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BASUDHA CHAKRAVARTY



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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA



ISBN 978-81-237-7818-1

First Edition 1975

Revised Edition 2016

First Reprint 2018 (*Saka* 1940)

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₹ 135.00

Published by the

Director

National Book Trust, India

Nehru Bhawan

5 Institutional Area, Phase-II

Vasant Kunj, New Delhi - 110070

Website: www.nbtindia.gov.in

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1

BORN TO HER MISSION

“We find affinity of spirit,” wrote a competent commentator decades ago, “only in the melancholy literature of the Irish, for long a defeated people like ourselves ‘who went to battle, but who always fell.’” That was the context in which the Irish struggle for freedom deeply inspired Indians of the last two generations. It also appears to have been the context of Margaret Noble’s initiation into the spirit of Indian heritage coupled with her active participation in the country’s struggle for freedom. She indeed appears to have been born to her mission in India. Both her grandparents and her maternal grandfather were involved in their country’s struggle for freedom from British rule. John Noble, her paternal grandfather, was a minister of the Wesleyan Church in

Northern Ireland but that did not prevent him from fighting against the Church of England in the cause of his country's freedom. The Nobles had migrated to Ireland from Scotland in the fourteenth century. John married Margaret Elizabeth Nealus. But he died early when he was only thirty-five. Samuel Richmond was the fourth of their children and, somewhat against his will, engaged himself in business pursuits to help his mother. He married Mary Isabel Hamilton and their first child Margaret was born at Dungannon, County Tyrone on 28 October 1867. Even at the moment of her birth, it is authoritatively known, her mother dedicated her to the service of God.

A year later Samuel and Mary decided to dedicate their lives into one of study and service. They placed their child under the care of her grandmother and left for England. They settled at Manchester where Samuel, while studying theology, would bring together factory workers and others from his country in study classes. It was a hard living he earned as preacher and when he died at the early age of thirty-four, Mary was left with two daughters Margaret and Mary, and a son Richmond. She then returned to her father Hamilton. Margaret had imbibed the spirit of service from her father; her grandfather, who was an active participant

in his country's fight for freedom, inspired her with love for her country.

Margaret and Mary were then sent to Halifax College for their education. There they were under the strict but careful supervision of Miss Larette and, after her, Miss Collins. Some fundamental questions regarding Christian dogma were disturbing Margaret at this time and the loving care of Miss Collins enabled her to think deeply and seek answers of her questions. It was also while studying at Halifax that Margaret developed an interest in music, art and the natural sciences. She passed the final examination in 1884 at the age of seventeen. She then took up teaching at Keswick and, soon after, at Wrexham. Wrexham was a mining centre and Margaret, besides being a teacher, loved to do social work among the poor mining community.

It was during this period that Margaret met a young engineer from Wales and they decided to get married. But destiny willed otherwise, the young man died of a fell disease and Margaret was left alone. She left for Chester. Her sister Mary was a teacher at Liverpool and her brother Richmond was at college there. Their mother came from Ireland to live with them. Margaret lived in close touch with her family and began to study new methods of education. These methods had been

devised by the Swiss educational reformer Pestalozzi and the German, Froebel, and laid stress on the preschool education of children through play, exercise, observation, imitation and constructive activity. These methods had already been taken up by a number of educators and appealed very much to Margaret. Mr and Mrs Logemann and Mrs de Leeuw introduced her to the Sunday Club where her talks and writings were very much appreciated. Mrs de Leeuw then invited her to teach at a new school at London. She accepted and settled with her mother at Wimbledon. At this school she had to follow no dry methods of teaching but let her pupils educate themselves through play and exercise. Thus, she made her occupation a pleasure, while continuing her own cultural pursuits. She read and discussed Shakespeare with her brother Richmond, held discourses with the Betty brothers – one a poet and other a journalist – wrote articles in Octavius Betty's *Wimbledon News* and also political articles in the *Daily News* and *Review of Reviews*. She came in contact with William Stead, the far-famed editor of *Review of Reviews*.

She wrote also in *Research*, a scientific journal. Soon after her arrival in London she joined "Free Ireland", an Irish revolutionary organization, spoke at its meetings and organized cells in South England. Prince Kropotkin,

the world famous author of *Mutual Aid* and ideologist of social revolution, was then in London and came to meet the organization. Margaret kept regular contact with him and obtained guidance on revolutionary work. Russia was then in ferment but Prince Kropotkin insisted that while taking lessons from the Russian experience, each country must work out its own path determined by its own conditions. Revolution must be brought about from within a country, it did not come from the blue. Margaret took these lessons seriously to heart.

Towards the end of 1895 she parted company with Mrs de Leeuw and opened her own school which she called "Ruskin School". This was a school not merely for children but also for research minded educators. Among the latter was Mr Ebenezer Cook who painted for children and whose experiments in the line had won for him a name. Margaret took lessons in art from him and the knowledge she acquired from him stood her in good stead in the promotion of art and art-criticism in subsequent years in India. Soon her activities expanded in a literary direction. She came in contact with Lady Ripon whose salon was a centre of discussion on art and literature. Margaret helped to develop it into the Sesame Club which became a rendezvous of leading art and

literary figures of the day, among them being George Bernard Shaw and Thomas Huxley. At this stage she sought consolation in a personal disappointment, from Miss Collins, her old teacher at Halifax and had it in abundant measure. She was now well set on the path of an educator and servant of society, of a quest of ultimate truth and of active interest in art and literature—all of which came to fruition in her future life. Then occurred the event which proved to be a turning point in her life and carried her in due course to India.



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2

MEETING THE MASTER

On a day in November 1895, Mr Ebenezer Cook invited Miss Margaret Noble to the place of Lady Isabel Marges-on where a Hindu Yogi would discuss religion. Miss Noble learnt of Mr Sturdy, Henriette Muller and other members of the Sesame Club that the Yogi, Swami Vivekananda, was in England after a very successful tour of the United States of America where he had addressed the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 and had taken the American public by storm. He was now staying at Mr Sturdy's place and had already delivered some lectures in London. Miss Noble accepted the invitation. On the appointed day she was one of a group of fifteen or sixteen people before whom the Swami spoke on the need for exchange of ideas between nations. Writing ten years later Sister Nivedita,

as Margaret Noble had in the meantime come to be known, wrote in her book *The Master As I Saw Him* that the Swami had dwelt on “Eastern Pantheism, picturing the various sense-impressions as but so many different modes of the manifestation of One, and he quoted from the Gita and then translated into English: ‘All these are threaded upon Me, as pearls upon a string’.”

Also “He told us that love was recognised in Hinduism as in Christianity, as the highest religious emotion.”

“And he told us—a thing that struck me very much, leading me during the following winter to quite new lines of observation—that both the mind and the body were regarded by Hindus as moved and dominated by a third, called the Self.”

She also says that Swamiji spoke in that lecture of “the ideal of the freedom of the soul, which brought it into apparent conflict with the Western conception of the service of humanity, as the goal of the individual.” Doubts also arose about the consistency of what he said, with the fact that service of humanity was always his whole hope. Swami Vivekananda apparently wished to confront the intellect of his western hearers. Margaret herself was but feeling her way to an understanding of his teaching. So she listened to two further discourses that Swami Vivekananda gave in London on that first

visit of his. As she wrote later in *The Master As I Saw Him*, she had no difficulty in accepting his sayings like “while no religion was true in the way commonly claimed, yet all were equally true in a very real way” or his statement that “God, really Impersonal, seen through the mists of sense became Personal” also awed and touched her. She also provisionally accepted his observation that “The spirit behind an act was more powerful than the act itself”.

But Margaret Noble did not as yet accept his system of thought as a whole. Yet she was so much impressed by his character and his apparent readiness to seek truth even elsewhere than what he had believed and preached, that even before he left England that time, she addressed him as “Master”. Swamiji himself expressly conceded that one had to go a long way to meet him. “Let none regret” he said “that they were difficult to convince! I fought my Master (Ramkrishna Paramhansa) for six long years, with the result that I know every inch of the way! Every inch of the way!” He wanted to exert no psychic influence over anyone. Reason, understanding, realization—he objected to the word ‘Faith’—were his path to truth. But Sister Nivedita owns in her book on her Master, to having had her mental window opened to vistas of thought other than the Christian dogmas

which had ceased to completely satisfy her. She found she had been introduced to concepts of thought which, in their spirit and approach, struck her as new. One of the illustrations of these was the inference Swamiji himself had drawn from the mirage in the desert. "Fifteen days he had seen it, and taken it always to be water. But now that he had been thirsty and found it to be unreal, he might again see it for fifteen days, but always henceforth he would know it to be false." Margaret felt such concepts were educative. Also, she was vastly impressed by the fact that Swamiji made no flourish of knowledge, no pretence at elevating the mean and the lowly but appealed in simple terms to the noblest and best that was among all and thus made them see truth.

When Swami Vivekanand returned to London in April 1896 and continued his discourses in between his tour of some European countries and return to India in December, Margaret Noble imbibed more of his teachings. She says in her book that he never preached any specified religion but only the philosophy which underlies all faiths, drawing upon the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita. He welcomed the materialist definition of Existence as only matter for that implied that the Existence was One, though he himself called it God. He explained Maya not as

delusion but as the mist with which we are used to cover reality “Because we talk in vain, because we are satisfied with things of the senses, and because we are running after desires.” “Know Nature to be Maya,” Swami Vivekananda said, “And the mind, the ruler of this Maya, as the Lord Himself.” “The Maya of the Vedanta,” he also said, “in its latest development, is a simple statement of facts – what we are and what we see around us. To break through it is Freedom, Mukti. Man is not to be a slave of Nature. ‘Not the Soul for Nature but Nature for the Soul’.” – Swami Vivekananda relied on the Vedanta.

Margaret Noble thus realized that “The word (Maya) does not simply refer to the Universe as known through the senses, but also describes the tortuous, erroneous and self-contradictory character of that knowledge.” Again she quotes Vivekananda: “This is a statement of fact, not a theory, that this World is a Tantalus’ hell, that we do not know anything about this Universe. Yet at the same time we cannot say that we do not know. To walk in the midst of a dream half-sleeping, half-waking, passing all our lives in a haze, this is the fate of every one of us. This is the Universe.” Margaret Noble therefore concludes that “ By Maya is thus meant that shimmering, elusive, half-real, half-unreal complexity, in which there is no

rest, no satisfaction, no ultimate certainty, of which we become aware through the senses, and through the mind as dependent on the senses. At the same time (again she quotes Vivekananda), 'And that by which all this is pervaded, know that to be the Lord Himself.' In these two conceptions, placed side by side, we have the whole theology of Hinduism as presented by the Swami Vivekananda in the West". Margaret found Swami Vivekananda's philosophy to be one of renunciation: strict austerity and avoidance of ease which led one away from Maya into the self. Such renunciation was but another name for Conquest and Margaret explains this by citing the instance of Stephenson who, by toil and refusal of ease, was enabled to discover the steam engine. Thus did Vivekananda place character above everything and prescribed resistance of evil to be the duty of the citizen and non-resistance of the Monk.

The question of difference between Buddhism which regarded the Ego as unreal and the many as real, and Hinduism which considered the One as real and the many unreal, cropped up and Vivekananda solved it by saying that the Many and the One were the same Reality perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes. Really, however, the Swami was diving deep into reality and bringing out the Soul

in all its glory and power. Nature, he declared, was for the Soul and not the Soul for Nature. So he called upon those around him to come out to serve the world which was burning in misery, with love. One grew only by renunciation into consciousness which transcended the body. Margaret took time to realize this truth but realization was already dawning upon her. Love meant perfect bliss and any manifestation of regret was a detraction from it. Any differentiation between oneself and others was hatred. While this was acceptable, it took time to accept that to do good to others was not the highest end but that spirituality was, intellectual knowledge came next and physical and material help must needs follow. Again, while the West demanded cleanliness and hygiene, and even the saints of the East loved beauty, the highest spirituality could not tolerate the World at all. While western monasticism loved order and organization, eastern monasticism in saffron robe and poverty was not incongruous either. Again, eastern monasticism provided many examples of people breaking all bonds and vows when service of humanity or of God required it.

Swami Vivekananda was not always impersonal either. There were moments when he spoke of his master Ramkrishna Paramhansa and his master's consort who

had allowed her husband complete freedom. He said that he had plans for women's education in his own country and there Margaret could help him. For Margaret it was the first hint of the call that shaped her life. Margaret spoke of the need to make London beautiful and Vivekananda reminded her of the price other cities had paid for the purpose. That enabled her to see other people's point of view. When he was informed of Margaret's desire to help him, Vivekananda answered that he was all pledged to serve his people and would stand by anyone who helped him in that. He regarded his disciples, Indian and non-Indian, all alike. Vivekananda seemed at this stage well poised to fulfil a historic mission. As for Margaret Noble, her initiation had progressed, the goal was also being set. But it was not time for her to take the plunge.

After Vivekananda's return to India Margaret and Mr Sturdy took charge of the Vedanta Centre in London. Swami Vivekananda had in the meantime sent Swami Abhedananda who held discourses with the admirers of Indian culture. News of Vivekananda's great welcome in his own country was joyfully received.

Vivekananda had set himself to the task of remoulding the activities of Ramkrishna's followers. Six European disciples had accompanied him to India. Swamiji introduced them to his fellow-Sannyasis, thus breaking

the bounds of Hindu orthodoxy. It was his intention to weld the caste-ridden and custom-plagued Indian society into a powerful unity. With that object in view he organized his fellow-Sannyasis into a Math. It was a very modest beginning hampered by lack of funds. Mr Sturdy sent a contribution. Margaret was the link between the Math and the western sympathizers of the project and worked to raise money. Swami Vivekananda established the Ramkrishna Mission with a view to divert the activities of the Math to public good. It was not easy to convert the Sannyasis who were preoccupied with their own religious development, lone living and pilgrimage, to the idea of active dedication to public welfare. Vivekananda also wanted to build up a working, effective relation between the Sadhus and the non-Sannyasi followers of Sri Ramkrishna. The latter would help to sustain the public activities of the Mission. Swami Vivekananda was in regular correspondence with Margaret on these matters. She used to receive reports of activities of the Math and dreamt of the day when they would include a school for women's education. But as late as 23 July 1897, Vivekananda wrote to her to say that her work for poor India still lay in London.

Margaret Noble's plan to come to India remained stalled until at last she wrote to Vivekananda to say

that she wanted to come to India to learn how to fulfil oneself through service. Vivekananda welcomed this letter as an indication that Margaret had at last given up the role of a giver and wanted to be a learner. She had completely shed her ego and so it was time for her to come. Vivekananda warned her in a poignant letter that she would have to live amidst superstition, poverty, exhibition of slave mentality in an alien and uncongenial environment. Also she would have to live in extremes of climate. Vivekananda advised her to think seriously before she took the plunge but promised all support in whatever she decided to do. A subsequent letter placed before her the ideal of a leader who led only through love and without any personal consideration. Margaret pondered over these letters and decided on her course of action. It was difficult to tell her mother of her impending departure but her mother had already divined her intention and resigned herself prayerfully to it. Margaret took a few more months in preparation, transferred charge of Ruskin School to her sister Mary, took leave of her friends Neil Hammond and Octavius Betty, and sailed on a wet day, being seen off by her mother, sister, brother, Octavius Betty and Ebenezer Cook. Destiny was beckoning her to India.

3

WITH THE MASTER

Margaret Noble was welcomed at Madras by Mr Goodwin, Vivekananda's stenographer-disciple. Vivekananda himself was among those who received her enthusiastically on her arrival on 18 January 1898, in Calcutta. She was lodged with some friends of the Ramkrishna Order at a house on Park Street. The very next day, however, Vivekananda sent a Sadhu to teach her Bengali. Two American friends of the Swami, Mrs Sarah Bull and Miss MacLeod had arrived in connection with the establishment of a Math and temple at Belur where land had already been purchased for the purpose. They had undertaken to bear the cost. Mrs Bull and Miss MacLeod moved into an old building there and on learning from Vivekananda of Margaret's arrival, asked that she should stay with them. Margaret,

who was resolutely acclimatising herself to India, accordingly came to live with them. Vivekananda often used to come to see and hold discussion with them. He now set himself to the double task of training a number of Brahmacharis to go out for service of society and of removing caste and race barriers in the Ramkrishna Order. The first was an important departure from the usual idea of Sannyas or the life of an ascetic being one of quest of mere personal salvation; the second went against the rigours of current orthodox practice. The formal establishment of the Math and of the Ramkrishna Mission at Belur, on the day of Sri Ramkrishna's birth anniversary that year, was an occasion of celebration with the participation of all castes and sections of society. About a month later, Vivekananda initiated Margaret Noble into Brahmacharya and thus admitted a foreigner into the Ramkrishna Order. She was renamed Nivedita. On a personal plane, however, that consummation was not reached without a struggle. Vivekananda insisted on Margaret imbibing the Hindu way of life without sacrificing her personality. That was not an easy thing to do. Margaret had come to India intent on working for women's education as indeed Vivekananda had asked her to do. She grew impatient as he took his own time to ask her to begin the work. Actually Vivekananda was

leaving her alone to prepare herself for work according to Indian ideals of self-dedication. Now amidst the bewildered ecstasy that accompanied Margaret Noble's transformation into Nivedita, he hinted that the hour for her taking up work for women's education had come.

Four days later the Brahmachari who taught Nivedita Bengali, was given Sannyas and named Swami Swarupananda. Nivedita writes of the immense impression his life of intense sympathy with human suffering made on her. It was from him indeed she learnt meditation. For, she had not yet succeeded in adapting herself completely to what Swami Vivekananda wanted her to be. Even after her initiation she said, in answer to a question by him, that she was a British national. That showed she had not yet merged her identity into this country. All the same she was approaching that much desired consummation. Swami Vivekananda got her to address a public meeting at Star Theatre, Calcutta, on the occasion of the opening of the Math and Ramkrishna Mission at Belur. Her speech showed deep realization of the meaning of India's spiritual heritage and was much appreciated. The Swami spoke at the meeting of the need for India to develop and express herself before the world on her own lines and also to learn and use western science for the good of her people. Thus did he

get Nivedita introduced to the Indian people. Another landmark in her life was her meeting with Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Ramkrishna Paramhansa, whom she first saw accompanied by Mrs Bull and Miss Macleod. A visit to the Mother by these foreign ladies was itself an extraordinary event in those days but she received them kindly. Gopaler Ma (Gopal's mother), an old associate of Ramkrishna who called her mother, accompanied the ladies on their way back to Belur. Nivedita thus took her place in Hindu society and the Ramkrishna brotherhood.

But her spiritual merger therein was yet to be. That was indeed the process that ran through her pilgrimage with Swami Vivekananda to Amarnath and other places in Northern India. In *The Master As I Saw Him* Nivedita describes the Swami's ecstatic experiences which left a decisive impact on her as well. After a brief halt at Nainital Swami Vivekananda and his party consisting of Swami Turiyananda, Niranjanda, Sadananda, and Swarupananda, Mrs Bull, Miss MacLeod, Mrs Patterson, wife of the American Consul, and Nivedita, reached Almora where they stayed with Mr and Mrs Seviars. This period was one of intense stress for Nivedita who was made to feel that she was still far from her complete identification with Indian life. The strain was indeed

so great as to make Mrs Bull intervene, and Swami Vivekananda announced his intention to withdraw for a few days to seek means of peace. That very announcement made Nivedita resign herself to his will.

Vivekanand indeed returned in an aura of peace. Yet the journey to Amarnath on which Nivedita accompanied him, contributed to Nivedita's complete adaptation to Hindu life. She saw the Swami in transition of realization from Shiva to the Mother, in self-abnegation so complete that he believed that everything was done by the Mother's will, that he had not the power to do anything himself and was transcending himself into complete union with the Universal will. The impact of all this on Nivedita was great. An incident in Kashmir which left a most painful impression on Nivedita was the disallowance by the British Resident of the gift by the Maharajah of Kashmir of a piece of land to Swami Vivekananda who would have used it to house a Math and a Sanskrit College. This incident brought home to Nivedita the real nature of British subjugation of India.

Nivedita returned to Calcutta where Swami had preceded her, on 1 November 1898. She then adapted herself to Hindu etiquette, thereby earning the approbation not only of Mother Saradamani who in any case had been benign in her attitude towards her but of

the orthodox women – most of them old widows – who lived with the Mother. It was time at last for Nivedita to begin the work which had always been in her view. She had, under Swami Vivekananda's inspiration, studied the habits and bents of mind of the people among whom she had to work, for her method of education had to be adjusted to those habits and bents of mind. A series of meetings were held at Balaram Bose's house at Bagbazar to prepare the ground for founding of the school. Vivekananda himself helped at getting pupils for the school.

On Sunday, November 13, the Mother performed the opening of the school at 16, Boscpara Lane. A few girls of the neighbourhood were Nivedita's first pupils and soon they and their mothers became bound to her by ties of pure affection. Sister Nivedita also introduced painting, clay work and sewing. While she considered the school to be the essential part of her work, she was called upon to extend her activities in a number of directions including public speaking. After the celebration on December 9 of the installation of Sri Ramkrishna's picture at Belur Math, the Math started functioning in an organised manner. Nivedita gave lessons to the Brahmacharis or new initiates, in Botany, Drawing, Physiology and Sewing, spoke at the weekly meetings of the Mission,

gave lectures on Education at the Brahma Samaj, and started a teachers' training class which was attended by many distinguished ladies. She also taught history at an American missionary school. A speech on "Kali" which she made on 13 February 1899, at Albert Hall proved to be controversial. Dr Mahendralal Sarkar, an eminent scientist and doctor of those days, who was one of a distinguished assembly, questioned Nivedita's wisdom in preaching the Kali cult while they were fighting, Dr Sarkar said, to remove superstitions of that nature. A gentleman present at the meeting replied forcefully and stampede ensued. All the same, Nivedita was invited to speak on Kali at the Kalighat temple. Before she spoke there, she gave an inspiring lecture at the Minerva Theatre on "Young India Movement." Swamiji and other Monks attended this lecture. Nivedita's speech at the Kalighat temple was a lucid discourse on the significance of Kali worship. She answered all the objections raised at the Albert Hall meeting and delineated the character of Kali both as the Mother and the Destroyer. These lectures were the prelude to Sister Nivedita's book *Kali the Mother*. But she was not content with such activities. Her work to alleviate the suffering of the people during the outbreak of plague in 1899 won the admiration of all her contemporaries among whom

Dr R.G. Kar, founder of the R.G. Kar Medical College at Calcutta, has left from his personal experience a vivid tribute to Nivedita's courageous and selfless service to plague victims. That highlighted her increasing moral greatness.

Meanwhile under Vivekananda's guidance she was being increasingly moulded unto the ideals of the land of her adoption. Inspired by his ideal of a dynamic monastic order, she expressed a desire to devote herself wholly to it and was on March 25 ordained a Naisthik Brahmacharini—meaning a Brahmacharini as true as the orthodox members of the Order. Nivedita mixed with all classes of people and Swami Vivekananda, while giving her full liberty, wanted her to adopt wholly Hindu etiquette. But he also took active steps to break the bounds of prejudices against foreigners and have her accepted into Hindu society. As the prejudices were mostly centred on interdining, he saw to it that people associated with him took food and tea from her hands. Nivedita has herself recorded that Mother Saradamani also helped her to be integrated into Hindu society. But Swami Vivekananda did not grant her request to be initiated as a full Sannyasini. He, however, commended highly her work for women's education; but the work was suffering for lack of funds. It also lacked stability

for the pupils were married off before their education could reach fruition. Another difficulty was the lack of women workers. It was felt that dedicated workers could be found only among widows and a Women's Home was necessary for their lodging and training. Ultimately, the school had to close down, much to the regret of Nivedita.

Swami Vivekananda was planning a visit to the West. Swami Turiyananda was to accompany him and it was decided that Nivedita should also go on a lecture tour of America. That would bring her money and he advised her also to form a society in Europe and America whose members would give small monthly donations. Their departure was fixed for 20 June 1899. Nivedita spent the morning of the 18th with the Mother and in the evening attended a tea party in her honour at Belur Math. She then went to the temple at Dakshineswar and spent hours in prayer and meditation. When she returned to her residence, it was raining heavily but she had regained peace after the doubts and disappointments she had experienced. Mother Saradamani invited Swami Vivekananda and other Sannyasis to her house on the morning of the 20th and was among those who saw Swami Vivekananda, Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita set sail for the West the same evening.

4

UNTO HER OWN

That visit abroad was destined to set Nivedita on her own path in the world. She of course never for a moment considered herself to be but under Swami Vivekananda's guidance but he himself left her to act on her own and showed himself unwilling to become further involved. One reason for this was his failing health which caused in him a feeling of indifference to worldly things and at the same time led him increasingly to seek repose in the Mother. Sister Nivedita did not quite like this, but this only added to his desire for withdrawal. However, during the voyage to London Vivekananda was all attention to Nivedita. He told her about Hindu religious beliefs, lives of Hindu saints and other great men. Thus she was not only initiated into the core of Hindu life and thought but inspired with the thoughts and ideas which

subsequently formed the content of her books. She considered herself responsible for carrying the Swami's message to the people through work.

They arrived in London on July 31. Among those who received them were Miss Christine Greenstidel and Mrs Funke who had come all the way from America. Miss Greenstidel later came to India to help Nivedita in her work. This time Swami Vivekananda and party stayed with Nivedita's family who received them with great cordiality, Nivedita's brother Richmond being his particular admirer. But this visit to London brought them certain disappointments as well, for Mr Sturdy, Vivekananda's old friend and admirer and some others of the old London circle, abandoned him. He left for America on August 16, but Nivedita stayed back to attend her sister's marriage.

Reaching America in September, she met the Swami who was staying at Ridgely Manor at the invitation of Mr and Mrs Legget, the owners of the Manor. The Manor became the happy meeting place of the Swami's associates but Nivedita was anxious to prepare herself for work. She longed for a period of solitude, to wear a plain, gown-like dress and obtained the blessings of the Swami who presented to her a poem entitled "Peace". Nivedita shifted to the outhouse and there completed

her book *Kali the Mother*. She dedicated it to Vireswar, the Lord of Hosts. That was the period when Swami Vivekananda impressed on her the duty of “Nishkam Karma Yoga” – action without any expectation for oneself. That was a stern lesson. He placed before Nivedita the conception of Shiva whose task was to make stern workers and the ideal of Shuka the saint who had reached the highest realization. Nivedita’s task was difficult for she had not only to earn money for her work in India but to acquaint the American public with the ideals of Hindu womanhood. She was in a manner to follow up the work done by Swami Vivekananda years ago. He left for New York and Nivedita for Chicago.

Nivedita’s first engagement was a talk on India to the children of an elementary school. She spoke about Child-Christ and about Dhruva, Prahlad and Gopala of the Puranas. Thus she projected the Child-figure of Indian scriptures against the Child-Christ her hearers knew. She instructed them also on the geography of India. Lectures on “The Conditions of Indian Women” before a Board of Missionaries and “Religious Life in India” at the house where she was staying, followed. “Ancient Arts of India” was to be the subject of another lecture by Nivedita and a subscription was to be raised for the purpose. Swami Vivekananda arrived at Chicago

at this stage and helped Nivedita to prepare the lecture. He was staying with George Hale. The lecture was a great success and brought Nivedita fifty dollars. She had also to join many informal discussions and answer questions—many of them tendentious and hostile. This often depressed her for she was of an impulsive nature. Vivekananda instilled into her courage and patience through instruction as well as by personal example. He himself was facing trials and difficulties. He felt that his task was tremendous and he had not long to live. His effort to open more Vedanta centres in America did not bear fruit and his need for money for work in India was unfulfilled. Nor did Nivedita find her task easy. Her idea was to form committees at different centres for propagating the Hindu view of life and for raising funds. Mary Hale, daughter of George Hale, whom she asked to become Secretary of the Committee at Detroit refused all co-operation. Such experiences were to Nivedita a pointer that she must move on her own account and personally shoulder responsibility and not consider herself only a carrier of the message of her Guru, Vivekananda. She sought comfort of Miss Macleod who in a remarkable letter asked her to depend on her own strength and derive inspiration from Kali. She approached realization of the ideal of Nishkam

Karma or selfless action in fulfilment of his words to her: “Death, not success, is our goal”.

Nivedita now got resolutely to work. She visited Ann Arbor and Jackson where she got promises from ladies to pay regular subscription. But her luck was not so good everywhere. At Detroit she was confronted by ladies, particularly those associated with the Church, with critical questions relating to Indian life and etiquette. To these she gave sharp replies. She felt it was her duty to defend staunchly Hindu customs, even to the extent – which would seem strange in the modern context – of standing up for polygamy as a palliative of divorce. Often indeed the provocation was not of a kind to be easily suffered. Swami Vivekananda continued to give her solace and courage. Nivedita returned to Chicago and visited many schools there. She made plans to send one Hindu girl to a training school for teachers founded by one Mr Parker. The idea fell through because the girl, Santoshini, had been married off. Nivedita went to Kansas City and Minneapolis and then to Cambridge in Boston. There she stayed with Mrs Sarah Bull and met Bipin Chandra Pal, the Indian nationalist leader who was on a visit to the U.S.A. Nivedita’s efforts resulted in establishment of the Ramkrishna Guild of Help in America with Mrs Francis H. Legget as President and

Mrs Bull as Honorary National Secretary. Mrs Bull was the widow of the well-known Norwegian violinist Ole Bull. Miss Christine Greenstidel who had met Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita at London, became the Secretary of the Detroit Committee of the Guild. The Committee published a booklet, prepared by Nivedita, on "The Project of the Ramkrishna School for Girls." Mr Legget helped Nivedita to publish the booklet and his wife gave a thousand dollars to start the project. The booklet was a beautiful exposition of the ideals of women's education Nivedita had in mind and the practical shape she intended to give them. Nivedita's answers to certain questions concerning the project were all appended to the booklet. She was at this period trying to publish *Kali the Mother* and wrote about certain historical and mythological characters of whom she had spoken in American schools. Vivekananda also wrote certain character-sketches at this period. She spoke on "Our Obligations to the Orient" at the Free Religious Association at Jamaica in Massachusetts. Opposition and criticism continued to dog her steps but she continued to receive encouragement from Vivekananda.

Nivedita went to New York and Vivekananda followed her there. She attended his lectures and felt a renewal of the primordial inspiration she had received

while listening to him years ago in London. She herself spoke on “The Ideals of Hindu Women” and “Ancient Arts of India”. These lectures made a great impression.

Professor Patrick Geddes, the reputed British sociologist and thinker, invited Nivedita to assist him in his work as organizer of the various sessions of the International Association at the Congress of the History of Religion held on the occasion of the Paris Exposition Universale. Swami Vivekananda was also invited to attend and went to Paris shortly after Nivedita. She had listened earlier to a lecture by Professor Geddes on “Sociological Method of History” at New York and been particularly impressed by the Professor’s delineation of the influence of place on humanity. The professor also admired the manner in which Nivedita had absorbed the subject. But it was mere mechanical assistance he wanted of Nivedita in his work at the Congress. She found that there was no scope for her purposeful participation in the work. So she left it but the relation of mutual admiration that had grown between her and the Professor continued. In later years she acknowledged the help she had received from the Professor in writing *The Web of Indian Life* and the Professor paid a tribute to the manner in which she had woven the web of Indian life on the general pattern of the lay-out of the material

conditions which it had fallen to him to explain. At this period Doctor Jagadish Chandra Bose and Mrs Abala Bose were also at Paris. Dr Bose was struggling to get his great work on plant life recognized. Nivedita took great interest in his work and from that time onward they became great friends. Swami Vivekananda's lectures at the Congress of the History of Religions were much valued. But at this very period a mood of weariness and indifference appeared in him. He actually said that he had not long to live, could not work any more and wanted to merge himself in the Mother. This caused misgivings in Nivedita who was now full of ideas and enthusiasm for work. Her conflict with Professor Geddes was another cause of sorrow. Her health as well as mental strength declined and on an invitation from Mrs Bull she spent some time at Perros-Guirec near Lannion in Brittany. She regained her peace somewhat but continued to fret over Vivekananda's apparent indifference and wrote to him for guidance. In his reply Vivekananda denied that he was particularly averse towards her and wanted her to go freely over her own way. This seeming unconcern disturbed Nivedita all the more and Mrs Bull who loved Nivedita as her own daughter, invited Swami Vivekananda to come there. Vivekananda who lovingly called Mrs Bull "Dhira Mata", responded to

the invitation. Nivedita's meetings with him served to disabuse her mind of all misgivings. She realized that he only wanted her to work independently of him and he himself was tired and anxious to return to India. He presented her with the poem "Benediction" which has rung true in Indian ears ever since:

The mother's heart, the hero's will,
The sweetness of the southern breeze,
The sacred charm and strength that dwell
On Aryan Altars, flaming, free;
All these be yours and many more
No ancient soul dream before –
Be thou to India's future son
The mistress, servant, friend in one.

Nivedita herself was planning to go to England before returning to India. On the last evening before her departure Vivekananda called her to the garden and said "Go forth into the world, and there, if I made you, be destroyed! If Mother made you, live!"

Again the next morning he came out to say farewell. Of that Nivedita wrote "In my last memory of him in Europe I look back once more from the peasant market-cart, and see his form against the morning sky, as he stands on the road outside our cottage in London,

with hands uplifted, in that Eastern salutation which is also benediction." Thus he set her firm and alone on the voyage of life.

Nivedita was indeed set on the final course of her destiny. She stayed on in England after Vivekananda had left for India, though not without doubts as to whether she was justified in doing so. She had also doubts on reconciling her urge for action to her spiritual aspirations. All she wanted was to live up to the ideal set before her by Swami Vivekananda whom she called her father. But her stay in England and later visits to Scotland and Norway were greatly helpful for her work for India. Dr J.C. Bose at this time underwent an operation in London and he and Mrs Bose were in certain difficulties. Both Nivedita and Mrs Bull gave them friendly help.

Nivedita emerged as a doughty defender of the Indian way of life and a champion of Indian interests. In January and February 1901 she spoke thrice a week to London audiences on subjects like "Spiritual Life in India", "Ideals of Indian Women", and even "How England has failed in India". Slowly she was taking in also the political aspect of India's problems. She gave lectures at Scotland also. She had to controvert the false accounts, given by missionaries, of Indian life and they

were extremely angry with her. She decided to write a book about them. Another lecture in London and she was anxious to return to India. She obtained through Miss MacLeod who had gone to India *via* Japan, the Mother's permission to return but was detained by further work. She wrote at the instance of Mr Hawks, an educationist, an article on Indian Education. Mr William Stead, the famous editor of *Review of Reviews* asked her to write a life-sketch of Dr J.C. Bose. Meanwhile *Kali the Mother* had been published. Mr Ramesh Chandra Dutt of the I.C.S. and a great scholar whose *Economic History of India* is an all-time classic, encouraged her to write more about Indian life as she understood it. So then she wrote the first chapters of that penetrating study *The Web of Indian Life*. On an invitation from Professor Geddes she stayed with him for about a month and a half at Dundee, lectured at the Indian section of the Glasgow Exhibition and undertook to write an article in reply to allegations made by missionaries against Indians. Anxious as she was to return to India, all this work detained her and on an invitation from Mrs Bull to her house at Norway where a bronze statue of Ole Bull was to be unveiled, went and stayed there for about three months. That gave her rest and recuperation, friends came to see her but she did some solid work

as well. Her article in reply to the missionaries was published in the *Westminster Gazette* under the title "Lambs among Wolves". On 4 September 1901, she returned to England.

About this time Nivedita's thought reached a new and most important dimension. A number of experiences convinced her that political subjugation of India was a stumbling block in delivering this country's message to the world. She had seen the atrocious behaviour of English rulers and Englishmen in India. The opposition and criticism Swami Vivekananda had to suffer in America was an agonizing experience for her. She saw how Jagadish Bose was honoured at Paris but he was sought to be humbled and ignored in England. These experiences awakened Nivedita to the prior need to make India free. She saw that real sympathizers of India in England were few in number. She learnt about Indian politics and economics from Mr R.C. Dutt and followed the proceedings of the Indian National Congress. She learnt that Jamsetji Tata's scheme for an Indian University had been rejected and Mrs Annie Besant had been refused permission to start a Hindu College at Banaras. She discussed the Indian situation with Prince Kropotkin and came to believe that India's village system was the key to the evolution of a permanent community

life. She visualized India evolving herself based on that system and then “No war. No bloodshed. We shall one day peacefully wait upon the Viceroy and inform him, smiling, that his services are no longer required. The great *means* of doing it will be elaborated by degrees as we come to have what Mr Geddes calls ‘a theory of the Pacific Life’.” That was prophetic of Mahatma Gandhi’s programme of non-co-operation together with constructive activity which in a few decades achieved the country’s deliverance.

Nivedita’s bitterness over England’s conduct in India became clear from these words “India was absorbed in study, a gang of robbers came upon her and destroyed her land. The mood is broken. Can the robbers teach her anything? No, she has to turn them out and go back to where she was before. Something like that, I fancy, is the true programme for India”. She wanted that representative Indians should go over to England and educate public opinion there. “We want the very dust of our earth to carry our message for us . . . All we have to do is to float with the tide, *anywhere*, anywhere it may take us to speak to the whole world that comes to us—strike the blow on the instant of heat.” She saw anew the supreme importance of Vivekananda’s dictum about national man-making. “Certainly no one has seen it but

Swami, and I know that his vision does not obviate mine, but makes it the more necessary." She had misgivings as to whether the new line of thought and action which was developing in her mind would meet with his approval; for, it was apparently divergent from the line of thought and action which he had placed before her and which, of course, she could never forsake. She was now anxious to return to India and completed the business in hand. She spent a week at the Home of Retreat of the Sisters of Bethany in London and was impressed by the similarity of the atmosphere there to that of the house of Saradamani. She stayed for a few days with Professor Geddes, edited Dr. J.C. Bose's book *The Living and Non-Living* and sailed for India. Mrs Ole Bull and Mr R.C. Dutt were with her on the journey. They were given a public welcome at Madras where they reached on 3 February 1902. Nivedita's speech in reply made a great impression. She spoke as one of the soil, made a sturdy defence of national customs and eulogised the greatness of the country of her adoption. The speech was widely published in the press, Swami Vivekananda who was then at Banaras, appreciated it and leading Indians established contact with Nivedita. This alarmed the Government and they imposed a watch on her movements and censorship of her correspondence. It

was at this period too that Gandhiji was at Calcutta to attend a Congress session and met Nivedita.

But Nivedita was intent as ever on establishing a school for women's education and with Swami Vivekananda's permission, opened it on the next Saraswati Puja day after celebrating the Puja with eclat. Miss Bett, her old nurse who had come to India with her, was of great help. Miss Christine Greenstidel who had been born in Germany and whose parents subsequently settled in the U.S.A., joined Nivedita in April and would take charge of the school in due course. As stated before, she had first met Swami Vivekananda at Detroit in 1894. Two years later she along with another lady, Mrs Funk, braved a difficult journey to see Swamiji while he was at Thousand Island Park. She met him also during his stay for a week at Detroit on his second visit to the U.S.A. Also as mentioned before, she helped Nivedita to collect funds and became the Secretary of the Detroit Committee. Vivekananda was impressed by her spirit of service and renunciation and welcomed her on arrival at Calcutta. Her sweet and patient nature impressed Nivedita too and was of great help in work at the school. On March 23, Nivedita spoke at the Classic Theatre on "The Hindu Mind in Modern Science." In the summer of 1902 Nivedita and Christine left for Mayavati. With

them also was Count Okakura, a great Japanese scholar and artist, President of the Archaeological Reform Society of Japan and also a great lover of Indian art and culture. He had come to India with Mr Oda, the high-priest of a Buddhist monastery of Japan to invite Swami Vivekananda to a Parliament of Religions to be held in Japan. Due to ill health Vivekananda was unable to accept the invitation but received them with delight. Okakura accompanied Vivekananda on his last pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya and Banaras. He stayed a long time in this country and wrote a very valuable book, *Ideals of the East*. Nivedita edited and wrote an Introduction to the book. According to reliable sources he took an active part in politics as well and had a hand in organizing secret societies in Northern India with the help of Surendranath Tagore, a nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, and a band of young men under him. He was among the influences which impelled her not to be content with being a preacher of thought but to try for actual realization of that thought in India's national life. After spending over a month in the peace and quiet of the Himalayas, Nivedita and party returned to Calcutta.

But the hour of parting from her Master had arrived. On her return from Europe she had seen Swami Vivekananda at Belur Math but he was not well. He kept

indoors during the Ramkrishna birthday celebrations at the Math on March 10th. Nivedita, however, saw him that day for a while with some English friends. Mrs Bull and Miss MacLeod saw him last on a day later that year when sports were held at the Math ground and Swamiji watched from the window. On Nivedita's return from Mayavati on June 26 Swamiji saw her the next day. On June 29 she went to Belur Math and Swamiji though on fast, served meals to Nivedita and washed her hands after she had finished eating. That was an event of significance in the light of the story of Christ washing the feet of his disciples prior to martyrdom. Nivedita was with Swamiji that day for three hours. In a letter she wrote later to Mrs Neil Hammond, she said that she thought that Swamiji had known that day he would never meet her again. On July 4 he was well and in the evening sent a message to Nivedita to that effect. Early next morning, however, a messenger from the Math informed her that Swami Vivekananda had passed away. She fanned the body right up to the time of cremation. A small piece of cloth which covered the bed-top was blown out of the burning pyre to her feet. She picked it up reverentially. She had a mind to give it to Miss Josephine MacLeod. She had had her last blessings from the Master.

5

ON WITH HER MISSION

Nivedita's only aim now was to fulfil the trust reposed in her by her Guru. But it had assumed a new dimension. Nivedita became firm in her belief that political freedom was essential for India's progress. Political activities were not however permitted to any member of the Ramkrishna Math. Truly enough, Vivekananda had told Nivedita that his mission was neither Ramkrishna's nor Vedanta's; it was simply to bring manhood to his people. Nivedita had offered to help him and he had acknowledged the offer. Yet it could not be said that he would have approved of her engaging herself in active politics. Swami Brahmananda, Swami Vivekananda's successor as President of the Ramkrishna Mission, wrote to Nivedita for her decision. She replied that in order to ensure freedom of action she was ceasing

connection with the Math. She also announced in the press that her action thenceforth would be independent of the sanction or authority of the Math. In a letter to Miss MacLeod she said that she could not confine herself to work for women, the stream of whose life was in any case even-flowing. She felt her task was to inform national consciousness of the problems and responsibilities which lay before the country.

So now Nivedita set herself to knowing the country and carrying the Swami's message to its people. Soon after Swami Vivekananda's passing, however, she went to Jessore to address a memorial meeting. She was one of the speakers at the Vidyasagar anniversary meeting at Classic Theatre presided over by Mr R.C. Dutt. A spell of illness followed and the monks from Belur Math took care of her. She was in financial difficulties, yet helped a number of neighbour women with money. So she took to finishing her book *The Web of Indian Life* which was destined to sell well. She received invitations from Bombay and so left on September 22, accompanied by Swami Sadananda. She carried out a heavy lecture programme at Bombay, subjects of her lectures including "Swami Vivekananda", "Hindu Mind in Modern Science", "Indian Womanhood", "Hinduism in the light of Modern thought", "Bhakti and Education",

“Asiatic Unity” and “Mother Worship”. Her deep faith in Hindu thought was manifest in a remark she made in her speech on “The Hindu Mind in Modern Science.” It was that howsoever great the advancement of European science might have been, it could not bear comparison with the intuitive methods of the Hindu mind by which real truth could be ascertained. All her speeches were highly applauded. Miss MacLeod had earlier conveyed to her that Swami Vivekananda had said that India would ring with Nivedita. Now in a letter to Miss MacLeod Nivedita said that she wondered if his words were coming true.

Nivedita’s lectures at Nagpur, Wardha and Baroda were equally successful. At Baroda she met Aurobindo Ghosh and that was the first of the meetings which led to her collaboration with him in the political cause. Lectures at Ahmedabad followed and she visited Kanheri Caves and Ellora. Of Ellora she wrote: “To all eternity, while the earth remains what she is, Ellora will be one of the spots where the mystery of God is borne in overwhelming measure, upon the souls of men, whatever their associations, whatever their creed.” Due to exhaustion she cancelled further tours and returned to Calcutta. A lecture at Chandernagore and two at Calcutta followed.

But again on December 8 she left with Swami Sadananda for Madras. With them was also Brahmachari Amulya who later, as Swami Sankarananda, became President of the Ramkrishna Mission. On the way they halted at Khandagiri in Orissa to observe the advent of Christmas. The observance itself was typical of a new spiritual synthesis Nivedita had attained: the two monks dressed like shepherds, holding crooks in their hands. They read from the Gospel of St. Luke the story about the Wise Men from the East and the Angels appearing to shepherds who abode in the fields at night. They read the great life of Jesus in review on to Death and the Resurrection. In Khandagiri which had received over two thousand years ago the message of Buddha, the message of the life of Jesus seemed to Nivedita to have received new enrichment.

On December 19, they reached Madras. Nivedita was particularly glad to be at that city where Vivekananda had found friends who helped him to go to America and where he had been given a grand reception on return. Here Nivedita had also been given a hearty public welcome on her return from a Western tour earlier that year. On request from local disciples Vivekananda had deputed Swami Ramkrishnanda to Madras where the latter had established a monastery at quarters provided

by a local devotee at Castle Kernan. Nivedita stayed at this monastery and carried out a programme of public lectures. In a lecture held under the auspices of the Young Men's Hindu Association she spoke on the unity of India which, she declared, was no gift of any foreigner. "If India had no unity herself," she said, "no unity could be given her. The unity which undoubtedly belonged to India was self-born and had its own destiny, its own functions and its own vast powers; but it was the gift of no one."

In a message to a crowded ladies' meeting which she was unable to attend, she pointed to the proud privilege and responsibility of women to keep society on an even keel and to build up a strong, brave generation. Her many meetings with students to discuss subjects like "Unity of India", "Nationalism", "Swamiji's Idealism" and "Hindu Religion" resulted in many of them going out to establish Vivekananda Societies in many places in the Presidency. These societies preached the message of Vedanta and did social and educational work. Nivedita herself wrote a book to guide them in their work.

Conversational meetings were also a big part of Nivedita's programme. She visited Conjeevaram where one such meeting was held at the railway station just on her arrival, and public lectures followed. She then

returned to Madras and in 1903 Swami Vivekananda's birthday was celebrated there with much ceremony. She received many more invitations to visit places but was unable to accept them. She left with her party the very next day for Calcutta. She was delighted at the manner in which South India had received the Ramkrishna-Vivekananda message. The work of the Ramkrishna Mission in Madras had, however, to be suspended for the time being because the house where it had been given quarters changed ownership.

Now Nivedita had time again to attend to the school which was of course always in her thoughts. As has been mentioned before, Miss Bett, her old maid, looked after the school in her absence. Christine Greenstidel arrived and joined Nivedita in March 1903. The school had now forty-five students on its rolls. Latest methods of education which aimed at supplementing book knowledge by practical exercises, were used. Nivedita compiled a personal record of each of her pupils with a view to build up her personality. A Women's Section was then opened, attended by the ladies of the neighbourhood with whom Nivedita and Christine had become friendly. Swami Sardananda and Swami Bodhananda gave lessons on the Gita; Labanyaprova Bose, sister of Dr J.C. Bose, taught reading and writing;

Joginma, an associate of Mother Saradamani, taught religion and Christine gave lessons in sewing and needle work. The women, all of whom had household duties to do, evinced great interest in going to school and their mental horizon expanded rapidly. A Chandi-Purana-Katha was held at the school courtyard and largely attended by ladies. Thus Nivedita and Christine approached the orthodox, largely unlettered women of the locality by methods in strict confirmity with their beliefs and customs. The response they received was not only gratifying to themselves but was applauded by observers like Mr S.K. Ratcliffe, then editor of the *Statesman*. The success of the project owed much to Christine and this was warmly acknowledged by Nivedita. Nivedita herself taught sewing and needlework and took teachers' training classes for senior students. "Bande Mataram" was sung and Sanskrit prayers said before a decorated picture of Ramkrishna everyday before work again. Mother Saradamani used to visit the school from time to time and this was a great inspiration. The school thus expanded and even in Nivedita's time additional accomodation had to be found for it. That was the modest, albeit dedicated beginning of what is now the massive Ramkrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls School.

With the idea of building up the future of her adopted country on the right lines, Nivedita planned a University Settlement where both men and women, Indian and foreign, would receive training for national educational work; also a Boys' Home, inmates of which would study for six months and for the other six months go out into the country. These projects could not, however, be fulfilled but in 1903 a group of boys of the Vivekananda Home was taken on an excursion to Pindari Glacier by Swami Sadananda. Rabindranath Tagore sent his son Rathindranath as a member of the group. Meanwhile Nivedita's speaking and writing programme continued without a break. She kept lecture engagements both at Calcutta and outside. She was a prolific contributor to prominent journals throughout the country.

Now she had a lecture programme at Patna and Lucknow. She attended the celebration of Swami Vivekananda's birthday at Belur Math on 9 January 1904, addressed a public meeting there two days later and also spoke on Vivekananda at Vivekananda Memorial Home. She then left for Patna accompanied by Swami Sadananda and Swami Sankarananda. The latter, who had been to Japan, gave a magic lantern lecture on his experiences in that country to a meeting of ladies who very much appreciated it. Nivedita gave three lectures and held

discussion meetings. The Hindu Boys Association was celebrating its anniversary on Saraswati Puja day and Nivedita was invited to address the gathering. She was introduced by Professor Jadunath Sarkar, the famous historian, in glowing terms and spoke on the need for boys to grow to real manhood in the service of the country. Her speech created great enthusiasm. In a public lecture on "The Educational Problem in India" she spoke on the need to develop by education the excellent human material in Indian women and the need for the students to remember the national goal of Independence. "The education of boys," she said, "will be in a national sense; that of your girls will be in a civic sense." The third lecture was on "Swami Vivekananda's Mission". These lectures left a deep impression on the public mind. Nivedita then undertook a visit to places sanctified by association with Lord Buddha. She had been influenced by the life and teachings of Buddha even at an early age and what Swami Vivekananda had told her of Buddha had augmented her reverence for him. Flowers had been laid at the feet of an image of Buddha at the end of the ceremony of her consecration. Now from Bankipore, the site of ancient Pataliputra, Nivedita went to Rajgir. She roamed over the famous hill there, walked with her companions a distance of eleven miles to Tilya station

and went to Bodh Gaya; she was lost in ecstasy. She also intervened in a dispute between Hindus and Buddhists over the right to ownership of the famous temple. Both in a public lecture and a widely publicised statement Nivedita stressed the point that Buddhists were not a community apart from the Hindus and no quarrel lay between them. There was even a proposal for her to found a School of History at Bodh Gaya but it did not materialize. After Bodh Gaya Nivedita visited Sarnath at Banaras and proceeded to Lucknow where she carried out a heavy lecture programme. The question of Hindu-Muslim unity was then exercising the public mind and Nivedita also exerted herself in the cause. Even after her return to Calcutta she had to give lectures on subjects like "Celibacy vs Matrimony", "Bodh Gaya" and "Dynamic Religion". She impressed by her strong, though brief exposition of Hindu marriage as both a social institution and a sacrament. In her speech on "Dynamic Religion" she brought out the dynamism of religious movements in India. Another very important lecture was on "Islam in Asia" delivered under the auspices of the Calcutta Madrassa, the audience being mostly Muslims. In that lecture Nivedita said: What then was the duty of the Indian Mussalman today? It was not to relate himself to Arabia. He had no need of that; his relation to Arabia

was of his very life-blood; it had been accomplished for him by the faith and patient labour of his forefathers. No, his duty was to relate himself to India, to throw into the national idea of India—his home by blood or by adoption and hospitality—the mighty force that was theirs by reason of the heritage into which they had been born.

It is remarkable that as early as 1904 Nivedita pointed out the right way for Muslims to integrate themselves in national life—a question that caused much political turmoil in the decades following. In March she fulfilled another lecture programme at Banaras. Both she and Christine went to Mayavati in summer on Mrs Seviere's invitation; Dr Bose and his wife and sister accompanied them. (It was on 17 May 1904, at Mayavati that Dr Bose began writing his famous book *Plant Response*.) She delivered more lectures at Calcutta, two talks on "Indian Arts" deserving special mention. Her understanding and exposition of Indian art prepared the way for the solid contribution she was to make to a revival of India's artistic life. Her tours and lectures were a sustained effort at revival in the Indian people of a consciousness of their own being. A trip to Bodh Gaya in October of the same year was remarkable for the distinguished party which accompanied her. In it were Dr J.C. Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Sankarananda, Jadunath Sarkar and

Mathuranath Sinha, a distinguished citizen of Patna. They all shared with Nivedita her effort at recapturing the spirit of India's heritage. She read to them daily Warren's *Buddhism in Translation* and Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. Recitations and songs by Rabindranath enthralled the party. During the day they strolled through the temple or visited neighbouring villages. In the evenings they sat under the Bodhi tree in meditation. Chanting of hymns by a poor Japanese fisherman, who had carefully saved money to come on a pilgrimage to India, added to the solemnity of the atmosphere. One evening Nivedita spoke of the Buddhistic age and her companions were imbued with the spirit of the age which she brought out vividly. On another evening they visited the site of the house of Sujata, Buddha's wife, at Urbel-Uru-Villa of Buddhist days and Nivedita spoke ecstatically of the significance of the life of Sujata. She also recalled Vivekananda's saying that the Indian social system reared an apparently idle community of lakhs of Sadhus but that had its use in that that very community produced from time to time a man like Ramkrishna Paramhansa. She then brought out the spiritual current running through India's national life through the ages.

That was not all, however. On the eve of leaving Bodh Gaya Nivedita was beside herself at the thought

that India was not yet conscious of her own being, not prepared to regain her place in human life and civilization. A feeling that her own and her co-workers' effort to reawaken India had failed, upset her. That was undoubtedly the prelude to a new and daring phase of her life: that of participation in efforts for India regaining her political freedom.



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6

IN FREEDOM'S CAUSE

It was not for nothing that Sister Nivedita had made herself independent of the Ramkrishna Order whose rules preclude their members' participation in politics. The beginning of the twentieth century distinctly revealed the newly awakened consciousness of Indians of their rights and their resentment at being deprived of those rights. Swami Vivekananda had himself told her that for the next fifty years Mother India would be the only object of their worship and worship of all other gods would follow. Sister Nivedita moulded her own life accordingly and, being in Calcutta, the seat of the nascent national movement, identified herself with thought-currents of the day. Practical action naturally followed.

Leaders of the National Congress looked askance at a Durbar held by the ruling Power at Delhi in 1902,

held their own meetings earlier at Ahmedabad and condemned the Durbar as a purposeless waste of money. Sister Nivedita received reports that the Durbar had been a humiliating experience for the Indian Princes. She remarked that the reaction of Indians to the Durbar showed that they had gained much political penetration. The move of Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy, to officialise the Calcutta University, evoked bitter resentment. Sister Nivedita acidly commented on it but at the same time asked the people in a number of lectures on "Educational Problems" to devise means and methods of national education. These exhortations had a deep effect on the minds of the people. Along with growth of political sensitiveness rose a number of societies for mobilization of young men for national work. The Dawn Society founded by Satish Chandra Mukherjee and the Anusilan Samity established by Satish Chandra Bose and barrister P. Mitra were the two main such societies, the others being the Young Men's Hindu Union Committee, the Gita Society and the Vivekananda Society. Sister Nivedita was associated with all these societies and inspired their members by talks on the Gita, Swami Vivekananda's message and Hinduism generally. She laid particular stress on "Nation", "Nationality" and "National Consciousness"

and so became an evangelist of nationalism. Under her inspiration, sports, recitations, and lecture competitions became a part of the training of young men. She was a preceptor to them and often distributed Vivekananda Medals in recognition of merit.

The Dawn Society established the National Education Society and the National College. Sister Nivedita was associated through these activities with all the leading figures of the day including Brojendranath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore, Surendranath Bancrjee, Bipin Chandra Pal and Abdul Rasul. Professor Binoy Sarkar, who later gained reputation as an economist and constructive thinker, has left a record of Nivedita's work and influence at the Dawn Society. The more politically oriented Anusilan Samity had also C.R. Das, Rashbehari Ghosh, Sister Nivedita and other leading figures as its associates. These societies aimed at physical, mental and moral training of young men and women. Gymnasia for physical culture, study circles for discussions on lives of great men and freedom movements of different countries, politics and economies, classes on the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, the *Gita*, the Chandi and Swami Vivekananda's works and also instructions on religious practices by Swami Saradananda, Satya Charan Sastri and Brahmabandhab

Upadhyay represented the activities of these societies. These activities reached a new stage, however, when Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, who was then at Baroda, sent an emissary, Jatindranath Banerjee, to ask the societies to remould their activities on revolutionary lines with the object of attaining national independence. This necessitated a re-orientation of the programmes of the societies towards greater emphasis on physical training and organized movement. Sri Aurobindo tried to weld these organizations into one under a Central Council of five persons of whom Nivedita would be one. But the idea did not work in his absence at Baroda. The Anusilan Samity, however, grew on the lines he had indicated and Sister Nivedita was actively associated with it. She believed in the need for revolutionary methods for the purpose of winning independence and, being a worshipper of Kali, was not averse to promoting violence for the purpose. But she maintained contact with all the other lines of political activity going on in the country. So she was a friend of Bipin Chandra Pal, the extremist leader, and contributed to his paper, the *New India*. She was, of course, a close friend of G.K. Gokhale, the Moderate leader, and of R.C. Dutt who was deeply concerned with the economic problems of his people. She said: "Let me plough my furrow across India just

as deep, deep, deep, to the very centre of things, as it will go. Let it be either as a hidden voice sending out noiseless things from a cell or as a personality, romping and raging through the big cities—I don't care! But the God of my own strong right hand grant that I do not have to waste my effervescence in western futilities. I think that I would rather commit suicide! India is the starting point and the goal, as far as I am concerned. Let *her* look after the West if she wishes!"

It is interesting to trace the course of Sister Nivedita's identification with the national movement. As early as 21 February 1905, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, offended Indian feeling by a remark he made in the course of his Convocation Address at the Calcutta University. He said that eastern people were less earnest about truthfulness than peoples of the West. Though nobody protested against the unwarranted aspersion on the character of the Indian people on the spot, leaders of public opinion who were present in the Convocation discussed the matter and Nivedita joined them. Next day she published in the press an extract from Lord Curzon's book, *Problems of the Far East*, in which he had himself related how while on a tour of Korea he had given the President of the Korean Foreign Office an impression, having no basis in fact, that he was going to be related by marriage to the Queen of

England. That revelation of a lie spoken by a man who dared to allege untruthfulness as a general trait of Indian character, created a stir. The public, however, did not know who was responsible for the disclosure. Dr J.C. Bose, who was one of the few who knew it, wrote a letter to Nivedita in which he called her "the thunderbolt behind dark clouds." Sister Nivedita, however, followed the matter up in an open letter to the editor of the *Statesman* in which she recalled Professor Max Mueller's book *What India has to Teach us*, of which the second chapter dealt with "The Truthful Character of the Hindus". But at the same time she castigated the audience of students before whom Lord Curzon had made the offensive statement, for having failed to protest in any manner whatsoever. The revealing passage in *Problems of the Far East* was omitted from the next edition of the book. A mass meeting of protest against Lord Curzon's calumny was held in March 1905, at Calcutta Town Hall. Soon after, Nivedita fell seriously ill of meningitis. After recovery, she left with the Boses for a change at Darjeeling and returned on July 3.

Soon after, occurred the event which changed the course of the history of India and involved Sister Nivedita completely in the cause of Indian freedom. The British Government's decision to partition the province

of Bengal was announced on 20 July 1905 and the people reacted sharply. Sister Nivedita attended a great protest meeting held on 7 August at Town Hall. In a subsequent meeting Surendranath Banerjee, the most outstanding leader of the anti-partition agitation, proposed the construction of a Federation Hall to symbolise the Unity of Bengal as a protest against the partition move. He has recorded in his autobiography *A Nation in the Making* that Sister Nivedita “that beneficent lady who had consecrated her life to and died in the service of India” warmly supported the proposal. She also supported the movement for Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods in these remarkable words: “The note of manliness and self-help is sounded throughout the Swadeshi movement. There is here no begging for help, no cringing for concessions... There will yet come a time when in India a man who buys from a foreigner will be regarded as on a level with the killer of cows today. For assuredly, the two offences are morally identical. It is precisely in a matter like the keeping of the Swadeshi vow that the Indian People especially can find an opportunity to show their true mettle.”

The Government retaliated by a number of circulars, one of which prohibited the singing of the song “Bande Mataram” and shouting of “Bande Mataram” as a

slogan. The partition of Bengal came into effect on October 16. The Congress observed the day as one of national mourning. The foundation of the Federation Hall was laid on the same day by the veteran leader, Ananda Mohan Bose. He was too ill and his speech was read by Surendranath Banerjee. Sister Nivedita associated herself with all these activities and attended the Congress session at Banaras on an invitation from the President, Gokhale. The Extremists carried the Congress with them and got the boycott resolution unanimously carried, an achievement hailed by Sister Nivedita. Gokhale's was a moderating influence in the Congress and in her thanks-giving speech Nivedita complimented him on his effort to make England see justice and thus render a spiritual service to that country. She also attended the next session of the Congress in Calcutta in 1906 but was pained by the growing rift between Extremists and Moderates. She was anxious for the growth of Indian nationality and felt allergic to the growth of parties. That led her to formulate a design for a national banner with Vajra or the Thunderbolt as the symbol and the words "Bande Mataram" inscribed on it. She took the idea from the story of Dadhichi who sacrificed his bones for the building of a thunderbolt, which represented to her the spirit of sacrifice. She also

had other forms of the design prepared. The symbol found general acceptance but was not suggested for consideration when the final form of the National Flag was decided on. That does not, however, minimise the significance of Sister Nivedita's ideas in the matter.

The political agitation was escalated when the foreign rulers broke up by the use of sheer force the Conference at Barisal in April 1906, which all the prominent leaders attended. The Congress was split at its session at Surat in 1907 when the Extremists, otherwise known as the Nationalists, captured it. Aurobindo Ghosh became the leader of the Nationalists and joined Bipin Chandra Pal in editing the *Bande Mataram*. He was the inspiration behind the revolutionary movement which grew rapidly through secret societies. Madame Lizelle Reymond, the French biographer of Sister Nivedita, says that Nivedita was intimately associated with these societies even to the extent of helping youthful bomb-makers to get access to the laboratories of Presidency College, Calcutta, as assistants of Dr J.C. Bose and Dr P.C. Roy, the eminent Professor of Chemistry who was also a great social worker. Madame Reymond has added that Nivedita was also involved in the Muraripukur Laboratory where bombs were manufactured and which led to the prosecution of a number of revolutionaries. It has been

questioned if Nivedita really went so far in associating herself with secret movements. Considering that she was by now an ardent seeker of freedom for India, by nature dedicated completely to any cause she believed in and wedded to the cult of strength derived from Swami Vivekananda's teachings and worship of Kali, it seems plausible that she did all she could to help the revolutionaries. The Government also kept close watch on her movements and censored her correspondence, as appears from a letter she wrote to the Postmaster-General at a subsequent date. Her heart and mind were swayed by the idea of making India a nation true to its genius, its heritage, its past. Swami Vivekananda, her Guru, had called for muscles of iron and nerves of steel. His was the philosophy of man-making. That philosophy inspired the revolutionaries so much that his works, together with the Gita and the Chandi, were their constant companions. The alien Government also regarded him and his works to be associated with revolutionary activity. Sister Nivedita regarded nation-making to be a fulfilment of man-making. In a letter to Miss MacLeod dated 4 April 1903, she said that the Indian nation must be inspired by the Ramkrishna-Vivekananda synthesis of religious ideas and realise its nationality deeply and fully. She noted the country's decline but believed that

neither orthodoxy nor mere acceptance of foreign ideas could redeem it. She believed that India had strength within herself for self-renewal as was evident from the fact that there were many streams of life even outside political and economic currents. She visualized India's regeneration as many-faceted – social, political, cultural, economic, religious – all these to be fed by the deeper reality of Indian life. It was this regeneration that she strived to serve by her speech, pen and action. The result was as far-reaching as abiding.



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ON LIFE'S WAY AHEAD

After the Congress session at Banaras in 1905, Nivedita stayed there for some time and worked for the Home of Service set up there on a modest scale three years earlier. She and her party then paid a long-awaited visit to Rajasthan. The historical associations of the place moved her deeply. It was past midnight one moonlit night when they reached Chitor. With the fort in view about a mile off, they sat on a stone and Nivedita sank in meditation on the past and on Padmini, the glory of Chitor. Later, the party returned to Banaras where Nivedita met Mrs Annie Besant, the famous theosophist who also adopted India as her country and rose to be one of its prominent leaders. Nivedita also gave a few public lectures.

They then returned to Calcutta on 22 January 1906. That was the year in which two persons with whom

Nivedita had come in contact and who had earned her reverence, died. One was Swami Swarupananda, the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, who had helped Nivedita to understand Hindu religion. Another was the venerable Gopaler Ma or Gopal's Mother, so called because Ramkrishna himself had called her his mother. Mrs Bull and Miss MacLeod who had met her at a festival at Belur and again at Kamarhutti in 1898, had been struck by her saintliness. For two and a half years since 10 December 1903, she stayed with Nivedita and then on 6 July 1906, at the age of ninety-three she passed away. These deaths left a void in Nivedita's life.

Another tragedy followed as famine occurred in East Bengal and Nivedita hurried there on a mission of succour. She also wrote of her experiences in "Glimpses of Famine and Flood in East Bengal in 1906." On return to Calcutta, however, she fell seriously ill and was looked after by Sister Christine and Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda from Belur Math. During convalescence she went to stay at Anandamohan Bose's house at Dum Dum. She extended her stay there for some writing and besides "Occasional Notes" for *Prabuddha Bharata*, began writing *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* and *The Master As I Saw Him*. She also helped Dr J.C. Bose in his work on *Comparative Electro-Psychology*.

Mrs Seviars came to Calcutta in 1907, stayed with Nivedita at Dum Dum and helped her with the proofs of Swami Swarupananda's English translation of the Gita. Both she and Christine accompanied the Boses to Mayavati. Swami Virajananda, who was then in charge of Mayavati Centre, had undertaken the task of printing Swami Vivekananda's complete works, publication of which had been arranged by Swami Swarupananda. Sister Nivedita undertook to write an Introduction to the Works and on return to Calcutta wrote it under the caption "Our Master and His Message". Her health was bad at that time and Miss MacLeod and Mrs Bull insisted on her going to the West for a change. The atmosphere in the country too was none too congenial and the Government had launched a policy of stern repression. The arrest and deportation of political leaders, including Lala Lajpat Rai, shocked her. Bhupendranath Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekananda and sub-editor of *Jugantar*, being arrested, Nivedita got him released on bail but soon after he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and on release, left for America. Dr J.C. Bose's books *Plant Response* and *Comparative Electro-Psychology* had in the mean time caused a stir and he was invited to go to Europe. He requested Nivedita to accompany him. So she prepared

in advance matter for the two journals *Modern Review* and *Prabuddha Bharata*, called on Mother Saradamani, visited Belur Math and Dakshineswar, and left for Europe. She continued to write on board ship. She was jubilant to learn in a letter from Christine that the Girl's School had reopened and was working fully.

Reunited with her mother, sister and brother after five years, she stayed with them for a few weeks from September 1907. Her mother, Mary, deeply appreciated the Hindu way of life her daughter had made her own and that was a solace for Nivedita too. In November she went to Europe, met the Boses in Germany and Miss MacLeod and Mrs Legget in Paris. She returned with the Boses to England and again stayed with her mother. Her book *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* was published at this time and proved to be a success. Her stay in England was spent in lecturing, writing and talking on subjects related to India. In 1908 she met Prince Kropotkin again who told her of the similarity of conditions in Russia and India and held out hopes of social revolution in both countries. A number of eminent Indians such as Gokhale, B.C. Pal, R.C. Dutt and Ananda Coomaraswamy as also Ratcliffe and Havell, the Principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta, were also in England. Sister Nivedita met all of them and continued her work for

India. She met a number of members of Parliament and journalists sympathetic to India. They included Sir Henry Cotton, Dr V.H. Rutherford, Mrs Keir Hardie, William Redmond and William Stead of *Review of Reviews*. She worked indefatigably in the cause of India.

But political tension in India had in the meantime risen high. The cleavage between Moderates and Extremists was complete. Revolutionary violence and Government repression were both on the increase. Khudiram Bose's attempt on the life of Calcutta's Chief Presidency Magistrate, Kingsford, at Muzaffarpore and the accidental death of two European ladies, an attempt on the life of Sir Andrew Fraser, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, the murder of the approver Naren Goswami at Alipore jail, arrests of Sri Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra Pal, the deportation of Aswini Kumar Dutt and eight others—news of all these events stirred Nivedita greatly. She had, however, more work to do abroad and with Dr J.C. Bose paid a month's visit to Ireland. Then they went to America and stayed at Boston with Mrs Ole Bull. She visited the Community of Greenacre in Maine where Swami Vivekananda had stayed for sometime on the invitation of Miss Sarah J. Farmer. He had passed his days there in contemplation and talks to disciples. Nivedita felt the atmosphere there sanctified

by his presence. She met old friends there, also met Miss MacLeod and Mrs Legget and undertook in November and December 1907 an extensive lecture tour. She also collected funds for her school. In New York she spent a few days with Miss Emma Thursby, a famous singer. A well-known journalist of those days, F.I. Alexander, met her and has left an account of the immense impression she made on him. In New York also she gave talks on India's religion and culture and their influence on Western thought. She met J.T. Sunderland who, as the President of the American League, warmly advocated the cause of Indian freedom. Among the Indian revolutionaries she met were Dr Taraknath Das and Dr Bhupendranath Dutt. Dr Dutt has acknowledged that Nivedita arranged for his education in America.

A very important work she did in America was to collect Swami Vivekananda's letters. Dr J.C. Bose had in the meantime been lecturing in American Universities and Nivedita planned to return with him to India. But she received news that her mother was ill of cancer and suffering great pain. Nivedita wrote a letter of consolation in which she invoked the inspiration of the divine lives of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. In January 1909 she left America and was at her mother's bedside. Her mother was happy to have her by her side

and passed away peacefully on January 26th. Nivedita stayed with her brother and sister for sometime more. She had promised her mother that she would rewrite and rearrange her father's sermons, and fulfilled her promise. In April, with her brother and sister she carried their mother's ashes to Great Torrington in Ireland and laid them at rest near their father. Some of those who had been present at her father's funeral were present in this ceremony as well. Nivedita wrote to Mrs Bull of her satisfaction that her parents lay together at the ancestral abode and in peaceful natural surroundings.

Sister Nivedita was now ready to return to India. The Boses returned to England in March and in May went to Europe where Miss MacLeod, Mrs Bull and Nivedita followed. On 2 July 1909, they set sail for India. But on the same day Sir Curzon Wylie, an official of India Office was assassinated by an Indian in London and the news disconcerted Nivedita. She finally reached Calcutta on 18, July 1909. Most of her biographers are agreed that she kept herself incognito for sometime at this period for she was a suspect in the eyes of the British police. So she felt her way before resuming normal activities. Yet she was destined to take a more open part in politics.

8

HOLDING THE FORT

That was the time of the Alipore Conspiracy Case. The Government had launched a policy of repression. Searches and arrests were on everywhere. The revolutionaries replied by bomb-making and bomb-throwing. The so-called Muraripukur Road Conspiracy was unearthed in May 1908. The case dragged on for a year and a half. Barindra Kumar Ghosh had had political training from his brother, Sri Aurobindo, had seen Vivekananda in his fifteenth year and obtained Nivedita's help in organising the youths of the country. He and Ullaskar Dutt were given the death sentence which was, on appeal, reduced to transportation for life. Thirteen others received severe sentences. Sri Aurobindo was acquitted, thanks to powerful advocacy in his defence by Chittaranjan Das. Nivedita, on return to India, found many of her friends

in detention or jail or deported. Among them was Tilak who had been sent to the Mandalay Jail for six years. Krishna Kumar Mitra and others had been deported from Bengal. Many others had been arrested, some had gone underground. The political movement seemed to be suffering from lack of leadership. Devabrata and Sachin, two revolutionaries, charges against whom had been dismissed, joined the Belur Math. That led to great police vigilance on the Math. Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Math, prohibited entry of outsiders into the Math and, on Nivedita's return to Calcutta, issued a second statement reiterating the Math's disavowal of responsibility for her actions. Nivedita celebrated Aurobindo's release from jail at her school. Sri Aurobindo appeared at this period to have summoned greater spiritual strength than before and himself wrote of the Yogic concentration he had developed with the help of the Gita and the Upanishads. He claimed to have heard Vivekananda's voice and felt Vivekananda's presence for a fortnight while he had been in jail. He published two periodicals during this time – *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali. He laid down the aim of the papers as an amalgam of religion and politics with a view to inject strength into the national effort. Nivedita was a regular contributor to these papers. Aurobindo

himself acknowledged that it was from Ramkrishna, the unlettered saint of Dakshineswar, that India learnt to reclaim herself. He emphasized that the work had hardly commenced, Vivekananda's message was yet unfulfilled in practice. Nivedita had noticed that Sri Aurobindo had himself been tending to divert himself from the field of action to gather spiritual strength in the wake of the sages of old. He had published thirty-nine issues of the *Karmayogin* when news was brought of the Government's contemplated action against him and his paper. Nivedita then used to frequent the circle of political workers who clustered round Sri Aurobindo. There was a report that Aurobindo was going to be deported and Nivedita advised him to leave the country. But he published in the *Karmayogin* a statement purporting to be his testament to the nation and deportation was staved off for the time being. Soon afterwards, however, Sri Ramchandra Majumdar, an employee of the *Karmayogin* brought informaton that Sri Aurobindo was about to be arrested. There was little time to be lost. Sri Aurobindo left for the French Settlement of Chandernagore in February 1910. He left a message for Nivedita asking her to edit the journal in her absence. Nivedita saw Aurobindo at Chandernagore on February 14 which was the Saraswati Puja day. She saw Aurobindo again on the 27th of the

same month. She fulfilled the task of editing *Karmayogin* until its suspension in April 1910. By that time Sri Aurobindo had reached Pondicherry.

In one of the issues Nivedita published at this period a statement which has been regarded as a testament. It ran as follows:

“I believe that India is one, indissoluble, invincible.

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

I believe that the strength which spoke in the Vedas and Upanishads, in the making of religions and empires, in the learning of scholars and the meditation of the saints, is born once more amongst us, and its name today is Nationality.

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

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

Nivedita had already become the object of constant police attention. Even her ordinary letters were censored so that she was obliged to protest against it to the Postmaster-General. On March 10, Lady Minto, wife of the Viceroy, paid an incognito visit to Nivedita at the latter's school. She revealed her identity before leaving and Nivedita regarded her visit as a happy surprise. Lady

Minto wrote later of the deep impression Nivedita made on her. She visited Belur Math and had Nivedita and Sister Christine with her when visiting Dakshineswar. She invited Nivedita to tea at Government House and expressed her worry over the police watch on her. She advised Nivedita to see the Commissioner of Police and Nivedita did so.

Even earlier, in November 1909, Mr Ramsay Macdonald, Labour Party leader and future Prime Minister, saw Nivedita while on a visit to Calcutta. He was also greatly impressed by her and talked with her on Indian religion and philosophy.

With the suspension of *Karmayogin*, however, Nivedita retired into a quiet mood. Her deep commitment to the cause of freedom for India was but a reflection of her self-merger in the stream of Indian life. Now again she felt herself diving deep into it in obedience to the message of her departed Guru. Whatever else she did or attempted to do, her school was her first concern and she gave loving care to it and its students. On her return from the West, Sister Christine who had conducted the school during her absence, left for a change and Nivedita took charge. A teacher named Pushpa Devi was at the school for sometime. But it was Sister Sudhira, sister of Devabrata, a revolutionary who, as stated before, later

joined Belur Math, who dedicated herself to work at the school. Sister Nivedita's real difficulty in running the school was financial. She received some small help from Olea, Mrs Bull's daughter, but that was not enough. Two branch schools which had been opened in the meantime had to close down.

At this time there were about seventy students in the school. Nivedita taught them Geography, History, Needle work and Drawing. She was a strict disciplinarian and the individual consideration she showed towards her pupils helped her to enforce discipline. She put on display toys made by her pupils and paintings by them, and was delighted when one day Ananda Coomaraswamy, the famous connoisseur, visited the school and praised an Alpana design made by one of her pupils. She revelled at the idea of introducing Sanskrit in the curriculum and the prospect of her pupils writing in Sanskrit on palm-leaves. Her ambition to take her pupils on excursions to places of religious and historical interest was not fulfilled but she arranged trips to the Museum, the Zoo, Dakshineswar and similar places. Her explanation of the significance of those places added to the interest of those trips. It was always her effort to imbibe her pupils with love for their country, Bharatvarsha. She took

them to Brahma Girls School so that they could listen to the patriotic lectures which used to be delivered at the adjoining Green Park. She arranged for a display of their handicrafts at Swadeshi Exhibitions, and also introduced spinning classes at her school. Though the singing of “Bande Mataram” was prohibited by the Government, she had it regularly sung by her pupils. She read with them Vivekananda’s life and took them occasionally to Belur Math and the Holy Mother. She took particular care of the child-widows among her school pupils. Altogether, she made of her school a place where the pupils got not only instruction but mental shelter and assurance. Despite all her hardships and difficulties, Nivedita felt herself blessed in her work for the school.

Mother Saradamanī paid a visit to the school whenever she came to Calcutta from her country home. Nivedita also made it a point to see her, particularly before she left Calcutta on tour. She received the Holy Mother with due ceremony. Her attitude to the Mother was one of intense devotion and the Mother had unbounded affection for her. Nivedita tried her best to make the mother comfortable. Her regret was deep because she could not do for the Mother all she wished to do, as she had little money. She called the Mother

her mother and Mother Saradamani addressed her as her daughter. This filial relation also found expression in their correspondence when Nivedita went abroad at times. She learned enough Bengali to converse with the Mother and give lessons to her pupils. It was for service of Indian womanhood that Swami Vivekananda had asked Margaret Noble to come to India. Mother Saradamani was the embodiment of ideal Indian womanhood and Sister Nivedita found in her all the solace she needed. She had arrived at a state of life in which, sensing a call to eternity, she became one with the tenor of life of the country she had made her own.

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JOURNEY TO THE END

Sister Nivedita set out on a journey which was to complete her identification with what has been regarded as India's eternal life. Accompanied by Dr J.C. Bose, Mrs Bose and their nephew Aurobindo Mohan Bose, she started on a pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badrinarayan. They went there *via* Hardwar and returned *via* Srinagar. Nivedita had her fill of experience of the spiritual fervour of the commonalty of the Indian nation. She wrote of her experiences in an article in the *Modern Review*, later published as the book *Kedarnath and Badrinarayan: A Pilgrim's Diary*.

On her return, she received news of serious illness of Mrs Sarah Bull who had been a great benefactor to her. Dhira Mata, as Swami Vivekananda had called her, had helped Nivedita to run the school, publish her writings

and help J.C. Bose in his work. Nivedita, however, had at this time a premonition of death and wrote to Mrs Bull of her fears of leaving her work unfinished. But at Darjeeling where, as usual, she went during the Puja holidays, she received a telegram informing her that Mrs Bull was in a critical condition and wanted to see her. So Nivedita hurried by ship to her bedside and stayed with her till the end. She read to Mrs Bull from Swamiji's works and recalled the days when they were together in India. At this period she also wrote and sent to the Universal Race Congress in London a paper on "The Present Position of Women." All her thoughts were centred on Mrs Bull and one day when she was praying at the local church for Sarah, she perceived that the Holy Mother was the Madonna. She then wrote a letter to the Mother. But in another way those were days of great disquietude for her. Mr E.G. Thorp, Mrs Bull's brother, and Olea, her daughter, were at the place at the time and the latter developed great antipathy towards Nivedita. She suspected that Nivedita was there to grab her mother's money. Mrs Bull passed away on 18 January 1911. Nivedita had a mind to return to India immediately but had to stay on to look into the bequest Mrs Bull had left her in her will. She shifted to the house of another friend, Miss Alice Longfellow. Olea, however,

disputed her mother's will and Nivedita decided to leave the matter to Mr Thorp and leave America. At this time she received the shocking news of the death of Swami Sadananda who had been her friend, comrade and companion ever since Swami Vivekananda's death. She had been looking after him in his illness before she went to America. On her way back to India she met Ratcliffe and other friends in London, and Miss MacLeod and Mrs Legget in Paris. These proved to be her last meetings with her friends. She sailed for India from Marseilles on 23 March 1911, reached Bombay on April 7 and returned to Calcutta. There she met the Mother who had returned from a visit to South India. She saw Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda at Belur Math. The premonition of death was growing strong within her and she was disturbed by anxiety lest she failed to be of such service as Swamiji had desired of her. At this period she paid a visit to Mayavati Asram in the Company of Dr and Mrs J.C. Bose and their nephew, Aurobindo Bose. She helped Dr Bose to prepare his new book. He gave a lecture at Advaita Asram and Nivedita too addressed the inmates of the Asram on "Intellectual Culture." They returned to Calcutta on July 3. Sister Nivedita was at this time disturbed over the future of her school because her expectation of a bequest from

Mrs Bull had not materialized. She could have easily obtained monetary help from the Government and Lady Minto was there to help her in that regard but it was Nivedita's principle not to accept help from the foreign Government. Indeed, Sister Nivedita Girls School did not accept any help from the Government until after the advent of the National Government. Soon after, however, she was informed by Mr Thorp that some money would be available for the school in terms of Mrs Bull's will. This was a great relief. Nivedita, however, had to suffer during this period a number of bereavements. She was at the bedside of Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Vivekananda's mother, when the latter died. News came of the sudden death of Olea, Mrs Bull's daughter. This was a shock for Nivedita though Olea had developed a dislike for her. Another shock was the death of Swami Ramkrishnanda, Swami Vivekananda's loyal and dedicated comrade with whom Nivedita had come in contact during her visit to Madras and whose spirituality had greatly impressed her. Misfortunes of another sort also befell Nivedita at this stage. Sister Christine had gone on a visit to America and had, on return, gone to Mayavati. When Nivedita went there, Christine told her that she would no longer live with her and would take up teaching at Brahma Girls School.

Nivedita had been all admiration for Christine and had always spoken and written highly of her. The latter's estrangement, reasons for which are not known, greatly depressed Nivedita. Nivedita continued to work hard for the school though she had her own writing to do and to help Dr Bose. Still another shock was Sister Sudhira's departure, probably under Christine's influence, from the school to join Brahma Girls School. Nivedita's efforts to bring her back failed. Neither Christine or Sudhira met Nivedita again for when, sometime later, they learnt of Nivedita's illness at Darjeeling and wanted to go there, it was already too late.

Sister Nivedita paid a number of farewell visits before going to Darjeeling. She saw Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous dramatist, who was then ill but nevertheless engaged in writing a play called *Tapobal* or the "Power of Austere Meditation." Nivedita expressed a wish to read the book on her return from Darjeeling and on learning of her death there, Girish Chandra dedicated the book to her. She also saw Swami Saradananda, Golap-Ma and Jogin-Ma at the Holy Mother's place. She then went with the Boses to Darjeeling. The first few days there passed off peacefully. They planned a visit to the distant Sandak Fu-peak but on the day of departure Nivedita developed an attack of blood dysentery. Dr Nilratan

Sarkar, the leading physician of those days, was then at Darjeeling but medical treatment was of no avail. Nivedita, however, put up a brave fight before imminent death. She was seemingly realizing what she had written before about Death:

“I thought last night that that interfused with all this world of matter, penetrating it through and through, there may be another, call it meditation, or mind, or what one will, and that perhaps that is what death means. Not to change one’s place—for since this is not matter, it can have no place—but to sink deeper and deeper into that condition of being more and more divest of the imagination of body. So that our dead are close to us physically, if it comforts us to think so of them, and yet one with all vastness, one with uttermost freedom and bliss.

And so I thought of the Universal as mingled in this way with the finite and we standing here, on the borderline between the two, commanded to win for ourselves the paradise of both the Infinite in the Finite. I am thinking, more and more, that Death means just a withdrawal into meditation, the sinking of the stone into the well of its own being. There is the beginning before death, in the long hours of quiescence, when the mind hangs suspended in the characteristic thought of its life,

in that thought which is the residuum of all its thoughts and acts and experiences. Already in these hours the soul is discarnating, and the new life had commenced.

I wonder if it would be possible so to resolve one whole life into love and blessing, without one single ripple of a contrary impulse that one might be wrapt away in that last hour and far evermore into one great thought, so that in eternity at least one might be delivered from thought of self, and know oneself only as a brooding presence of peace and benediction for all the need and suffering of the world."

Before she went to Darjeeling, Nivedita had got printed and circulated the English translation of a Buddhist prayer. It was now read to her:

"Let all things that breathe, without enemies, without obstacles, overcoming sorrow, and attaining cheerfulness, move forward freely, each in his own path.

In the East and in the West, in the North and the South, let all beings that are without enemies, without obstacles, overcoming sorrow and attaining cheerfulness, move forward freely, each in his own path."

In a soft voice she uttered her favourite prayer: "From the Unreal lead to the Real! From Darkness lead us to Light: From Death lead us to immortality! Reach us through and through ourselves, and evermore,

O Thou Terrible! protect us from ignorance, by thy sweet compassionate Face.”

Then came 13 October 1911. She said that she would yet see the sunrise. Sunrays illumined her room as she set for the bourn from where no traveller returns.

Prominent Calcutta citizens who were then at Darjeeling accompanied the funeral procession which all classes of people of the hill-station joined. The funeral pyre was lit at 4.15 p.m. and Ganen Maharaj of the Ramkrishna Mission, who had always been a devoted companion, performed the last rites. All was over by 8 p.m. Citizens of Darjeeling raised a memorial at the place of her cremation. There in the silence rests the Samadhi: *Here Reposes Sister Nivedita Who Gave Her All to India.*

Irish by birth, Indian by adoption, having been immersed in what she had realized to be the spirituality of India and having served this country to the last drop of her being, Nivedita at last left the World with the hope that she had fulfilled well the precepts of her Guru.

10

IMPACT ON HER TIMES

Doctor Jadunath Sarkar, the doyen of Indian historians, among others, writes of the House of Sisters, the residence of Sisters Nivedita and Christine, where men, women and children flocked practically at all hours of day and night. Leading lights of the day used to assemble there on Sunday mornings and many a plan for social and cultural work emerged from that rendezvous where high Government officials, public leaders, artists and writers met and discussed matters of common interest. Common people too went to Nivedita, many of them for selfish purposes. The influence she exerted in many directions had, however, abiding results. Reference has already been made to the unstinted manner in which she came to the help of Jagadish Chandra Bose. A section of British scientists made a conspiracy to suppress Bose and

went so far as to prevent publication of his work and to try to have it shelved or stolen. This greatly depressed the scientist. Nivedita expressed shame at the conduct of some of her countrymen and helped him to prepare a number of his books, and also papers for publication in the *Philosophical Transaction*. Dr Bose was in those days in daily touch with Nivedita. She obtained money from Mrs Bull for publication of his works. She also desired to see a research laboratory opened and though she did not live to see it, the Bose Institute which has been described as not only a laboratory but a temple, came later into being. In his speech at the opening of the Institute, Dr Bose referred to “a few, now in the city of silence” who had come to his aid. He said also in a letter that it was Nivedita’s strong belief in Indian science and Indian scientists that led him to found the Institute. A memorial fountain within the Institute with a bas-relief of “Woman carrying light to the temple” is regarded as depicting the spirit of Nivedita hovering over the institution. Sister Nivedita, though junior to Dr Bose in age, was a guardian angel to him. She accompanied Dr and Mrs Bose in holidays to hill stations and, when in Calcutta, spent many an evening with them in discussions and poetry recitals. Mrs Bose was much impressed by Nivedita’s work for education of

orthodox Hindu women and got her to address Brahmo ladies on topics of interest. She and Labanyaprova Bose, J.C. Bose's sister, taught at Nivedita's school for sometime. Sister Nivedita's untimely death left J.C. Bose very sorrowful. He left one lakh of rupees in his will for a memorial to Nivedita. Mrs Bose used the money to build a hall at an institution called Vidyasagar Bani Bhavan and named it after Nivedita.

On the death of J.C. Bose in 1937, Rabindranath Tagore spoke in a speech at Santiniketan of the help the departed scientist had received from Nivedita. Tagore himself was a close friend of Nivedita. When they first met, Tagore requested Nivedita to take charge of the education of his daughter. Nivedita declined because, she said, the child should be educated according to Hindu ideals. That surprised Tagore but also impressed him—so much so that he offered his own house for use by her for giving education according to her ideals. Nivedita declined because of the pressure of the work she had been already doing. When Nivedita sent a batch of students on excursion to the Himalayas with Swami Sadananda, Tagore sent his own son Rathin with them. He frequently visited Nivedita and, as mentioned before, accompanied her once to Bodh Gaya. Nivedita learnt Bengali sufficiently well to translate Tagore's

story “Kabuliwala” into English. Once she went with Dr Bose to Silaidaha in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) where Tagore used to stay often. Tagore was fascinated by the manner in which Nivedita mixed with the villagers like a mother. Experiences like that made him call Nivedita “Loka Mata” – Mother of the People. Though on very friendly terms with her, Tagore did not find it possible to work with her in the practical field. He explained that his path was different from Nivedita’s; also a certain militancy in her nature made it difficult to work with her unless there was full agreement. All the same he derived inspiration from her and in a tribute at her death, acknowledged the benefits he had received from her and the strength he gained from remembering her. Nivedita also saw the poet’s father Maharshi Devendranath and at the Maharshi’s request saw him again with Swami Vivekananda. She was also close to Sarala Ghosal, niece of the poet, who besides being a litterateur, was a great patriot.

Sister Nivedita’s efforts, however, were particularly fruitful in the sphere of revival of the old tradition of Indian art and use of that tradition for rejuvenation of art. Count Kokasu Okakura who has already been mentioned as having been on a visit to India at the time, instilled into Nivedita a deep sense of appreciation of

art. That enabled her to detect the lifelessness of the products of the Calcutta Art School of which E.B. Havell was then Principal. Nivedita decided that a country's art must strike roots in the country instead of lodging itself in imitation of alien art forms. Love for the country, pride in it, aspiration for the future and the artist's own desire for expression, must be the fountain-springs of artistic creation. These, she found, were abundant in India and found expression in folk songs, folk art, folk dance, handicrafts and the like. Nivedita instructed even Abanindranath Tagore, to whom she was introduced by E.B. Havell, as to how to inform art of awareness of one's own country's life—past and present and the future-to-be. She published reprints of the best specimens of western art including art of the Renaissance, and wrote essays explaining their significance. When Miss Hirlingham of England came to India to copy the frescoes of Ajanta and Ellora, Nivedita arranged that Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar, two of Abanindranath's pupils, should also go to Ajanta and Ellora to study the rock paintings. That was indeed the turning point of Indian art towards rejuvenation. It was under the inspiration of Nivedita that Havell wrote his book *Indian Sculpture and Painting* in which he refuted the theory that

Indian art had been influenced by the Greeks. For this he was hauled over the coals by his European compatriots. Ananda Coomaraswamy, the famous artist and art-critic, also collaborated with Nivedita in this field. These three and Okakura indeed held up the greatness and distinctiveness of Indian art before western scholars. Abanindranath's pupils clustered round him and formed the Bengal School of Art, the Indian Society of Oriental Art was founded in 1907 and altogether Indian art chalked out a new path for itself. Sister Nivedita took a hand in the training of young artists. Nandalal Bose has written of her as a guiding angel and Asit Haldar has testified to having learnt from her that work for revival of Indian art would be a great contribution to national reawakening. Nivedita visited all exhibitions of works by young artists. The last such exhibition which she visited was in February 1907 and in her remarks she foretold a great future for all branches of Indian painting.

Nivedita's articles on art were mostly published in *Modern Review* to which she was introduced by J.C. Bose. She came to know closely Ramananda Chatterjee, the famous editor of *Modern Review* and helped him immensely in his work. Not only did she keep him supplied with articles but for a time edited the journal

on his behalf and made it the forum of literary contacts which served to enrich the country's cultural life.

Sister Nivedita's contacts with Bipin Chandra Pal, the great nationalist leader, in India and America were productive of mutual appreciation, though they sometimes differed and violently too. Sister Nivedita particularly appreciated Pal's lecture at the Annual Congress of Religions at Boston which Nivedita too attended. They became great friends and when Pal published his journal *New India* Nivedita was a regular contributor to it.

Sister Nivedita helped Dr Dinesh Chandra Sen to prepare his monumental work, *History of Bengali Literature* in Bengali. She learnt Bengali and Sanskrit from R.C. Dutt, received help and encouragement from him in writing *The Web of Indian Life* and encouraged him to write *Economic History of India*. She had among her friends G. H. Natesan, Srinivasa Iyengar and Subramanya Bharati, the famous Tamil poet and patriot. She was a contributor to Bharati's paper *Bal Bharat*. Jadunath Sarkar held her in great esteem and she requested him to write historical truth without bowing to any foreign authority. Dr Radhakumud Mukherjee, the historian, also acknowledged the encouragement he received from her. She was a Guru to young Indians

who wished to serve the country. Taraknath Das, the revolutionary, dedicated his book *Japan and Asia* to her. Many others received from her concrete help and encouragement. The leading men and women of contemporary Bengal – and they were a galaxy – were all her friends and admirers.

Sister Nivedita also worked to secure understanding of Indian life and thought by open-minded Europeans. Indeed, her life of dedication itself made a profound impression on persons like Lord and Lady Minto. Mention has already been made of S.K. Ratcliffe, editor of the *Statesman*. There were others. Dr T.K. Cheyne, an Oxonian scholar, has left a record of what he gained from Nivedita's writings and the guidance she personally gave him in the study of Indian thought. In a word, Sister Nivedita did not miss a single opportunity of serving the country of her adoption. Her life, short as it was, was devoted up to the last minute to the service of India. It remains for succeeding generations a shining example of total integration of oneself with the country's life and of practical self-realization in the country's service. Her contemporaries have testified to the solemnity of Sister Nivedita's dress and deportment and the immense impression she made in any gathering. They have also told of a certain militancy

in her temperament which sometimes proved awkward for those who came in contact with her. But they have also ascribed that militancy to a depth of conviction and resoluteness in action which left an abiding impression on men, women and events of her times.



11

HER LITERARY LEGACY

It is indeed a great fortune that Sister Nivedita who had so great a love for India and so great an understanding of Indian thought, should leave a record of her study in a considerable number of books and articles. These illumine not only the entire vista of Indian life in a comparative estimate of western thought but provide considerable insight into contemporary political and social movements. Her first publication was *Kali the Mother* which depicted Kali as she appears to man in anguish as the Terrible, who plays with him as with a child and thereby shelters him in love. The complicated conception was adequately explained in the book which consisted of essays on various aspects of the subject.

The Master As I Saw Him in which Nivedita describes Swami Vivekananda's influence on her own life, has

been placed by competent critics on an equal footing with *Confessions of St Augustine*. The subtlety and grandeur of Vivekananda's teachings have been fully brought out in the book. *Notes on Some Wanderings* is a companion volume of *The Master As I Saw Him*. It is a vivid description of the impressions gathered by Nivedita in course of her travels with Swami Vivekananda in the Himalayas and other places of religious interest. A number of lectures and articles, mainly on Vivekananda, published in book form are a record of Sister Nivedita's presentation of Swami Vivekananda from time to time. *Kedarnath and Badrinarayan – A Pilgrim's Diary* is of absorbing interest as a narrative of the historical associations of the holy places which Nivedita visited and describes delightfully both the natural background and the architectural significance of the temples on the route.

The Web of Indian Life has taken its place among the classics. It is marvellous both in insight into the subtleties of the Hindu family and social organization. It has to be remembered, however, that Nivedita's outlook on Hindu society was related to the historical context of the day. She interpreted the caste system as an assurance of everybody being honour-bound to follow his own way of life in fulfilment of his obligation to society, and

did not yet feel called upon to take note of the abuses and injustices which had crept into the system. She was enchanted by the Hindu woman's self-abnegation and the magnificence of the widow's resignation to her fate and dedicated way of living. It would seem to the modern mind that she was oblivious of the suffering and humiliation of women in the guise of dedication and sacrifice. But she laid great stress on the educational shortcomings of the Indian Woman resulting in her being denied complete fulfilment. She was aware of the modern conditions in which lack of education left her ill-equipped to fulfil the demands of society and the potentialities of her own being. Uncommon foresight is apparent in these words of hers occurring towards the end of her essay:

“Such a change would befall them as a result, not cause, of some great upheaval, from which the nation herself had emerged radiant victorious, impressing herself upon the imagination of her own children for ages to come. But the spring of such an upheaval where is that to be found?

In answer to such questions we can only assure ourselves that when the world is ripe for some epochal idea – as the Indian World is surely ripe today – that idea pours “itself in from all sides upon the waiting

consciousness. The very stones speak it, and the timbers out of the wall cry out and answer them; some immense struggle for the common good precipitates itself; idea and struggle act and react, each throwing the other into greater distinctness, till the goal of both of them is finally achieved.

This is more true in these days of telegraphy and letter-writing, of a common language and cheap print. A process which in Asoka's India would have taken at least two hundred years, may now be accomplished in a single decade. And whenever a word of English goes, the national idea constitutes for itself the necessity of an apostolate."

One wonders if this was not an accurate forecast of the Great Awakening which came off in India under the aegis of Mahatma Gandhi only about a decade after Sister Nivedita wrote these words. And also the inevitable corollary:

"Woman, with her determinedly synthetic interests, will refuse long to be baulked of her right to consider things as a whole. The interest of the mother is ever with the future. Woman will readily understand that a single generation of accomplished defeat is sufficient to divorce whole race from its patrimony and she will determine and effectively determine, that the lot of her own sons shall be victory, and not surrender.

And if once the Oriental Woman seize the helm of the ship in this fashion, solving the problems of her whole country, whom is it suggested that she shall afterwards petition for the redress of her own grievances?"

The whole book is a complete picture of Indian society as Nivedita saw it and visualized it for the future.

An Indian Study of Love and Death is a collection of delightful pieces, both prose and poetry, on Indian ideas of love and death as the author found them. *Studies from an Eastern Home* is a record of nuances of Indian life in Indian families. Lectures and articles which complete the second volume of Sister Nivedita's works published on the occasion of her birth centenary, not only throw light on varied subjects but help re-orient the reader's perspective. These include the varied impact of India's spiritual message, the progress of Indian philosophical and social thought, the beauties of Islam and Islam in Asia. Nivedita's views on Islam stress the need for Islam in India to find its roots within the country. Her autobiographical sketch *How and Why I Adopted the Hindu Religion* is particularly interesting.

Sister Nivedita serves a delicious dish of essays and articles on Indian art and works of individual artists. Her essays on the outstanding creations of European, particularly Renaissance, art are a very helpful introduction

to their understanding. *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* are picked up from the rich and old store of stories which exemplifies the background of Hindu life. *Religion and Dharma* presents and number of essays on the manifestations and influence of religion. *Aggressive Hinduism* is a study in the need of the activation of religion with a view to remake Individual And national character.

Footfalls of Indian History begins with this remarkable poem:

“We hear them, Oh Mother!

Thy footfalls,

Soft, soft, through the ages

Touching earth here and there,

And the lotuses left on Thy footprints

Are cities historic,

Ancient scriptures and poems and temples,

Noble strivings, stern struggles for Right.

Where lead they, O, Mother!

Thy footfalls?

O grant us to drink of their meaning!

Grant us the vision that blindeth

The thought that for man is too high.

Where lead they, O Mother!

Thy footfalls?

Approach thou, O Mother, Deliverer!

Thy children, thy nurselings are we!
On our hearts be the place for thy stepping,
Thine own, Bhumya Devi, are we.
Where lead they, O Mother!
Thy footfalls?

Even the hard-core Marxist would rejoice over the explicit manner in which Sister Nivedita has delineated the effect of time and place on men's character. So she saw the role of the Prophet of Arabia as a great nation-maker who had welded together the tribes into a mighty nation. The book is a fascinating account of the social and religious movements through the ages and their imprint on history.

Civic Ideal and Indian Nationality commences with this "Daily Aspiration for the Nationalist":

"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 strength which spoke in the Vedas and Upanishads, in the making of religions and empires, in the learning of scholars, and the meditation of the saints, is born once more amongst us, and its name today is Nationality.

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

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

This certainly seems as legitimate for the Indian nationalist today as it was then. Sister Nivedita stresses the point that nationality cannot survive without a strong sense of civic duty among the people. The ramifications of this position are fully set out in the book.

Hints on National Education in India is a masterly discussion of the requirements of a truly national education. The Introduction to the book calls for a compulsory period of service for young, educated people in the cause of spread of primary education. The papers on education that Sister Nivedita presents in the book stress (i) the need for education being strictly oriented to the understanding of Indian life; (ii) describes the three elements of education as mental preparedness for learning, absorption of the common social concepts and full human development; (iii) emphasises the need for training of the emotion no less than that of the intellect (iv) point to the need for directing education to the duty of nation-making; (v) calls for inspiring education with national ideals based on national history and geography. Sister Nivedita proceeds to write on the illusion of the craze for foreign culture for its own sake. She includes in the book an essay on a subject on which

she was never tired of writing – namely, the right type of education for Indian women. Ancillary to this essay is “The Project of the Ramakrishna School for Girls.” “Suggestion for the Indian Vivekananda Societies” discusses the method and purpose of training of young men for social work. “Notes on Historical Research” gives useful pointers to students of history. “A Note on Co-operation” is emphatic in tone. “The Place of the Kindergarten in Indian Schools” is an exhaustive and delightful discourse on the education of very young children. Two essays on “Manual Training as a Part of General Education in India” complete the compendium on national education that the book really is.

Glimpses of Famine and Flood in East Bengal in 1906 opens with these beautiful lines:

“There is no region, even in India, which was intended to compare, at once in extent and in fertility, with the wide-stretching delta-lands of East Bengal. Placed before the extreme mouths of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, from the Calcutta on the west to Chittagong on the east, and Dacca and Mymensingh to the north, lies this vast triangle of country, measuring as the crow flies, something like two hundred miles or more every way. And it is painted, on the surface of Planet Earth, in nature’s most vivid pigments of green and blue. Green for the fields

and forests, the palms and the gardens and the grain; and blue, blue, blue, everywhere else, for the sky above and for the waters beneath. To those who know Holland, or even Venice, this land is full of subtle suggestions and reminiscences of distant beauty. For it, too, is a country snatched from the waters, though not by the hand of man. It, too, lies passive and half-expectant under the unbroken dome of heaven. In it, too, the white sail may suddenly come into vision at any moment, across the distant meadows. And it, too, bestows that irresistible calmness of benediction that comes to the infinitely small in the presence of the infinitely great."

The book is a down-to-earth narrative of the author's experiences in course of relief work in East Bengal. Many of her observations have a direct bearing on the problems East Bengal, now Bangladesh, has to face even today.

Lambs Among Wolves is a pungent criticism of the often perverse views of European missionaries regarding Hindu society.

Altogether the literary creations of Sister Nivedita present a panorama of Indian life, probing deep into the intricacies of Indian society and enabling the reader to live the whole gamut of existence as it has been built up by the climate, the conditions, the traditions and the problems of the land that is India.



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Lasertypeset at Ideal Publishing Solutions, New Delhi and
printed at Gopsons Papers Ltd., Noida