born in the small town of Dungannon, Tyrone Province, North Ireland.
- 1877 : Death of father, Reverend Samuel Richmond Noble.
- 1884 : Successfully completed the last examination of the University and took up teaching at Keswick.
- 1895, November : First meeting with Swami Vivekananda.
- 1898, 28 January : Landed on the soil of India (Calcutta).
- 22 February : First visit to Dakshineswar and attended Belur Math for the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna.
- 11 March : First public speech in India at the Star Theatre.
- 17 March : First *darshan* (sight) of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.
- 25 March : Margaret Noble formally initiated in the vow of *Brahmacharya* by Swami Vivekananda and named NIVEDITA.
- 11 May : Went to North India with Swamiji and others.
- 2 August : Visited Amarnath with Swamiji.
- 13 November : Opening of Nivedita's school at 16 Bosepara Lane by the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

- 1899 : Plague broke out in epidemic form in Calcutta. Under advice of Swami Vivekananda, Nivedita engaged herself in fighting it with full dedication.
- 20 June : With Swamiji and others left for the West.
- 1902 February : Return to India.
- 2 July : Nivedita's last meeting with Swamiji (at Belur Math).
- 4 July : Swamiji left his mortal body in *Mahāsamādhiyoga*.
- 21 September : Taking the theme of 'Nation Making', started touring India, giving lectures.
- 1903 September : The book, *The Web of Indian Life*, was published.
- 1904 : Journey to Bodh Gaya.
- 1905 : In Bengal, Swadeshi Movement started.
: Participated in Kashi Congress.
- 1906 : Death of 'Gopaler Ma', Went to East Bengal ravaged by flood and famine for relief work. Became seriously ill on account of brain-fever.
- 1907 September : Revisited the West.
- 1909 July : Return to India.
- 1910, 1 February : Her famous book on Swamiji, *The Master as I saw Him*, was published.
- June : Pilgrimage to Kedar Badri and other shrines with the J.C. Bose family.
- 1911, 13 October : Left the mortal plane at Darjeeling.

APPENDIX

Some of the noteworthy books by Nivedita are : **The Web of Indian Life, The Master as I Saw Him, Notes of Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda, The Cradle Tales of Hinduism, Studies from an Eastern Home, Civil Ideal and Indian Nationality, Hints on National Education in India, Glimpses of Famine and Flood in East Bengal—1906.**

Besides, she wrote innumerable essays and articles on Religion, Education, Economics, Politics, Sociology, History, Arts and Literature and gave lectures extensively. Advaita Ashram (5, Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700014) have published *The Complete works of Sister Nivedita* in 5 volumes, incorporating her books, essays and some of her lectures. It includes also the essays she had written (as Miss Margaret Noble) before her coming to India. Her 'Complete Works' has more than 2500 pages, which include a large number of her letters, rich in thoughts and ideas. Besides, a little more than 800 letters of hers have been brought out by M/s Nababharat Publishers in two volumes entitled *Letters of Sister Nivedita* and edited by Sri Sankari Prasad Basu.

Notable biographies of Nivedita are: *Bhaginī Nivedita* by Pravrajika Muktiprana in Bengali, and *Sister Nivedita* by Pravrajika Atmaprana in English. These two books have been published by Sarada Mission and are available at different centres of Sarada Mission and Ramakrishna Mission. This apart, M/S Rider & Company, London

published a beautiful book entitled, 'Long Journey Home', written by Barbara Foxe.

The best book that has so far been published on the life and activities of Sister Nivedita is *Lokamātā Nivedita*, written by Sri Sankari Prasad Basu in Bengali. The book has 4 volumes. First volume has two parts, and both the parts are independent volumes by themselves. Nobody can comprehend the enormity and variety of her life, activities and contributions to the cause of India unless the named book is read.

The first volume of *Lokamātā Nivedita* contains: Nivedita's life before she met Swami Vivekananda, and the reminiscences of her brother and sisters; transformation of Margaret into Nivedita; after transformation, her life with Swami Vivekananda and the Holy Mother as also in the circle of lay and monastic disciples and admirers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, both Indian and foreign; detailed exposition on all the aspects relating to her contribution behind the scientific pursuits of Jagadish Chandra Bose and building 'Basu Vijnan Mandir'. Divided into two parts, the first volume contains 800 pages.

The second and third volumes of *Lokamātā Nivedita* contain a detailed study on the Indian socio-political scene and the enormity of Nivedita's role of involvement. The author took as many as 620 pages in both the volumes to complete his study. Some of the subtitles of the books are: Role of Nivedita in the awakening of India; Nivedita's philosophy of nationality; Role of Nivedita in exposing the imperialist Lord Curzon; Swadeshi Movement; Revolutionary links and activities of Nivedita; Nivedita-

Aurobindo relations and Nivedita on International Politics, Imperialism, Socialism and Freedom Movement.

The fourth volume of *Lokamātā Nivedita* deals with Nivedita and the Art Movement in India, which runs to 260 pages. The remarkable chapters are: Nivedita's education of Indian art from Swamiji; Nivedita's theory of art expounded in her lecture on Kali; Nivedita and Okakura in the Art Movement and Vivekananda's inspiration; Nivedita and Havell; Nivedita and Abanindranath; Nivedita and Coomarswamy; Nivedita and Nandalal; and Nivedita and the chief propagator of the Art Movement, Ramananda Chattopadhyaya.

In addition, on the occasion of Nivedita's centenary birthday celebration, a Memorial Souvenir in two volumes was brought out under the joint editorship of Sankari Prasad Basu and Sunil Behari Ghosh. The book is a valuable anthology of essays, reminiscences and poems, written in both English and Bengali. At present this publication is not available, nonetheless the libraries of the Sarada Mission and the Ramakrishna Mission have copies.

Nivedita Vrati Sangha [W/2A(R)IC/4, phase IVB, Golf Green, Kolkata 700095] brought out two valuable anthologies on the 125th birthday anniversary of Nivedita—*Shikhāmoyī Nivedita* and *A Soldier with a flaming Sword*.

Apart from the above listed books there are still a few large and small books on Nivedita, such as *Bhārata Chetanā* and *Bhārata Vāñī*, being collections of some of the writings of Nivedita brought out by the Sarada Mission.

TWO LETTERS*

63, ST. GEORGE'S ROAD, LONDON,
7th June, 1896.

DEAR MISS NOBLE,

My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is : to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

This world is in chains of superstition. I pity the oppressed, whether man or woman, and I pity more the oppressors.

One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by *ignorance* and nothing else. Who will give the world light ? Sacrifice in the past has been the Law, it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity.

Religions of the world have become lifeless

* Before her arrival in India in January 1898, Swamiji wrote a number of letters to Sister Nivedita (then Margaret Noble) apprising her of his mission, the task that was waiting for her in India and how she was to prepare herself for it. We are here giving two of these letters, one in full and the relevant portions of the other.

mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need for those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.

It is no supersition with you, I am sure, you have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come. Bold words and bolder deeds are what we want. Awake, awake, great ones ! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep ? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers to the call. What more is in life ? What greater work ? The details come to me as I go. I never make plans. Plans grow and work themselves. I only say, awake, awake !

May all blessings attend you for ever !

Yours affectionately,
VIVEKANANDA.*

ALMORA,
29th July, 1897.

MY DEAR MISS NOBLE,

Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man, but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially.

India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education,

* *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1995, pp. 294-95.

sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.

Yet the difficulties are many. You cannot form any idea of the misery, the superstition, and the slavery that are here. You will be in the midst of a mass of half-naked men and women with quaint ideas of caste and isolation, shunning the white skin through fear or hatred and hated by them intensely. On the other hand, you will be looked upon by the white as a crank, and every one of your movements will be watched with suspicion.

Then the climate is fearfully hot; our winter in most places being like your summer, and in the south it is always blazing.

Not one European comfort is to be had in places out of the cities. If, in spite of all this, you dare venture into the work, you are welcome, a hundred times welcome. As for me, I am nobody here as elsewhere, but what little influence I have, shall be devoted to your service.

You must think well before you plunge in, and after work, if you fail in this or get disgusted, on my part I promise you, *I will stand by you unto death* whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. 'The tusks of the elephant come out, but never go back'; so are the words of a man never retracted. I promise you that. Again, I must give you a bit of warning. You must stand on your own feet and not be under the wings of Miss Müller or anybody else. Miss Müller is a good lady in her own way, but unfortunately it got into her head, when she was a girl,

that she was a born leader and that no other qualifications were necessary to move the world but money !...

Mrs. Sevier is a jewel of a lady, so good, so kind. The Seviers are the *only* English people who do not hate the natives, Sturdy not excepted. Mr. and Mrs. Sevier are the only persons who *did not come* to patronise us, but they have no fixed plans yet. When you come, you may get them to work with you, and that will be really helpful to them and to you. But after all, it is absolutely necessary to stand on one's own feet....

Yours ever in the Lord,
VIVEKANANDA.*

* *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1995, pp. 362-64.

REFERENCES

In writing the present monograph, we have been assisted mostly by two books: *Sister Nivedita* of Pravrajika Atmaprana and *Lokamātā Nivedita* of Sankari Prasad Basu. The quotations have been mostly drawn from these books. In addition, we have received help from *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, two *Centenary Memorial Souvenirs* on Nivedita and *Niveditake Yeman Dekhiāchhi* by Saralabala Sarkar.