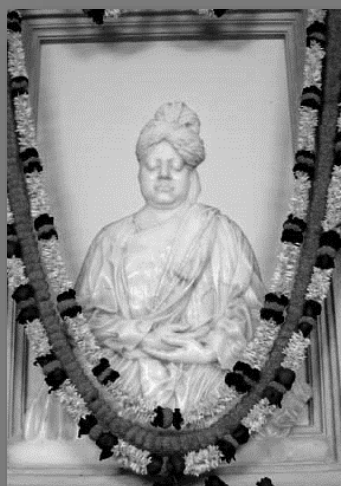




Art Institute of Chicago, ca 1893

C
H
I
C
A
G
O
C
A
L
L
I
N
G

A Spiritual & Cultural
Quarterly eZine of
Vivekananda Vedanta
Society of Chicago
No. 15, 2017



*Howe very faithful.
Nivedita.
Ramesh Chandra V.*

Table of Contents



	Page
EDITORIAL	3
MARGARET NOBLE: THE SPIRITUAL DAUGHTER OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA <i>SWAMI KRIPAMAYANANDA</i>	4
SISTER NIVEDITA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN WOMEN'S EDUCATION <i>SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA</i>	8
SISTER NIVEDITA: A PERSPECTIVE OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN <i>OCTAVIA HARRISTON</i>	14
TRIBUTE TO SISTER NIVEDITA <i>RUNA BHAUMIK</i>	21
ARISE, AWAKE AND STOP NOT	23
SISTER NIVEDITA AND HER TIMES <i>SWAMI ISHATMANANDA</i>	24
INTRODUCTION TO THE COVER PAGE	28
ADVERTISEMENTS	32

Editor: Swami Ishatmananda
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
14630 Lemont Road, Homer Glen. 60491

email: ezine@chicagovedanta.org
chicagovedanta.org

©Copyright:
Swami-in-Charge
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago



Ms. Margaret Elizabeth Noble, Sister Nivedita, is the embodiment of Vedic dictum, Tyage Naike Amrithatwa Manasu, Eternal bliss cannot be achieved without renunciation.

Sri Shankaracharya said that it is only by God's grace that three things can be achieved by a human. They are human birth (manusatwam), the desire for liberation (mumukshatwam), and finally the guidance of a godly person (Mahapurusha Samsraya).

Margaret Elizabeth Noble, the daughter of Samuel Richmond Noble and Mary Isabel Noble of Northern Ireland, got all three. She was a blessed soul.

The influence of her father helped her to develop truthfulness, religious zeal, love and service to the poor and downtrodden. And, by the grace of God, she received the blessings of the greatest spiritual soul—Swami Vivekananda.

Margaret became successful in her external life, but her church-regulated religious life could not give her peace. She was restless to know the truth, to know what God is, to know how to realize God! Her intense longing to know God (mumukshuta) brought her into the holy company of a Mahapurusha—Swami Vivekananda.

It was on a cold afternoon in November 1895 in London that Margaret met her guru, Swami Vivekananda, for the first time.

The Swami was explaining Vedanta philosophy, and his words charmed Margaret. She attended several other lectures and question-answer sessions of the Swamiji.

At last Margaret realized that this Indian Sannyasin would be able to lead her to the truth she had been searching for. Margaret accepted Swami Vivekananda as her Guru. And, Swamiji also became convinced of Margaret's truthfulness, determination and kindness.

Swami Vivekananda through his divine farsightedness saw that Margaret would be a perfect instrument in his mission of applied Vedanta, i.e., "Service to Man is Service to God."

Swamiji wrote to her: "Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman—a real lioness—to work for Indians, women especially....your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted."

It was not an ordinary call—it was the call for

self-sacrifice. Sacrifice of those who were known for those who were unknown. It was truly a heroic decision for an educated young lady of 30 years old.

Margaret Elizabeth Noble had great faith (shraddha) in the words of her guru, Swami Vivekananda, and equal faith (confidence) in her own capacity.

She left behind her motherland, family and friends and reached the land of her dreams, India, on 28th January 1898.

Two great incidents happened in her life:

First, meeting Sri Ma Sarada Devi and becoming her baby daughter (Khuki). Mother's personality, purity, simplicity and unfathomable spiritual knowledge sanctified the heart of Margaret.

Second, entering the life of all-renouncers. Swami Vivekananda gave Margaret 'Brahmacharya' and gave her the name 'Nivedita', the 'dedicated one' and blessed her to move like Buddha in the world of misery and affliction giving service and love.

Nivedita followed the instructions of her great guru without caring for her personal safety or comfort.

In the year 1899, just a year after her arrival in Calcutta, a great plague broke out. Swami Vivekananda, the propounder of Vedanta in Practice gave a call to serve the 'living gods', the plague-infected people of the city.

A famous personality, Dr. R. G. Kar, recorded: "During this calamity the compassionate figure of Sister Nivedita was seen in every slum of the Bagbazar locality. She helped others with money without giving a thought to her own condition. At one time her diet consisted of only milk and fruits. She then even gave up milk to meet the medical expenses of a patient. Having discussed with her the possibilities of hygienic nursing in the slums of the poor people I asked her to take precautions. When I went to visit the patient again in the afternoon I saw Sister Nivedita sitting with the child on her lap in the damp and weather beaten hut in that unhealthy locality. Day in and day out, night after night, she remained engaged in nursing the child in that hut, having abandoned her own house. When the hut was to be disinfected she took a small ladder and began white washing the walls herself. Her nursing never slackened even when death was a certainty. While nursing the sick child not a shade of bitterness marked the corner of her face, not a murmur of self-pity crept into the words she used."

Nivedita gave her all and became immortal.

MARGARET NOBLE: SPIRITUAL DAUGHTER OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

SWAMI KRIPAMAYANANDA

Head, Vedanta Society of Toronto

This article is based on the lecture delivered at the 150th Birth Anniversary on May 21, 2017

Today is the first day of the series of talks that will be delivered by visiting swamis every month at the Hindu Temple of greater Chicago in Lemont. The first talk is on “Margaret Elizabeth Noble: The Spiritual Daughter of Swami Vivekananda.” We know about the birth and childhood of Sister Nivedita—Margaret Elizabeth Noble. She was a brilliant student. She finished her education at the age of 17 and started teaching at that young age. After a few years she started her own educational institute. She was quite famous for her noble ideas about how to teach children, and she was by her own right a unique teacher and educationalist. She was a writer, an orator, and had earned quite a name in England.

In 1898 she heard that a monk from India was visiting England. He was meeting friends and devotees at the house of Lady Isabel Margesson, who was quite an erudite and honorable lady. When Nivedita went there, Swamiji was surrounded by about 15 people, and he was speaking on Vedanta. Nivedita was born in a religious family, but she was not happy with the teachings she got from organized religion. She was searching for more meaning in religion and spirituality. She felt that religion should be something that came from within not something imposed from outside. When she heard Swami Vivekananda’s message of Vedanta, which said that every heart was the seat of God and that there was an immense possibility for every human being to reach the ultimate reality called Brahman, she was inspired. And, Swami Vivekananda was so attractive, so scholarly and so simple that she was deeply impressed. During the talk Swamiji would intermittently repeat, “Shiva, Shiva” whenever there was a pause. He became immersed in the thought of God and became one with the talk. This

made a great impression on the brilliant mind of Sister Nivedita.

Sister Nivedita then connected with Swami Vivekananda and said, “I have found a Master.” When Swami Vivekananda talked about India, there was so much love that Sister Nivedita wrote, “When he said India there was pathos, there was the past, there was the future that India would become. All were there in the mere utterance of the word, ‘India’; the whole love for India was there in the utterance of that one word.” That was Swami Vivekananda, and in the language of Sister Nivedita, “Swami Vivekananda was India in flesh and blood.” When Josephine Macleod asked Swami Vivekananda how she could help, Swami Vivekananda said, “If you want to help me love India”.

Swami Vivekananda was full of India—its glory, its spirituality. He knew the importance of India to the world; how the whole of mankind would be benefitted through the great message India had to give to the world. For thousands of years the Indian mind had inquired deep into the truth of the Self. Perhaps, no other religion had searched for the ultimate truth as intensely as India. So, the growth of India, the freedom of India, the glory of India was not only for India but for the good of the whole world. That was what Swami Vivekananda believed, and he impressed Sister Nivedita so deeply that she said to him, “I want to come to India.” Swami Vivekananda presented the condition of India and the difficulties of a white-skinned European lady going to serve there. Swami Vivekananda didn’t want someone coming from outside and patronizing India and telling the Indians that you have to listen to me and I will make you good. No, Swami Vivekananda could never tolerate that type of condescending help.

He wanted someone who was willing to serve India out of deep love for India.

This is what he wrote to Sister Nivedita. She replied, “Yes, I am going to India.” She accepted all those challenges, and she did go to India, so much was her love for her Guru—Swami Vivekananda. She saw her Guru’s love for India and that love for India was imparted into her heart.

Sister Nivedita reached Calcutta on January 20, 1898, about one year after Swami Vivekananda returned from America. He arrived in January 1897, and Sister Nivedita arrived in 1898. After 3 weeks she went to the holy shrine of Dakshineswar, the sadhana pitha where Sri Ramakrishna, the Guru of her Guru, had performed his spiritual practices. He had realized God not only from the standpoint of Hinduism but from practicing all religions. He practiced Christianity, He practiced Islam, He practiced all the branches of Hinduism. Sister Nivedita remarked, “I had a great day today.”

On March 11, 1898, Swami Vivekananda arranged a public reception for Sister Nivedita at the Star Theater, and it was a great success. Sister Nivedita needed to be accepted into Indian society, and Swami Vivekananda was worried how Holy Mother, the spouse and divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, would accept her. Swamiji arranged a meeting between Sister Nivedita and Holy Mother. Sri Sarada Devi represented traditional India. Sri Sarada Devi had been born in a village and had no education, but she was a spiritual personality and was so modern in outlook that she accepted Sister Nivedita as her own daughter. She gave her the name “Khoki”, a Bengali name meaning “Baby”. Sister Nivedita always called herself “baby” whenever she wrote to Holy Mother.

On March 25, 1898 Swami Vivekananda gave Sister Nivedita initiation into brahmacharya. She became a brahmacharini. She took a vow of continence and self-control and service to India. That was what Swami Vivekananda wished, and he gave her the name “Nivedita”. So, Margaret Elizabeth Noble became Nivedita on 25th March 1898. First, she worshipped Shiva, then Swamiji blessed her and said, “go thou and follow him who was born and gave his life 500 times before he attained the vision of the

Buddha.” So, Swami Vivekananda inspired Sister Nivedita to become like Buddha, dedicating her life for the service of the whole humanity.

The main reason for Swami Vivekananda’s invitation to Sister Nivedita was for the education of women, but it was very difficult to find girls. Swami Vivekananda arranged a meeting at Balaram Mandir in the house of Balaram Bose and asked a few people who were known to him to send their daughters to Sister Nivedita’s school. However, no one was willing because of the many superstitions there were about the education of women. But, if women were not educated, how would society grow? Swami Vivekananda was very worried and, really, it was a nightmare for him. India had to rise, and he had the vision that India would become such a great nation that it would even eclipse its past glory. We have a glimpse of India rising now as Swami Vivekananda predicted, but it is rising slowly. But, then, no one was giving. Swami Vivekananda had to speak, and still nobody gave. He said, “Stand up and say who is sending their daughters.” Nobody stood! Then he pointed to his classmate, Haramohan, and said, “Tomorrow you are going to send your daughters to the school established by Nivedita.” Haramohan agreed, and Nivedita was very happy.

Now, the school formed by Nivedita at 16 Bosepara Lane in North Calcutta is a famous school in Kolkata. It is called “Sister Nivedita Girls School”. It gives not only the English education, but also the education to build character. On November 13, 1898, the school was inaugurated by Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. The picture of Holy Mother that is worshiped in the temples of the Ramakrishna Order or by devotees was taken in that house of Sister Nivedita.

In March 1898, Swami Vivekananda said, “My mission, my aim is not preaching Vedanta, my aim is not preaching Sri Ramakrishna, my main aim is to bring manhood to my people.” He wanted Indians to become active and said, “Let the Rajoguna flow in the veins and arteries of India; let there be activity.

How glorious India once was. Without work, without passion, without activity, how is it going to rise?

In the name of Sattva Guna we have all become Tamoguna; lazy, inactive.” So, he wanted India to rise by any means. He said, “My message is to rouse the manhood, the manliness, the purushartha that should flow into the whole of the country.” That was his aim.

Rabindranath Tagore came to know about Sister Nivedita within a few weeks after she landed, and he said “please teach my girls.” That shows that Sister Nivedita was already known in the elite circles of Kolkata.

In 1899 when the plague broke out, Swamiji entrusted Sister Nivedita with the relief and rehabilitation of the people. Along with Swamiji’s own disciple, Swami Sadananda, Sister Nivedita worked tremendously hard for the people who were suffering from the plague without caring for her own health. When there was a lack of funds, Swami Vivekananda said, “Go on working! If necessary we will sell the very monastery for the service of the people. If need be we will sell Belur Math for the service of the people.” That great heart of Swami Vivekananda was equally matched by Sister Nivedita.

Sister Nivedita had a very strong personality. She was courageous and fearless, and she argued with Swami Vivekananda, just as Swami Vivekananda, himself, used to argue with Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji wouldn’t accept things just because Sri Ramakrishna said them. He said, “I will not accept unless I believe”, and Sri Ramakrishna was very happy. Sister Nivedita was like that.

Swami Vivekananda had to guide her as to what would be her role in Indian society and how she could rouse the Indian nation to work and become active. Swami Vivekananda dreamt of Indian independence and freedom, and, by his inspiration, Sister Nivedita jumped into politics and started inspiring youth to become freedom fighters for the freedom of India. Swami Vivekananda had told her, “Be thou to India’s future son the mistress, servant, friend in one.” That much faith he had in Sister Nivedita!

Swami Vivekananda considered Sister Nivedita a spiritual daughter. Let me tell you one story. Once Sister Nivedita came to Swami Vivekananda and Swamiji offered her something to eat. While she was

going to wash her hand, Swami Vivekananda himself poured water on her hand. Sister Nivedita said, “Why are you doing that? I should do that for you. You are my Guru and I am your disciple.” Swami Vivekananda said, “Didn’t Jesus do the same thing for his disciples? Didn’t he wash their feet?” Sister Nivedita said, “But that was at the last moment of his life.” Swami Vivekananda didn’t utter a word. He smiled, then after a few days he attained Mahasamadhi on the 4th of July in 1902.

When Swami Vivekananda passed away, it was a devastation for Sister Nivedita for whom he was everything. On July 5th she came to pay her homage to Swami Vivekananda and had a great wish to have some memento to remember Swami Vivekananda—maybe a piece of the cloth that was on the body of Swami Vivekananda, but she could not say anything to anyone. Later the body was placed for cremation, and the wind blew a piece of that ochre robe onto the lap of Sister Nivedita. So it was divinely ordained. So, that was the relationship between Sister Nivedita and Swami Vivekananda.

Swami was not even 40 when he passed away. Sister Nivedita was only 44 when she passed away, but how much she loved India; she became a part of India in a way that no other foreigner had. So many have come and served India, but nobody has given so much for India; nobody has done so much. Others have done something or the other, but Sister Nivedita’s contribution as an integral part of her love for India is something unique and unequalled.

Swami Vivekananda had said to Nivedita, “Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man, but a woman—a real lioness—to work for Indians, women especially. India cannot yet produce great women: she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic blood, make you just the woman wanted.” Thus was Swami Vivekananda’s love for country transmitted to Sister Nivedita, who totally absorbed that love and dedicated her life to it. In her epitaph where she is buried in Darjeeling, it is written “Here lies the mortal remains of Sister Nivedita who gave her everything for India.”

The 1st Program of the half-year-long Celebration to observe the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita was held on May 21, 2017: A Report



Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago (VVSC) in collaboration with the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago (HTGC), Lemont organized a special program to commemorate 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita on Sunday, May 21, 2017.

The program was held in Auditorium of the Hindu Temple, Lemont.

The function began with Ganesh Vandana and devotional songs. Dr. Satish Amruthur welcomed the congregation.

Before the meeting commenced Swamis and the dignitaries lighted lamps while the priests of HTGC chanted Shanti Mantras.

Swami Ishatmananda in his introduction to Half-year long celebrations informed VVSC are going to hold a special program once a month from May through October, 2017 at HTGC. He

announced that the celebrations will be concluded with a "gala" event in the month of October, 2017.

Mrs. Neeta Bhushan, Consulate General of India, Chicago talked about the influence of Ramakrishna Mission on her life. She mentioned about the selfless and remarkable contributions of Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita to India.

Swami Kripamayananda gave a talk on the life and contributions of Sister Nivedita under the title "Margaret Elizabeth Noble: The Spiritual Daughter of Swami Vivekananda."

The program was conducted by Mr. Amrish Mahajan, the Chair of the celebration committee. After the speeches, as part of cultural program, Nrithyanjali School of Dance rendered classical dance of India.

About 300 people participated in the function.

SISTER NIVEDITA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN WOMEN'S EDUCATION

SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

Head, Vedanta Society of Holland

This article is based on the lecture delivered at the 150th Birth Anniversary on August 27, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Noble lived for about 43 years only. Born in 1867, she passed on in 1911. But in those 44 years, she lived a hundred years, if not more. What a life it was! Just as it was with the glorious life of her guru, Sister Nivedita's life too was one of complete and total dedication to humanity. Every moment of her life was lived for others. While her guru did not see 40 years, she within those 43 years of her life did numerous impossible-to-do things. One of them was her struggle towards the education of Indian women.

Born in an Irish family, and intensely spiritual since childhood, Margaret met Swamiji as a young woman of 28 in 1895, heard him, and was transformed. This transformation led her to follow in Swami Vivekananda's footsteps and to dedicate herself to Vedanta and God. Her guru, Swamiji, saw tremendous potential in her. He guided Margaret at every step and had her attain the highest. Having tasted the bliss of God, Margaret wanted to dedicate herself to the service of India—the land of Vedanta and her guru. Swamiji knew her past, future, everything. He knew her capabilities and potentialities. He understood that Margaret would be a great help to India, especially Indian women. He knew fully well that India desperately needed a woman like Margaret Noble. Yet, Swamiji would not make false promises to bring her to India. So he wrote a letter to Margaret, which can be called a masterpiece. Absolutely frank, sincere and truthful, this brief letter says everything that Margaret must know if she was to live and serve in India. Further, it also shows the magnanimous heart of Swami Vivekananda.

This letter was written on 29th July 1897.

"My dear Miss Noble,

A letter from Sturdy reached me yesterday, informing me that you are determined to come to

India and see things with your own eyes. Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man, but a woman—a real lioness—to work for the Indians, women specially. India cannot yet produce great women; she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.

Yet the difficulties are many. You cannot form any idea of the misery, the superstition, and the slavery that are here. You will be in the midst of a mass of half-naked men and women with quaint ideas of caste and isolation, shunning the white skin through fear or hatred and hated by them intensely. On the other hand, you will be looked upon by the white as a crank, and every one of your movements will be watched with suspicion. Then the climate is fearfully hot; our winter in most places being like your summer, and in the South it is always blazing. Not one European comfort is to be had in places out of the cities. If in spite of all this, you dare venture into the work, you are welcome, a hundred times welcome. As for me, I am nobody here as elsewhere, but what little influence I have shall be devoted to your service.

You must think well before you plunge in; and after work, if you fail in this or get disgusted, on my part I promise you, I will stand by you unto death whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. "The tusks of the elephant come out, but never go back.", so are the words of a man never retracted.

Yours etc

Swami Vivekananda"

However, Margaret Noble landed in India.

NECESSITY OF NIVEDITA FOR INDIA

Having been slaves to the Muslims and the British for centuries, the common masses of India had become wary of their culture and civilization. Leading selfless lives for God? Oh no. Let us first fill our stomachs. Leading god-centered lives? Oh no. Let us first of all have bread to fill our stomachs. Such was the desperate situation.

When Sister Nivedita landed in India in 1897, the situation was not at all new to her—her guru's description of the situation had readied her mind. So she plunged into action immediately. Soon, Swami Vivekananda dedicated her to the world by ordaining her as a brahmacharini, and giving her the great name Nivedita. There was no looking back from then on. No such a thing as years of preparation as it is usual in ordinary cases, no such a thing as years dedicated to study of the situation as it is usual in ordinary cases. She jumped head on into the ocean called India with the only intention of service. India needed Nivedita, and here was Nivedita, giving herself completely from the day one. Soon, Sister Nivedita realized that Swami Vivekananda was absolutely true. She was needed for India for a special purpose. And that purpose was awakening Indian women.

Sister Nivedita was a special personality. Right from the beginning, she was a personification of the future woman of the world. Educated, learned, traditional, modern, methodical, scientific and spiritual—these were some of the qualifications which would suit perfectly to Nivedita's personality. It is human nature, especially the nature of subdued people, to follow a leader. Nivedita made an excellent role model for the Indian woman. The Indian woman of those days was unlettered, fettered and helpless. She needed to express herself but had no means of doing it. And here was this lioness, Nivedita, who showed the way.

Nivedita was extremely sharp. She was not emotionally blind and was not led by her emotions to do something that she was doing. She studied humanity. She saw what India stood for. There are

five important points which distinguish the West in general and India of those days. Sister Nivedita studied these five points, and understood what exactly she had to do.

1. Physical Characteristics: Sister Nivedita writes that she had the idea, like countless Westerners of those days, that pure air and hygienic surroundings meant saintliness. She imagined that to be organized physically, and being elegant meant sainthood. Then she came in touch with the Indian thought. She saw that the Indian ideal was indifference to the world—something different from what she had thought. That did not mean that the Vedantic ideal was to be dirty. The Vedanta ideal, as Nivedita saw, was adoration. That is, while adoration of God made the surroundings beautiful, nature itself was adored to make everything sanctified. Worship creates an ambience, says Nivedita, which is purer than the so-called elegance that the then Western mindset appreciated. The apparent uncleanliness was only due to poverty and not due to ignorance, she realized. The Indian ideal of nature was based on spirituality.

The second physical characteristic that Nivedita saw was poverty and richness. To be and to have...which one was better? The West of those days preferred to have, while the Indian ideal of those days was to be. Poverty was preferred over richness. A man in rags was respected because of his learning than a man for how much he possessed. This was important for Nivedita.

2. Character and Expression: Sister Nivedita thought that oratory, for instance, meant just oratory and there was no need of a power behind it. What a man spoke was important and not what he was. When she heard Swami Vivekananda say that character precedes expression, she was initially surprised. Her concept had to change. Swami Vivekananda said, "The world is in need of those whose life is one of burning love and selfless. That love will make every word tell like a thunderbolt. Awake, awake, great souls!"

The world is burning in misery. Can you sleep?" This was an astonishing fact of the East which Nivedita took a little while to understand and appreciate. Then she realized. A person is a person not because of what he says or howls loudly, but because of what he is. The depth of an individual is far more important than superficial appearance. This revolutionized her thinking.

3. Other-centered Life: One of the most sublime and noble sentiments that Nivedita observed in her master's life and thought was his living for others. Swami Vivekananda never took a single breath for himself. What was more, he was selfless to the extent of being ready to suffer oneself so as to bring happiness into another's heart. This was the third difference which Nivedita noticed between the ancient Indian ideal and the Western. The Western ideal was to earn for one's own sake. Her Master would declare: "Of course I would commit a crime and go to hell forever, if by that I could really help a human being." This was such a noble sentiment for Nivedita. It could be seen in only the sublime thinking as of eternal India. She saw how, for instance, Sri Ramanuja was ready to go to hell if he could be of some help to the suffering. So Ramanuja had declared the mantra, though prohibited by his guru as a test, to the people from the rooftop. Nivedita also remembered the way the Buddha was ready to give his life to save that of a bird. She even appreciated Shishupala's eagerness to die in the hands of the Supreme Lord. In this, she saw the same sentiment of sacrificing the lower self for the Self or Atman. Here, she saw the dedication to Truth.

4. Spirituality as the goal of life: Once, Sister Nivedita heard her Master, Swami Vivekananda, say this during the course of his talk: "What the world wants today is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the street yonder and say that they possess nothing but God. Who will go?" Nivedita soon saw that these were not merely emotional statements. This was because, she saw

Swamiji stop his speech, stand up and look pleadingly towards his audience, as if to see if someone was ready to take up the task. Perhaps he saw fear in the audience's mind. So Swami Vivekananda had continued: "Why should one fear? If this is true, what else could matter? If this is not true, what does our lives matter?" If spirituality is true, what else is worth living? If spirituality is not true, what is life worth living for? Sister Nivedita had seen a new light that evening. Yes, spirituality was the only life worth living. Everything else—the modern rush for money and fame and enjoyment—was just insignificant.

A new world had opened for Nivedita in these words. She saw that for India, spirituality was central point, the pivot, the way and the goal. The world was just a launchpad or the ground for realizing this truth. When she compared this to the way the West of those days understood even spirituality, as if it was one of the occupations like another, her conviction and dedication for India and her guru took a solid shape.

If there was a life worth to live for, it was the life of Vedanta—seeking the Truth, living for the Truth, and working for the others. To live self-centered lives was not worth the life. This became Sister Nivedita's conviction.

Life in the Spirit, selflessness, seeking God, truthfulness and so on were the ideals of ancient India. Nivedita understood that with these becoming the basics of education, once again India could be great and glorious. To achieve this, something important had to be done. It was important to impart education to women. Woman, the heart of the home, the mother, should be educated along these lines. Thus came up the idea of the Nivedita School.

When speaking about the contributions of Sister Nivedita to the education of Indian woman, we may feel one thing. Apart from one little school in Calcutta, what, after all, has she done?

Quantity-wise, may be true. But that one little school, a symbolic opening of the education for women based on the Vedanta ideals, is set to change the entire outlook towards true learning.

This takes us to Macaulayism .

5. Macaulayism and Niveditism :

It was 1835. One year before the avatar was born. The nation hit an all time low with the declaration by the British Government of introducing the Macaulay system of education. Who was this Macaulay? Born in 1800 as Thomas Babington Macaulay, this man was a historian. He went to India to work as one of the officers in the supreme court in 1834. Within a year, Macaulay was condemning and criticizing the Sanskrit language, calling the Sanskrit scriptures as useless children's rhymes no better than school-kid poems. He declared before the highest authorities of the British Government: "It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England."

In this way, within a year of his arrival in India, Macaulay had announced that the great histories of India, Ramayana and Mahabharata, let alone other scriptures as vast as the ocean, were "paltry abridgements used in preparatory schools in England". He had a plan for educating Indians. His plan for the education of the Indian youth was instantly accepted.

What was the plan of that education proposed by Macaulay? Training the young in English to be clerks; to earn money working as slaves!

Whatever his faults, Macaulay did one good thing. He abolished Persian as the official language. English became the official language. But the wicked thing was, Sanskrit was removed.

This situation may have continued till 1897.

Sister Nivedita came to the scene. She understood India in a different way than that of Macaulay. For her, whatever was worthless for Macaulay was extremely important, sacred and holy. For her, Indian history was replete with great stories of self-sacrifice and heroism. The history of India was for her the breath of Reality, the voice of the Eternal. For her, the ideal of India was so vast, so great, that the Western ideals appeared childish and silly. For her, Sanskrit was such a noble language of such antiquity that she wished she knew even a little of that language.

This was the world of difference between Macaulaysim and Niveditism. When we see this in perspective now, we can realize how important and how vital Nivedita was for India at that time. Swami Vivekananda had hit the Western system of those days with their own weapon--Nivedita. A so-called "Western" woman herself had re-initiated a system which had been eternally liberating souls from bondage and misery. She initiated a school for the betterment of the Indian woman, basing all her thoughts on the ancient Indian system. While an European had tried to destroy Indian roots by introducing self-centered alien educational system, another European, this time a woman, had removed that and had reinstated the ancient Indian system of education! And the inspiration behind all this was the Prophet, Swami Vivekananda, who had seen both the East and the West in all their entirety.

What is the end of the story?

None other than the venerable Holy Mother, the soul of the present and future universe, came and opened Nivedita School. This is such a tremendous move and an important step. Its effects have begun to unfold slowly and steadily. What is the importance of Holy Mother's inaugurating the school?

Women should not study: This was the law of the India since British occupied her. And this law was put into rigorous practice not only in remote villages of India but also in the capital city of India—Calcutta!

The very heart of India, of Brahmos and educated Bengalis, was averse to women getting education! Women were hidden in dark corners, left to lead ignorant lives.

However, this changed.

Even though the Calcutta elite was not interested in educating its women, an apparently village-born mother, Mother Sarada Devi, boldly opened the school. When Sister Nivedita spoke at a meeting about the urgent need to educate Indian women along Indian lines and requested people to send their children to the school, nobody was ready. Swami Vivekananda suddenly appeared at the meeting. He tried to push one or two of Ramakrishna's disciples to agree to send their daughters to Nivedita's school. But no one wanted their daughters to be educated. At last Swamiji compelled one gentleman to accept. Such was the situation. Knowing fully well how the orthodox would react to a foreigner opening a school for girls in Calcutta, Holy Mother had boldly opened the school. While the British hadn't given permission for women of their own country to vote till the late 1920s, while women's suffrage was still a far cry, India woke up to educate her women,

thanks to Sister Nivedita. And the instrument behind this move was Sister Nivedita. But this was not easy task to accomplish for an ordinary mortal. Thus, the Divine Mother Herself intervened. The embodiment of knowledge, Mother Sarada, Herself blessed the school, thereby the entire humanity.

Now we can understand the importance of Sister Nivedita's contribution to Indian women's education. The opening of a school in Calcutta was symbolic. It was a symbolic opening of the doors to ancient, eternal, divine knowledge for women, and through them, to future generations. For if the mother is educated, the child is educated. If the mother is educated in a proper way, her children also shall be educated along proper lines.

Today, when we celebrate the 150th year of Sister Nivedita's birth, the school she started is still vibrant and flourishing. But that is just a little part of the whole story. The bold girls who got training in Nivedita's school became symbols for other girls to make bold to learn, and others, and then others, and today, we have millions of girls getting education. Slowly and gradually the education will get rooted in the past of India, and Swamiji's dream of a spiritual universe shall come into being.

Photo taken
sometime around
June, 1899 at
8, Bosepara Lane,
Baghbazar, then
residence of Ma
Sarada Devi and
Sister Nivedita.

<http://vivekananda.org/archivedphotosliideshow.asp?id=93>



From left to right:
Swamis
Trigunatitananda,
Shivananda,
Vivekananda,
Turiyananda,
Brahmananda,
And Swami
Sadananda
(seated below)

The 2nd Program of the half-year-long Celebration to observe the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita was held on June 25, 2017 evening



The program was organized by the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago in collaboration with the Vedanta Society of Chicago. Octavia Harriston spoke on Sister Nivedita from an African-American perspective. Swami Sumanasananda described Margaret Noble as the "Dedicated One". University students concluded the program with a Bhangra dance.



SISTER NIVEDITA: A PERSPECTIVE OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN

OCTAVIA HARRISTON

Devotee, Vedanta Society of Chicago

This article is based on the lecture delivered at the 150th Birth Anniversary on June 30, 2017

For the celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita Swami Ishatmananda requested me to give a talk; he assigned a topic, "Sister Nivedita: A Perspective of an African-American Woman". Interesting, I thought.

The request might have been for a perspective of an American woman, a devotee for over fifty years in the Chicago Vivekananda Vedanta Society. But no, it was specifically for An African-American woman's perspective

This perspective, then will be Sister Nivedita, her life viewed through lenses grounded in the African-American experience.

I did not know much about Sister Nivedita, only that she was one of several European women, close devotees of Swami Vivekananda, who followed him to India and started a school for girls

So as this view is through my African - American lenses it might be good to give a brief description of the cultural system that formed the values, sentiments and biases that tinge these lenses

There is little true and accurate information available in history books about my people - with the exception of course, of one young, charismatic, leader of the free world, Barack Obama who emerged from this much maligned culture. Most mass media project only the negative portrayal that for a portion of my people is factual and can be directly attributed to negative racial experiences we have endured and continue to endure. Seldom is there mention of the many accomplished African - American scholars, scientists, writers, artists and others whose contributions helped make America great.

I am descended from African people stolen from their homeland, and enslaved in a brutal racist

system purposely designed to de-humanize us. My ancestors were stolen, kidnapped, and admittedly in some instances, sold by our own when captured in inter - tribal conflicts. Those apprehended, despite many portrayals, were not spear-wielding bone -thru-the-nose savages, living in trees. Some were kings, warriors, priests. Let us remember, Egypt is not isolated. Egypt is Africa. A thriving culture existed there long before the arrival of Grecian invaders. Many historians and anthropologists agree that the much vaunted culture of Egypt emerged from sub-sahara Africa. My ancestors were taken mostly from the west coast of Africa and transported across the ocean, chained together in the holds of ships, lying in their own bodily waste. Those who did not survive the horrendous conditions were, without ceremony, tossed overboard, even though some were, not yet dead but were deemed useless for the auction block where they were destined to be sold like cattle.

The world has long had slavery but the American slavery experience has no parallel in history. I don't know of any other slavery tradition so brutal and de-humanizing. and yes, genocidal. Families were torn apart, mothers, fathers, and children sold away destroying any chance of a cohesive family unit. Our African culture was systematically erased then we were portrayed to the world as brutes, savages, declared to be only three-fifths human. They portrayed our men as indolent and violent. Our women were often forced into concubinage and bore the children of their owners. They were then portrayed as promiscuous, without morals. This forced concubine of African women when the slave holder's wives were present in the house-hold resulted in a particularly strained relationship between African American women and the

European house wife who could not understand her husband's preference for the African woman.

The house wife often saw the offspring resulting from union of her husband with his African servant working in servitude in her own kitchen and garden.

Among these brutal oppressors were some compassionate individuals without whose help many of us could not have survived. We learned to distinguish, on careful observation the difference between the brutal and compassionate. An attitude of "guilty till proven innocent" made inter-racial relationships tenuous, ambiguous. Although the American tradition of slavery goes back a few hundred years its racist components still tear at the fabric of American society today.

Perhaps this is why, as a survivor of this system, though deeply enamored of the Upanishads, the Vedas and the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother. I was never interested in the life of Sister Nivedita although I was aware of her, and many other prominent European women disciples of Swami Vivekananda. I saw them as the idle rich who could entertain in their drawing rooms and travel the continent at their leisure.

I knew little of her life. Swami Ishatmananda suggested some publications for me to read and I found several others on my own. As I began looking into her life, I became absorbed and captivated, as I remain, in the life experiences, the spiritual journey of this remarkable, woman. I learned to admire her.

Who was Margaret Noble? Why was she so venerated in India? Was it just her close association with Swami Vivekananda or did she stand as well on her own merit?

Of the several biographies I read; one by a compassionate devotee, another by an often unkind critic, the one that captivated me most was by Marie Louise Burke. Her book, "Swami Vivekananda- His Second Visit to the West-New Discoveries" presented details of Margaret Noble, Sister Nivedita's life both in the West and in India. This was a more personal, up-close view. Also, this portrayal showed the closer relationship with

Swami Vivekananda, how he fashioned her for the work in India for which she is so highly regarded.

During all my reading I kept in mind the advice of a wise old professor who said, "Each person who writes a book, should give it a subtitle, Or How to Think Like I Think"

So, I continued my reading, always mindful to distinguish between factual events and opinion or interpretation of events by the biographers - the view through their cultural lenses.

Through my own lens I consciously or unconsciously looked for instances of paternalism or European superiority in her behavior. She was said to be proud of her heritage. What values had she absorbed as a proud Irish/Scottish woman. Was she free of learned biases, prejudices?

Dr. Morris Massey a sociologist developed a theory he called Value Programming. According to Dr. Massey, you are what you are because of where you were when. According to his theory, by the time a child is ten-years old his/her attitudes, behavior and values are set for life based on events prominent in his environment during his formative years.

The child internalizes messages, both spoken and subtle, from authority figures like parents, teachers, the media and society that influence the way he relates to the world. All through life his behavior and attitudes are determined by these messages that formed the lenses through which he views the world, himself and others. He is set for life unless he experiences what Dr. Massey called, a SEE, a Significant Emotional Event that causes him/her to look inward, examine and attempt to discard undesirable, negative character traits. And I say, attempt to discard. They don't dissipate simply because they are recognized and acknowledged. They often remain latent and will resurface. The remedy is given for this inadvertent resurfacing in Jnana Yoga practice: Neti, Neti, not this, not this.

The following incident may be an example of such a re-surfacing in Sister Nivedita. I say may be because when this occurred she had undergone intense training under swami Vivekananda which I go into later.

For practically all her time in India, the struggle for independence from British rule was going on. I don't know the context in which she offered this advice. I assume she intended to be helpful. She advised Indian independence fighters to, rather than continue agitating for freedom they should instead send some of their more accomplished people abroad to Europe to demonstrate to the British that they are a people worthy of ruling themselves.

I admit, I probably over reacted to the idea that Indians should prove to the British that they were "worthy"

Worthy? Who could be more worthy. She was speaking of the people from the soil of India, the incubator of spirituality, The source of the Upanishads, the Vedas and its multitude of realized souls, including among others, Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother. Worthy? and to prove worthiness to whom?

So, why did Swami Vivekananda choose Margaret Noble to assist with his mission for India? There were other accomplished, capable, strong willed women among his devotees. Why Margaret? One biographer stated that she did, in fact lobby for the position. Did her expression of an interest constitute lobbying? I don't think Swami Vivekananda could have been persuaded by any lobbying effort.

He cited many characteristics that made her a clear choice. On Several occasions he mentioned her Celtic background as uppermost among the other favorable qualities she possessed.

What of her Celtic background? Within the Celtic culture there was a highly exalted class of people, the Druids. They were mostly priests, valued for their wisdom they were also fierce warriors. There was a similar group in African culture called Griots. Both these class of people, the Griots of Africa and the Celtic Druids were custodians, preservers of the culture. Each of these cultures had no written language so knowledge traditions and values were transmitted orally by story-telling. Those charged with this responsibility were trained - interestingly, in both instances- for a period of twenty years. This skill-

knowledge was then passed on to one offspring in the family to be carried forward.

Druid, women were often as strong as, or stronger than, the men both physically and intellectually. This Celtic/Druid culture, prevalent in many parts of Europe, especially in Ireland and Scotland, the land of Margaret Noble's ancestry, was virtually destroyed by the Roman conquerors. As there was no written language we only hear of it today in association with Wicca with perhaps many undeserved negative connotations.

I believe that Swami Vivekananda knew of and recognized these Celtic/Druid traits in Margaret Noble; determination, courage, unswerving dedication to an ideal. Perhaps this is what made her stand out among the other women devotees. He said a woman was needed to train the women of India. Not just any woman, but a woman who embodied the characteristics apparent in the young Margaret noble.

It would have been interesting to know more about her family relations. I did not find a lot of information, just that her father was a clergyman and she had a sister and a brother. This was the mid-late 1800's, the Victorian era. A woman's place was in the home, her virtue to be guarded by valiant men. There might have been rare exceptions but certainly a woman would have been strongly discouraged to run off to India with a foreigner. I don't imagine there were many brown-skinned turbaned Swamis wearing strange garb, seen around London in those days.

Margaret was already independent. She had established a school in London practicing an innovative futuristic, for that period, method of teaching.

I assume she told her family and close friends about her plans to go to India. Given the spirit of the times would they have expressed concern for her safety, her future, and her reputation - a young woman going alone to a foreign land to live among foreigners? Surely they did not view these brown-skinned British subjects as Margaret's equals. Of course, It is possible they did not object. But assuming they did.

Everything I have learned about Margaret's character indicates that her iron will and determination could have, and obviously did, overcome any objections.

Margaret had known the swami for some months now. She had sat at his feet in many London drawing rooms and lecture halls absorbing his lofty ideas and concepts on spirituality and his dream for India. In today's jargon, she was hooked. By this time she was referring to him as Master. She, the devoted disciple.

She was thirty years old when she sailed to India, to join Swami Vivekananda and fulfill what she now saw as her destiny; to help in uplifting the masses of Indian people. Several of the other women in her circle also went to India. They were devotees following their guru. Margaret went, of course, as a devotee but also she went to work.

Once she arrived Swami started her training. I imagine it was – and I loosely make the comparison- not unlike disciplining for the reins, a high spirited young pony in whom exists tremendous potential to become a champion – in this case a champion for the cause of his beloved India. Most of her training took place in Northern India, around Kashmir. He first bestowed on her the vows of Brahmacharya and gave her the name Nivedita.

According to Marie Louise Burke, the training was intense, they clashed. Idealistic and eager to serve India though she was, she was still fervently opinionated and unyielding, her ideas cemented together by prejudices so inbred as to be unknown to herself. Patiently, though not always gently, for the time was short, Swami unearthed, unmasked, demolished all that stood in the path of her potential greatness and usefulness.

When upon reading Swami Vivekananda's writings today we can still fill the power in his words, I can only imagine face-to-face with him, at his feet, absorbing his thoughts, his ideas, feeling the sheer force of his personality. Was this training period, the instructions given, possibly Margaret Noble's SEE- Significant Emotional Event to change and shape her for the rest of her life?

Training completed she went to Calcutta to begin her work, starting the girls school. A gifted teacher, she used an educational philosophy developed by a German educator, Friedrich Froebel. His approach was based on four basic components: free self-activity, creativity, social participation and motor expression. While steeped in Froebel's methodology, Nivedita was always careful to further and preserve in her students appreciation for their Indian cultural traditions and values. She did not want to create western thinking Indian women.

Although Swami Vivekananda had warned her of obstacles she could expect in her work, she was not prepared for the reality. She was not fully accepted by many Indian families. Many of the village families were reluctant to allow their girls to attend a school, especially one run by a foreign woman. Her fellow British citizens in India looked down on her for mingling so freely with British subjects. She must have felt isolated. Plus funding for the school was an ever-present problem.

Imagine her; a young woman, in a foreign land far away from all that was familiar to her, family, home, traditions, adjusting to hot humid weather and food unlike the usual bland European diet she was accustomed to. She persevered, adjusted to her new reality, made new friends and charged ahead. She refused to give in or give up.

Margaret Noble belonged to a privileged class in Europe that she turned her back on when she sailed for India. Though, in India she still moved among a privileged Indian class of artists, literary figures, scientist she was equally at home with the downcast, poverty stricken villagers. Always eager to serve, she made no distinctions.

Margaret Noble, now Sister Nivedita was a member of the Ramakrishna Mission and in accordance with their policies avoided political activities. There must have been times when she felt she had a foot in both worlds. Though committed to her master, Swami Vivekananda's, spiritual visions for India she was no doubt still intrigued by the secular struggles for Indian independence. Many freedom fighters were in her circle of friends.

She once wrote to an American friend, "I am a political person by nature. I cannot imagine a world without politics."

Her intense training under Swami Vivekananda had not completely eradicated this aspect of her personality (possibly he did not intend to). This was born out when later she resigned from the Ramakrishna Mission to become immersed in the socio-political aspects of Indian life.

Meanwhile though, she forged ahead developing the school, she trained others to assist in her work. She was active in the school and family life of the girls. She spent much time in the company of Holy Mother who regarded her as a daughter and was also frequently in the company of the direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna.

A prolific writer and ardent lecturer she travelled throughout India and often returned to the west, all to raise funds for the school.

She accompanied Swami Vivekananda on his second trip to the west. When he embarked upon this trip Swami's health was deteriorating and he was becoming more distant and withdrawn.

It was on this second trip that while in Paris, Nivedita met Patrick Geddes. A google search describes Patrick Geddes as a Scottish biologist, sociologist, geographer, philanthropist and pioneering town planner, known for his innovative thinking in the fields of urban planning. He was a true renaissance man, a man of varied interests and accomplishments.

Nivedita had heard of and had been encouraged to make his acquaintance before her initial voyage to India. Finally, she met him. She was fascinated and no doubt felt a kinship to him based on shared, wide ranging interests and their common Celtic roots. She said, "I was glad I found my own place in the world before meeting him". She reported the meeting with great excitement to Swami Vivekananda, who according to Marie Louise Burke was not equally impressed.

Swami had reluctantly agreed to make this second trip to the west. His increasing withdrawal affected Nivedita, often she sensed a coldness toward her that left her feeling rejected. This was a

period of great anguish and confusion for her.

An account is given of Shri Ramakrishna having seen in a vision – a highly evolved sage deep in meditation who interrupted his meditation and descended into the world at his – Ramakrishna's urging to assist in the spiritual revival of mankind. After confirming for himself that Naren indeed was the sage seen in the vision, Ramakrishna predicted that once Naren realized that he was indeed this sage, he would have no more interest in the world and would cast off his body. It seemed that Swami Vivekananda was slowly arriving at that time of realization. He had done tremendous work travelling the world spreading the message of Vedanta in accordance with Shri Ramakrishna's wishes. Now, hard work, austerities and a daunting travel schedule in India and the west had taken its toll on his body. Did he perhaps feel his work was done? Nivedita now seemed pulled toward a path different from that for which she had been trained. Often she was anguished, feeling his cool indifference toward her.

She did not give in to despair. Instead she became, as was her character, totally absorbed in work for Professor Geddes. She declared herself his disciple. It is not clear what work she performed in that capacity. There was mention of her complaining that she was tired of filing, stating that she was not a good secretary.

Events around this time, Swami Vivekananda's detachment, indifference to Nivedita and her declared discipleship to Patrick Geddes seemed to indicate a turning point in their once close master/disciple relationship.

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission was established and in the hands of Swami Vivekananda's capable brother monks. A sound base was in place for Sister Nivedita's girls' school. Was it time to declare: Mission Accomplished? It seemed, they were preparing to go separate ways. He to be absorbed into the spiritual realm and she to pursue her secular interests. He had said to her "you are free, you have your own choice, your own work."

She recounted a late evening visit he paid her in a small arbor study where she worked. He called her into the garden, she assumed to give her his blessing instead he described to her a tradition of some Mohammadians, addressing their new-born children, which he modified somewhat to suit their situation. "I say to you tonight – go forth into the world and there, If I made you, be destroyed, If Mother made you, live." Apparently this was his final directive to her. The master freeing his disciple from the commitment she had sworn to him.

It was not long after this eventful time in and around Paris and Brittany that Swami Vivekananda returned to India. She must have also returned but not with him. However, she was in India when she got word that he had left his body. She went immediately and it is said, she sat beside his lifeless body, fanning him until he was taken away for cremation

She must have suffered. Her world turned upside down. Still devoted, now a child of India to the core she immersed herself in the social-political activities of her adopted homeland. There seems some indication that she was involved in the freedom struggle. She once said, "Because of the color of my skin I can travel freely thru the streets." What was she doing? Acting as a messenger, a spy for the freedom fighters? At one time she was under police surveillance. Many freedom fighters were her close associates. Perhaps if in my research I had dug deeper I could have found answers to this question, and I do intend to keep probing. Certainly, she could have returned to London and found a place ☉ a livelihood among her friends and acquaintances there. She chose not to.

The time of her death had been foretold her by a clairvoyant. When the time he had predicted approached she began having premonitions and set about putting her affairs in order. Her body, like that of her masters at the time of his death, was ravaged by austerities and hard work. She had totally without reservation given her all to India. Many mourned her passing and she is still revered for her service to India.

I started my review of the life of Sister Nivedita with questions and skepticism, viewing her thru the lenses of my own cultural biases. Was she just another white woman seeking a grand adventure? Yes, her life was a grand adventure. Was her aim to "help the noble savage?" To pull them out of darkness, making of them a carbon copy of herself? I saw no indication that she wanted to Europeanize Indian women. Was she simply restless, bored with life in Victorian Europe wanting something different? No, I found her a purpose ☉ driven woman dedicated to an ideal of service. My initial skepticism was tempered by Swami Vivekananda's regard for her. Was she too a highly evolved spiritual being destined, as was he to inject renewed spiritual energy into a people fallen into despair?

If, indeed she was this highly evolved being I found her exceptional on the human level. Warm, connected and approachable.

Often when we encounter beings we deem exalted we are timid in approaching them. We place them so high above us that we can only bow in awe before them. Swami Vivekananda said, in Song of the Sanyasin: "For whoso wears the form must wear the chains". I believe that highly evolved souls enter this human plain, assume the chains of human qualities, to show us: Look, I, like you, have weaknesses, faults, but let me show you by example how to overcome them. I recall my own guru, Swami Bhashyananda saying to a group of us once "don't look at me, I'm still struggling, just like you." Becoming human, they make themselves approachable for the sake of our involvement

I now view Sister Nivedita as someone I would have felt privileged to meet. I can envision, sitting with her in her garden over a cup of tea, listening to her ideas, perhaps we would begin with light girl-talk that would progress deeper revealing to me a glimpse of her spiritual self. She possessed so many fine qualities that we can all emulate, her courage, her love for humanity, her selflessness, her love for learning.

My study of her life is not ended. I want to know more about her.

A Report on 3rd Celebration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita: July 30, 2017



I am pleased to report that the 3rd program of the half-year-long celebration to observe the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita was held in the evening of July 30, 2017.

The program was organized by the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont in collaboration with the Vedanta Society of Chicago.

Dr. Satish Amruthur, President, HTGC, welcomed the congregation. The program began with bhajans presented by Anushree. Dr. Suneela Hasoor introduced the speakers. Dr. Rajeshwari Pandharipande, Professor, UIUC spoke on the “*Contribution of Sister Nivedita in Colonial India*”. Swami Vimokshananda, Head, Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore, described the “*Contribution of Sister Nivedita in Hinduism*”.

The program ended with several dance compositions performed by the Sowmya Kumaron’s students. Mr. Amrish Mahajan and Mr. Ravi Hasoor conducted the whole program.

TRIBUTE TO SISTER NIVEDITA
A COLLECTION OF FAMOUS SAYINGS
BY DR. RUNA BHAUMIK
Devotee, Vedanta Society of Chicago

In November 1895, Margaret Elizabeth Noble met Swami Vivekananda in London for the first time. Her truthfulness, determination and above all, her heart full of kindness impressed Swami Vivekananda.

Vivekananda always gave importance to improving the condition of the common mass and women. He realized that through education, they would become self-confident and would be able to solve their problems. He invited Margaret to spread the education. He wrote to her: "What was wanted was not a man, but a woman – a real lioness – to work for Indians, women especially. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted".

After her arrival to India, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, accepted Margaret spontaneously as her daughter. She embraced her as "khooki", which means "little girl" in Bengali. She was very intimate with Sarada Devi. Sarada Devi wrote to her in one letter, "I look at your photo, which is with me, every now and then and it seems as if you are present with me. I long for the day and year when you shall return. I always pray to the Lord that he might help you in your noble efforts and keep you strong and happy". On 13 November 1898, the Holy Mother Sarada Devi came to inaugurate the school of Nivedita and blessed her.

Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate a Bengali polymath who reshaped Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, had great regard for Sister Nivedita. Tagore had written, "I had felt her great power... She was a versatile genius ...". In his essay, *Bhagini Nivedita*, he adorned her with the title *Loka-mata*

(Mother of People), which was later universally accepted. When Tagore was planning to start a traditional Indian teachers' training school in Calcutta, he requested Sister Nivedita to take charge of it.

Journalist Mr. Henry Nevinson, had paid tribute with the following wonderful lines, "It is as vain to describe Sister Nivedita in two pages as to reduce fire to a formula and call it *Knowledge*.... Like fire, and like Shiva, Kali, and other Indian powers of the spirit, she was once destructive and creative, terrible and beneficent.". He also mentioned that not only her language but her whole vital personality often reminded him of fire.

One of the most celebrated Indian artists, Abanindranath Tagore visualized her as an ideal of beauty and considered her as meditating *Uma*. He mentioned that "Among all the foreigners who loved India, Nivedita occupies the highest position."

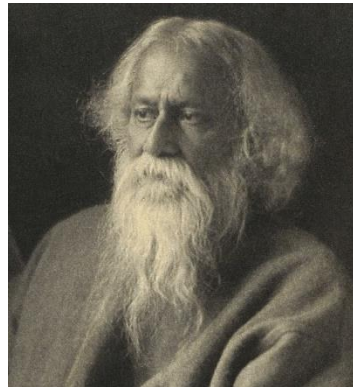
Scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose and his wife Abala Bose were great admirers of Nivedita. When Bose founded his famous Institute for research, he had an image installed, of a woman stepping forward with a lamp in her hand, in Nivedita's memory.



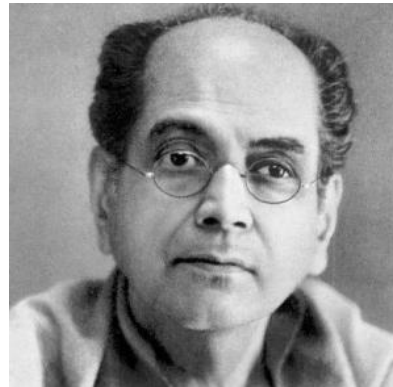
Vinayak Pandurang Karmakar's relief on Sister Nivedita at Bose Institute. This was modelled on Nandalal Bose's painting of Nivedita – 'Lady with the lamp'.



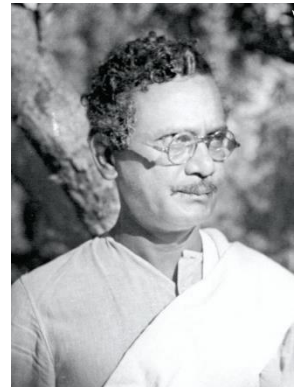
Sri Aurobindo



Rabindranath Tagore



Abanindranath Tagore



Nandalal Bose

Swami Brahmananda, spiritual son and the very first president of Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belur used to say that whenever he would come close to Nivedita, his mind would soar high up and dive deep inside.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar, an eminent social scientist and intellectual said, “Nivedita was a humanist and a public worker in every field—patriotism, education, politics, nationalism, industry, history, moral reforms, social service, feminism and what not. If Vivekananda had not done anything but import Nivedita into the Indian sphere of activity, his lifework would have still remained exceedingly epoch-making and fruitful. She was his miraculous discovery for India, and grew into one of them profoundest treasures of the Indian people.”

After the passing of Swami Vivekananda in 1902, Nivedita undertook a tour of the country to give shape to her plans. She met Sri Aurobindo, the great Indian nationalist, philosopher, yogi, guru and poet, at Baroda and convinced him to come to Calcutta and take up the leadership of the nationalist movement in Bengal.

"If the dry bones are beginning to stir, it is because Sister Nivedita breathed the breath of life into them," said Rash Bihari Ghosh, about her influence on the young patriots in India's freedom struggle.

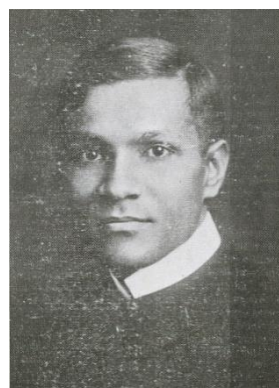
Henry Nevinston



Rash Bihari Bose



Benoy Kumar Sarkar



Jagadish Chandra Bose



ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Sarojini Agarwal

A cradle outside a home in Lucknow may look strange for passersby but for orphaned and abandoned girls, it ensures love, warmth and motherly care. For over 30 years, this cradle has seen many a baby girl being left in it only to be taken care of by another mother who made it her life's mission to help them.

Dr Sarojini Agarwal, now 80 years old, is 'Maa' to the scores of girls and young women who live at Manisha Mandir (as the destitute home is called), her home and the ashram in Lucknow where she raises her adopted daughters. Interestingly, the destitute home owes its origin to a tragedy, which had struck Sarojini over three decades ago. Her eight-year-old daughter Manisha died in a road accident in 1978. Why my child? The question nagged her persistently till, as Agarwal says, the answer finally came to her.

"I was lamenting the loss of one when there were so many other Manishas, homeless and unloved, looking for a mother. Perhaps I could give them a loving home," she recalls. Born and raised in Jodhpur and holding a PhD in Hindi literature, Dr Agarwal was then a writer and had authored short stories and collections of poetry and novels. "The day my oldest son became an engineer, I shared my idea of a home for abandoned children with my husband," reveals Dr Agarwal, who adds that her husband, V C Agarwal is now 'Papa' to the girls at Manisha Mandir.

And so Manisha Mandir was set up in 1985 in three rooms in her own house with Dr Agarwal pouring into it all the money she had earned in royalty from her books. The first girl she adopted was a deaf and mute child whose mother, a divorcee, had died while giving birth. Shivi, as she named the little one, was soon followed by two sisters whose mother had also died in an accident. Other girls followed – some who were found abandoned, others given up as unwanted while

some others were picked up from the streets by Agarwal. A few also found their way out of brothels.

Dr Agarwal also began hanging a crib, which she named 'sanjeevan palna' or cradle of life near the gate of her home. Here, people could leave abandoned newborns, instead of leaving them on the streets. "We have even taken in two-day-old baby girls. It would then occur to me that you need not give birth to a child to be a mother..." Dr Agarwal says, adding that it gave her the greatest pleasure to hear her girls call her 'maa'.

Over the years, Manisha Mandir has changed addresses a few times and is now housed in a sprawling, three-storey home and has a well-stocked library, a computer lab, craft workshops, among many other facilities that ensure a comfortable and safe environment for the children. They also learn to stitch, knit and are taught other vocational skills. Dr Agarwal also ensures that the girls receive the best education possible. "Only good education can make the girls independent, which is so crucial for their self-confidence. We get them admitted to good and prestigious schools. Many of our girls have excelled in their studies and have secured good jobs," she says, adding that her family have always lent all possible help.

Although she has received numerous awards for her work, including the National award for Children's Welfare, accolades mean little to Dr Agarwal, who continues to work tirelessly for the girl child. However, with age catching up, she says she finds it difficult to take in newborns any more. Dr Agarwal says that she has no idea how much longer she will be able to go on serving these girls, but will continue to do so for as long as she can.

"In every orphan and abandoned girl, I see my daughter Manisha. Maybe God took my daughter away from me as he wanted me to take care of these children. I thank him for giving me this opportunity to keep her memory alive in a meaningful way," says Dr Agarwal, summing up her life's journey.

(Adapted from:

<https://www.thebetterindia.com/81597/sarojini-agarwal-manisha-mandir-orphan-girls-lucknow/>)

SISTER NIVEDITA AND HER TIMES

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA

Swami-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Chicago

Margaret Elizabeth Noble was born on October 28, 1867 during the well-known Victorian Era, which lasted from June 20, 1837 until Queen Victoria's death on January 22, 1901.

The condition of women was very sad. Helena, in her article on women's status in mid 19th century England mentioned:

1. Women had to obey men because men held all the resources.
2. Most women had little choice but to marry and everything they owned, inherited and earned automatically belonged to their husband. This was the law.
3. A woman could not obtain a divorce. Adultery was not grounds for a woman to divorce her husband but sufficient grounds for a man to divorce his wife.
4. Women were indoctrinated from birth to accept their lowly status.
5. Girls received less education than boys. Well-to-do girls were educated at home or in small schools.
6. Women received lower wages than their male counterparts.

The 19th century was known as the Victorian Age. It was also known as the "Century of the Middle Class".

In January 1884, "The Household" magazine wrote about the condition of women. "A really good housekeeper is almost always unhappy. While she does so much for the comfort of others, she nearly ruins her own health and life."

The condition of American women was also not good.

1. After marriage her wealth went into the hands of her husband.
2. There was a lack of education—before the Civil War there were only 3 colleges for women.
3. They had no political rights.
4. They had no voting rights until 1920.

White American women were hard-working;

some were rich and many were financially well-off.

Margaret Noble was born in 1867, and fortunately, in 1871 the "National Union For the Improvement of Education of Women of All Classes" was formed. This became known as the "Women's Education Union."

In 1872 the Girls Public Day School Trust was created.

In 1878 the Education Act made education compulsory.

Though girls from the working class were allowed to receive education in domestic skills, middle class girls had a chance to receive higher education more in the line of male students.

The Victorian English Education Policy was divided into two groups:

1. Liberal Humanist, who favored liberal education.
2. Utilitarians, who favored vocational education.

By 1890 elementary schooling had been in effect; the education scene had improved, but Oxford and Cambridge were not admitting women for degrees.

This is in brief the condition of women's education at the time of Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble (Nivedita).

Miss Noble was lucky—her family environment gave her a firm support to grow up as an educated, decent lady.

Her grandfather was a patriot and a minister of the Wesleyan Church, and her father was also trained in spiritual ministry.

From her parents Margaret developed faith in God and Love for the Have-nots.

The untimely death of her father forced her to grow self-confident. Long afterwards she wrote to a prominent follower of Swami Vivekananda, Mrs. Ole Bull, "I have often wondered what my own life would have been, had the awful blow of my father's death not been dealt me at its start.

That made me a Sannyasini (Nun)—the child of the Great.”

Margaret never enjoyed a life of affluence or even sufficiency. But hardship taught her to find the real life of humanity.

Margaret and her sister received their formal education at Halifax College. They used to live in the women’s hostel. Here she learned punctuality, discipline, self-help, adjustment with the other hostellers, and above all love for books.

Before her birth her mother, Mary Noble promised God that she would offer her child for His service. And God was, perhaps, preparing His future messenger.

At the age of 17 she became a teacher after completing the final examination from Halifax in 1884. Margaret joined Kingston House School at Salisbury, Wrekham and got an opportunity to participate in welfare service.

After school hours she started serving the poor miners’ families without any discrimination. Her only goal was to bring a little comfort and happiness into the lives of these unfortunate people. Margaret did not know that there would be objections even to helping and serving the poor. “They are poor but they do not belong to our camp, so you should not help them.” was the order that Margaret was given, and she had to give up her welfare work.

Another power started manifesting in her—powerful writing. She started writing under pseudonyms and publishing in local papers, like the “North Wales Guardian.” Margaret’s ability attracted many thoughtful people.

She joined as a co-principal in the Kingston House School in Wimbledon. In 1852 she opened her own school, called Ruskin School, in Wimbledon.

Friends, God in His inscrutable was preparing His future worker. Her knowledge and experience would be properly utilized in the future.

Through her new school, Margaret came in contact with a journalist and editor of the “Wimbledon News”, an organ of the Irish Associations in England. She started giving

lectures in public in favor of a “Free Ireland” group working for “Home Rule.”

Her associations grew, and she came in contact with Lady Ripon and started attending her Salon where eminent people used to visit and discuss art and literature. In time the Salon became famous as the Sesame Club. Margaret met great minds like George Bernard Shaw and Thomas Huxley.

While Margaret Noble was preparing to become Nivedita, Europe was trying to reshape its map.

The 1814 Vienna Convention by Austria, France, Russia and the U.K.; Italy’s birth as a state; the unification of Germany; the Three Emperor’s League (German Empire, Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary); unrest over new national identities—all these led to the 1st World War, about which Swami Vivekananda declared in 1897 in Madras, “The whole of the Western world is on a volcano”.

Margaret was developing in this situation, and the horizon of her knowledge, which she later utilized in her Guru’s work, was growing.

Margaret met her destiny in 1895. “The time came before the Swami (Vivekananda) left England, when I addressed him as “Master.” I had recognized the heroic fiber of the man, and desired to make myself the servant of his love for his own people.”

The great Swami Vivekananda said to Margaret, “I have plans for the women of my own country in which you, I think, could be of great help to me.”

Why was Swami Vivekananda so concerned about the education of women in India?

India, the most ancient culture of the world, had also given great importance to education without any discrimination. The whole civilization was based on knowledge—in Sanskrit “Veda”—and people were inspired to follow the path of veda (knowledge)—both spiritual and secular. Knowledge was considered to be the third eye of the human being.

Like men, women also became perfect in knowledge and received great respect in society. A few among them are Vishva-vara Sikata, Nivavari, Ghosa, Lopamudra, and Apala.

To give equal respect to women, it was mandatory to perform Vedic sacrifices with one's wife. She was to recite the Vedic verses along with her husband during the rituals.

2500 years ago, in the Buddhist era, both male and female students used to study subjects like Sanskrit, Astronomy, Astrology, Medicine, Law, Administration, etc. Interested students used to study theology, philosophy, and logic also.

Tomorrow is the 1229th Birthday of Adi Shankaracharya. His biography mentions his famous debate with Mandana Mishra. The judge of that highly intellectual debate was Mandana Mishra's wife—proof of the standard of women's education in India.

In the Gupta period education was regulated and improved. Vocational education was emphasized—crafts and other useful arts were introduced.

Manu, the Hindu Law Maker, gave great importance to women's education. His famous lines in the Manu Dharma Shastra say,

Yatra Naryastu Pujyante (Where women are honored)

Ramante Tatra Devata, (Divinity blossoms.)

Yatra-itaastu Na Pujyante (Where women are dishonored,)

Sarvaa-stara-ajala-kriya. (All actions, no matter how noble, Remain unfruitful.)

Kautilya (also known as Vishnu Gupta), the famous economist of the Maurya Dynasty (320 BC to 297 BC), also emphasized the importance of women's education.

The whole scenario of India changed in 1000 AD with the stormy invasion of Mahmud of Gazni. All the sultans (rulers) after him—Muhammad Ghori, Qutb-ud-din, Altamash, Sultana Razia, Nasir-ud-din—made no attempt to improve education, rather they destroyed famous universities and burnt the books in libraries.

In 1526 AD Babar came and established the Mughal Empire. Samrat Akbar of this dynasty did take some good steps to improve education.

Translations into the Persian language of famous books, like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Atharva Ved, Raj-tarangini (history of Kashmir by Kalhan,) Lilavati (a mathematical book) took place.

But Aurangzab completely changed the education policy. Only religious teachings, and that too to only Muslim boys, was emphasized.

The educational, social, and cultural life of India came to a stop, as it were, with the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 AD.

Almost 1000 years of subjugation, suppression, and lack of proper education compelled the majority of Indians to accept horrible superstitions as religion and dreadful customs as social norms.

To report on the condition of education in Bengal in 1836—the year of Sri Ramakrishna's birth—William Adam wrote, "There is a strong belief in the society that a girl taught to read and write will become a widow soon after marriage."

The British came to India to do business under the banner of the East-India Company, then captured the whole of India politically.

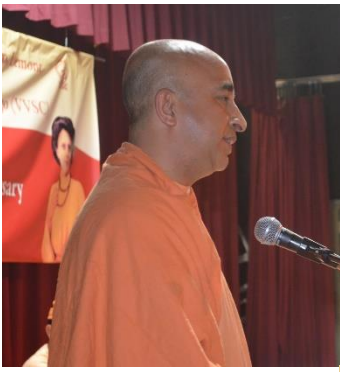
The new rulers introduced education, establishing schools, colleges and even universities. Madras University and the University of Calcutta were established in 1857. They became recruiting grounds for generations of highly trained officials.

Thomas Balington Macaulay introduced his Minute of February in 1835—confident to create a class of anglicized Indians. Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General since 1829 had also supported this idea.

This was the 'Time' when Margaret received the call from her Guru to develop and impart "Man-making character building education." His specific vision was, "Educate a woman and the entire nation will be educated."

Margaret E. Noble plunged in and emerged as Nivedita. Through renunciation she became a great force in the upliftment of India.

Sister Nivedita lived the life ahead of her time.



4th Celebration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita August 27, 2017

The 4th program of the half-year-long celebration of Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary was organized by the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont in collaboration with the Vedanta Society of Chicago.

The program began with bhajans presented by Suraj Pattanaik and the students of Manjusha Sangeet Academy. Dr. Suneela Hasoor introduced the speakers. Dr. Runa Bhaumik, Professor at UIC, discussed a "Tribute to Nivedita" by Nivedita's contemporaries. Swami Sunirmalananda, Head, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Holland, delivered an enlightening lecture on "Sister Nivedita's Contribution in Indian Women's Education". Swami Ishatmananda remembered two incidents that illustrated Nivedita's strong spiritual foundation.

The program ended with several dance compositions performed by the students of Nrityanjali School of Dance.

Introduction to the Cover Page: The Triangle

Br. Panchatapa

This issue of the eZine is a special one. Being published in September of the year of Sister Nivedita's sesquicentennial Birth Anniversary we chose to have a cover page that would represent a triangle centered on Sister Nivedita and her three qualities. This is an attempt to see these three qualities in the light of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

Sister Nivedita was born in 1867, met Swami Vivekananda in 1895, and came to India to dedicate herself for Mother India in 1898. She never had an opportunity to meet Sri Ramakrishna physically who had cast off his gross body in 1886. However, in a subtle form for the welfare of the world he continued working through his spiritual consort Sri Sarada Devi and fittest disciple Swami Vivekananda.

The question is: what was Ramakrishna's ideology for which Sri Sarada Devi and Vivekananda continued working? To answer this, most quoted line is 'as many faiths, so many paths; a message of harmony. All paths are leading to the same destination. So there is need for assimilation, not dissension. This spiritual heritage Swami Vivekananda inherited from Sri Ramakrishna and transferred to Nivedita. As soon as Nivedita the embodiment of dedication got accepted by Swami Vivekananda and Mother Sarada Devi, by default she became the flag carrier of Ramakrishna ideology and she loved to call herself, Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda'. With this image starts our cover story.

Let's come back to our topic, which is The Triangle. There can be no triangle without all its three angles. The first angle of our triangle is Spirituality. Young Narendranath Dutta came to Sri Ramakrishna as the seeker of spirituality. After practicing under the guidance of his guru he said,

'Sir, I wish to remain immersed in Samadhi like Sukadeva, for five or six days at a time, and then to return to the sense-plane for a short while if only to maintain the body, and then revert to that state of blessedness.' Sri Ramakrishna grew impatient, saying, 'Fie! For shame! You are such a big receptacle. Does it befit you to speak like that! I thought that you were like a huge banyan-tree and would give shelter to thousands of weary souls. Instead you are seeking for your own *mukti*, your own salvation! Do not think of such small things, my boy! How can you be satisfied with such one-sided ideal? ... I enjoy the Lord not only in His unconditioned state of Oneness as Absolute Brahman, in Samadhi, but also in His various Blessed Forms through sweet human relationships. So do thou likewise. Be a Jnani and a Bhakta in one!' [The Life of the Swami Vivekananda by Swami Virajānanda; vol. 1, pp 412 - 13]

These words of Sri Ramakrishna shift us toward the second angle of the triangle – Nationality. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, for the next five years, from 1888 to 1893 Swami Vivekananda traveled as a Parivrajaka, wondering monk, along the length and breadth of India in search of truth, spirituality and a real India. He won the admiration of kings, felt for the suffering people, motivated the youth for a greater cause, studied many religious scriptures, visited many historic sites, gained knowledge, and visualized the future of India.

To awaken the nationalist consciousness, which Swami Vivekananda experienced sitting in meditation on the rock of Cape Comorin, he asked his fellow countrymen, "For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for that time from our minds."

The bright image of Mother India was always so lively existing in Swami Vivekananda's heart during his travel through the West that Sister Christine told, "Our love for India came to birth, I think, when we first heard him (Swami) say the word, "India" in that marvelous voice of his. It seems incredible that so much could have been put into one small word of five letters. There was love, passion, pride, longing, adoration, tragedy, chivalry, heimweh, and again love. Whole volumes could not have produced such a feelings in others. It had the magic power of creating love in those who heard it."



Christina Greenstidel,
(Sister Christine)
17 Aug 1866 – 27 Mar 1930

What is the best way to manifest this powerful message of national consciousness? The answer shows us the third angle of our triangle -- that is Art, the highest manifestation of an ideal. In his book 'Swami Vivekananda: A Historical Review' R. C. Majumdar quoted Mahendranath Datta, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda: 'Dada (elder brother) used to draw pictures in his boyhood. He used to draw colored pictures with water-colors... He could paint well; besides, he had a good voice in singing'. Swamiji also made a study of ancient Indian art. Once during a course of conversation about the paintings of Ravi Varma, then famous as the innovator of a new technique in Indian art of painting, adept in Indian Art Swamiji pointed out the defects of the painter.

In 1900 at the Congress of the History of Religions held in Paris, Swami Vivekananda protested against the then accepted theory of Greek influence on Indian Arts. Swamiji's views on art, were grounded on his high and clear conception of

the subject and have been subsequently accepted by eminent scholars of Indian art. In his opinion, "Art has its origin in the expression of some idea, in whatever man produces. Where there is no expression of idea, however much there may be a display of colors, light and shade, perfection in drawings, high technique – and so on, it cannot be styled as true art." Sister Nivedita was inspired by Swamiji to understand the spiritual import of Indian fine arts. It is Swamiji who asked her to hold a discourse on *Fine Arts of Ancient India* at New York in August 1899.

Surely Nivedita heard that word 'I-n-d-i-a' uttered by Swamiji. That pulled her to get merged in the Indian freedom fighting movement. If education of Indian women is one of the ways to nurture her ideal of independence, the other one must be her support to Indian arts.

In the introduction to the complete works of Sister Nivedita, Pravrajika Atmaprana wrote, "The rebirth of Indian Art was one of Nivedita's dearest dreams. She believed that "art offers us the opportunity of a great common speech, and its rebirth is essential to the upbuilding of the motherland—its re-awakening rather." (Complete Works, Vol. III, p. 3). Hence her profound thoughts on Art in general and Indian Art in particular are of great importance. She is one of the foremost of art connoisseurs who inspired and encouraged our young artists to revive ancient Indian art and to develop modern Indian art. She told them: "Art is charged with a spiritual message,—in India today, the message of Nationality." (Complete Works, Vol. III, p. 12).

Sister Nivedita inspired Havell and several Indian artists, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose of Bengal School of fine arts during the 19th century renaissance period in Indian art. She was the main motivating power behind Abanindranath Tagore's timeless painting of "Bharat Mata", *Mother India*. This image is brought to the cover as a tribute to Nivedita's contribution to Indian Art.

Out of her profound dedication to nationality Nivedita organized a *Swadeshi Exhibition* in December 1906 at the Congress in which the Nivdita Girl's School exhibited a 'National Flag' designed by Nivedita. The square-shape saffron flag had the symbols of Vajra (Thunder bolt) in yellow in the center. On both sides of the Vajra was written 'Vande' (I salute) and 'Mataram' (Mother) and Jyotis (flames) in the outer periphery. The saffron flag stood as the symbol of the hoary culture, heritage and nationalism of the country.

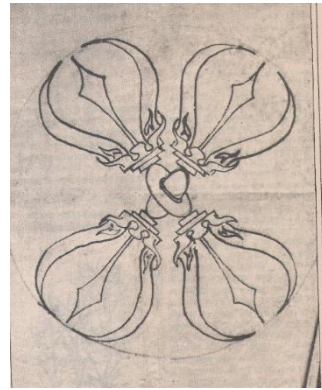
She conceived the idea of the flag, while on a visit to Bodh Gaya in 1904, in the company of Jagadish Chandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore. She was inspired by the Vajra sign, symbol of Budha - the selfless man. It was the weapon of Lord Indra and is a symbol of strength (and also associated with the Goddess Durga). Legend goes that Vajra (Thunder bolt) was made from the bones of Rishi Dadhichi, who donated his back-bone to the Gods for making a weapon to fight the Demons and it was now for the people to sacrifice their all at the altar of the Mother in this fight against British imperialism. It is a symbol of supreme sacrifice.

Sister Nivedita in an article titled 'The Vajra as a National Flag' published in the *Modern Review*, November 1909, strongly suggested Vajra as a National flag for whole of India. The opening sentences of the article are, 'The question of the invention of a flag for India is beginning to be discussed in the press. Those who contemplate the desirability of such a symbol, seem to be unaware that already a great many people have taken up, and are using, the ancient Indian Vajra or Thunderbolt, in this way....'.

Though later this flag was not selected as Indian national flag, yet till today, 'Bose Institute' [named after Jagadish Chandra Bose], a world renowned science institute and North Bengal University in India, are using her Thunderbolt painting in their emblem. The image of the flag on the cover is the symbol of Nivedita herself – who gave her all to

India.

Nivedita's sketch



North Bengal University Emblem



After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda when Belur Math wanted to build a memorial at the place Swamiji was cremated, Nivedita came forward to collect money. She got Joe MacLeod and Betty Leggett by her. She found a stone cutter in Rajasthan, India and sent Mother's attendant Brahmachari Ganen to talk to the artist. On September 14, 1911 Nivedita wrote a vivid description to Mrs. Francis Leggett of the day when Swamiji's image for his Samadhi Mandir (Memorial Chapel) started take form. The sculpture began by offering worship with oblations to Swamiji in stone – ending "Oh Swamiji, come out well from under my hand!" He works from 8 am to 9.30 pm and he eats as he works...Of course I am still trembling about it. But that you will understand. Dr. Bose [Scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose] made me write in the beginning that the work was of national importance. And it is!" The photograph of the marble bas-relief of Swamiji in meditation-posture most tastefully decorated with garland at his memorial chapel at Belur Math, place of national importance, on the cover is a wonderful expression of devotion of artist Nivedita to her spiritual Guru.

Nivedita was the first of all western disciples of Swami Vivekananda to meet Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna. The meaning of the word "Sarada" is the "bestower of the essence or sara". This is another name of Divine Mother Saraswati, who is the giver of all types of Knowledge – both spiritual and secular. Secular knowledge covers also the realm of music and arts. Sarada Devi had a very fine sense of arts. During her early days with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, she would make beautiful hanging racks out of jute for Sri Ramakrishna to save food for his disciples. After making the racks, all the extra stuff she would use to make pillows. She appeared to be 'extraordinarily ordinary' but we know from Sri Ramakrishna, the key to the absolute knowledge is in her custody forever.

Sarada Devi was the embodiment of universal Motherhood. Motherhood is the highest manifestation of the message of assimilation; it does not discard or disregard anything – Sarada Devi was the Mother of all. And her consciousness of nationality was grounded in this field of spirituality. Mother Sarada was patriotic in her own way. A couple of examples can be mentioned: hearing several heart-rendering reports of torture of Indian people by the British government Holy Mother could not control herself. Weeping bitterly, she said: "When will the English go? When will they leave our country?" At same time it is recorded in Swami Gambhirananda's book on Holy Mother: At Jayrambati, in 1906, she said to the young Brahmachari Girija, 'Mark you! The Master (Sri Ramakrishna) entered into spiritual trance very often. One day, as he came down from a long samadhu, he said, "Listen, my dear, I went to a land where the people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!"

The photograph on the cover of the meeting of Sarada Devi with Nivedita stands for an eternal

moment. Here is manifested Sri Sarada Devi's art of living, which Swami Vivekananda expressed artistically, in different context though, on the last day of the first Parliament of World's Religions, 'Help and not fight', 'Assimilation and not destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension'.

124 years earlier on the 11th day of September a young spiritual representative of world's oldest religion, Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda stood before the audience of the first parliament of world religions in Chicago. Before he started one of his very first public lectures in the Art Institute, he prayed to Mother Saraswati, the goddess of art, whose other name is Sarada -- the bestower of spiritual knowledge. And what happened when he finished? Let's read a few lines from the article 'Our Master and His Message' by Sister Nivedita: 'Of the Swami's address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of "the religious ideas of the Hindus", but when he ended, Hinduism had been created.

Nivedita wrote in her book *My Master, As I saw Him*, 'Humanly speaking, without the Temple of Dakshineswar there had been no Ramakrishna, without Ramakrishna no Vivekananda, and without Vivekananda, no Western Mission'.

We can say, in a similar manner, humanly speaking, without the parliament of world's religions in the Art Institute of Chicago there would have been no Vivekananda coming to the West with the message of Indian spirituality, without hearing the message of Indian spirituality, no meeting between Sarada Devi and Nivedita, and without that timeless meeting, no application of eternal ideology of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta in the all the possible directions of Indian society. Hence the final image on this cover page is the Art Institute of Chicago, as it appeared around 1893.

Advertisements

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago (VVSC) : Book Store

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda & Vedanta Literature available

Order can be placed online: <http://www.vedantabooks.com/>

Eternal Literature : The Vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavatam, Brahma Sutra, Upanishads in original Sanskrit with English translations. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta scriptures, Sanskrit texts. We are on **amazon smile** too!

Bhagavad Gita

The gist of Vedanta and the philosophy of life, has been taught verse by verse and explained in a lucid way for everyone to understand.

(MP3 CD, 25 lectures, \$5)

The Saga of the Soul

It is the story of the journey of the human soul through the ages. (MP3 CD, 25 lectures, \$5)

SPIRITUAL RETREAT with Swami Ishatmananda

Three in one pack:

How to Be Spiritual, Preparation for God Realization & Tantra: A Way for God Realization (\$15 only)

***You are welcome to attend special celebration of
Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary on***

Sunday, 24th September; 6 pm – 8pm

Sama Rathi Auditorium

Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont

Special Lectures by

Jigna Shah, University of Chicago

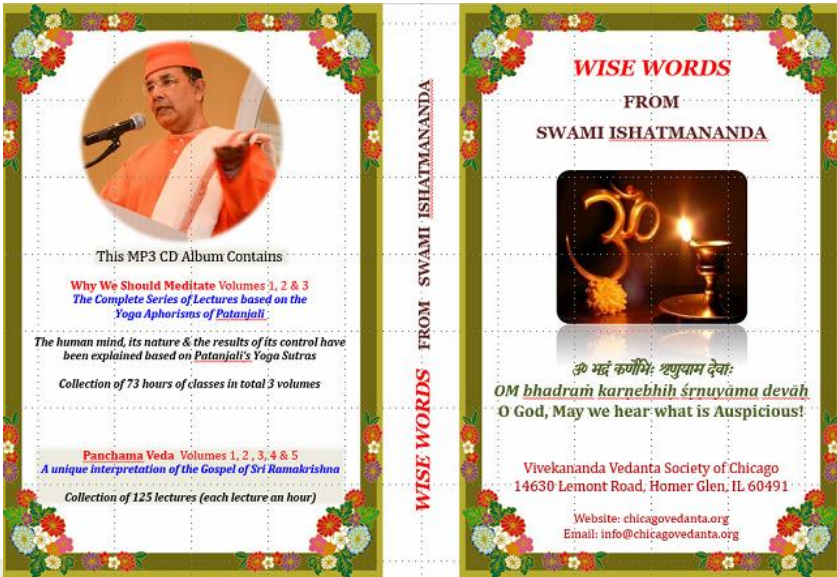
Swami Ishatmananda, Vedanta Society of Chicago

Cultural Program by

Bollywood Arts Academy

This program is free of charges and open to all.

Advertisements



WISE WORDS From Swami Ishatmananda

\$35 per album
Or \$5 each CD

This MP3 Lecture Album of
8 CDs Contain:

Why We Should Meditate Vol 1, 2 & 3:

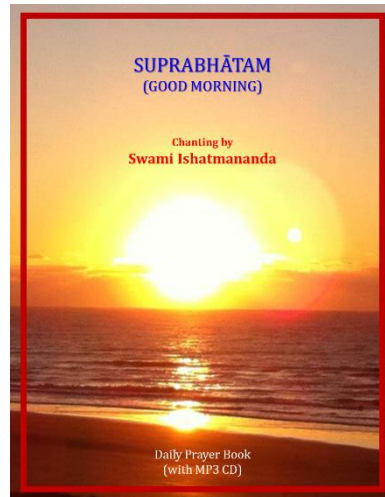
The Complete Series of Lectures based on the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali
The human mind, its nature & the results of its control have been explained based on
Patanjali's Yoga Sutras by Swami Ishatmananda.
Collection of 73 hours of lectures in total 3 volumes

Panchama Veda Vol. 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 (new arrival):

A unique interpretation of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Ishatmananda
Collection of 25 lectures (each lecture an hour) in each MP3 CD



Panchama Veda Vol. 5
(new arrival)
Collection of 25 lectures
MP3 CD; \$5



The book, Suprabhatam, along with the CD will help
the devotees to chant the holy hymns dedicated to
different Gods & Goddesses on each day of the week.
\$10



Collection of 45 spiritual discourses (**in Bengali**), by Swami Ishatmananda

“Tader Kathay Moder Jivan” (CD; \$10).

A Very helpful DVD set to learn **“Bhagavad Gita”** (**in Bengali**), by Swami Ishatmananda
(14 DVDs. \$50).

**Three Special Programs
October 28-29, 2017**

October 28, Saturday, 11 am – 1.30 pm
**Sister Nivedita in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna,
Sri Sarada Devi & Swami Vivekananda**

Organized by the **University of Chicago**
(Hindu Sangam and the South Asian Music
Ensemble group) & **Vedanta Society of Chicago**

International House Assembly Hall, 1414
East 59th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637

Speakers: Swamis Sarvadevananda, Ishatmananda
& Purnananda
Cultural Program: University of Chicago Students

October 29,
Sunday,
6 – 8 pm

**Special Program on
Four Yogas of Hinduism
and Sister Nivedita**
Organized by the
Hindu Temple of Greater
Chicago in collaboration with
the Vedanta Society of
Chicago

Sama Rathi Auditorium,
HTGC, Lemont
Speakers Swamis:
Chetanananda: Sri Sarada
Devi & Nivedita
Sarvadevananda: Jnana Yogi
Nivedita
Swami Purnananda: Karma
Yogi Nivedita

Sitar: Pundit Deboprasad
Chakraborty
& Atanu Majumdar
Cultural Program:
Natya Dance
Theater

**You are invited
with your family and friends!**

October 29, Sunday, 11 am – 3 pm

**Understanding Sister Nivedita & Her
Contribution to Indian Art**

Fall Banquet Organized by the
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
The Meadows Club, 2950 Golf Road,
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

Speakers:

Swami Chetanananda, Head, Vedanta Society
of St. Louis

Nivedita: A Great Wonder

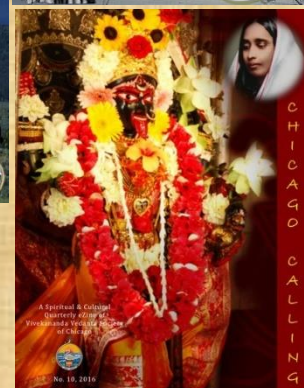
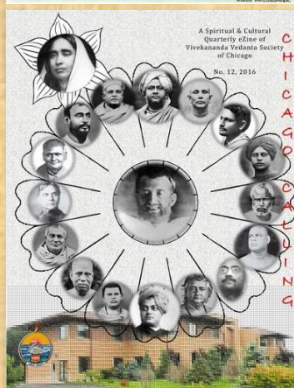
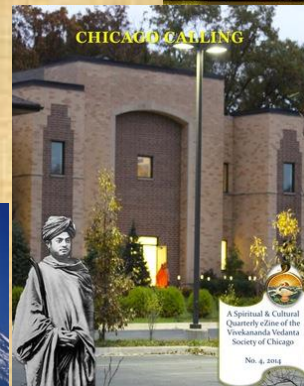
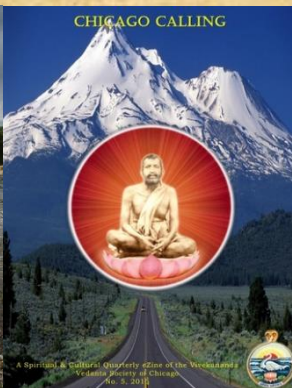
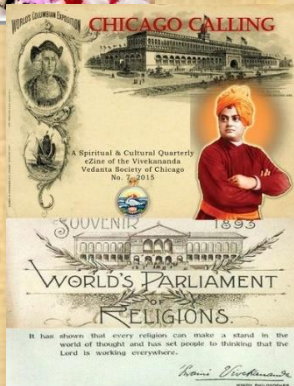
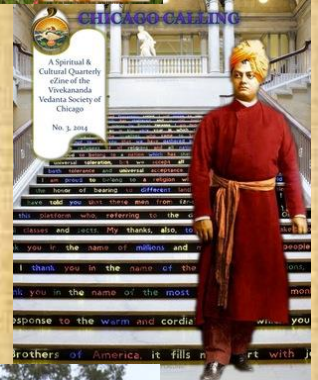
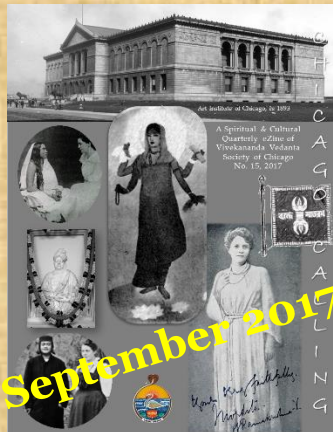
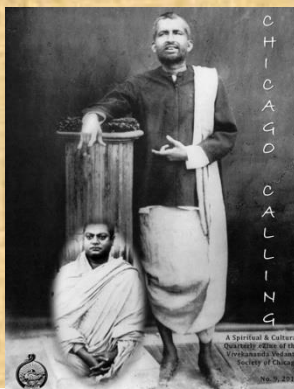
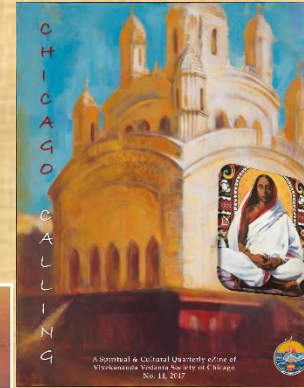
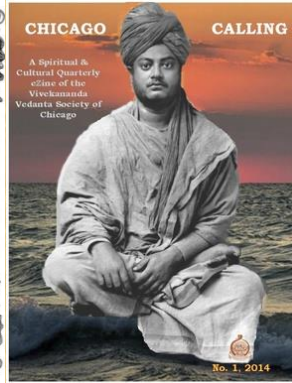
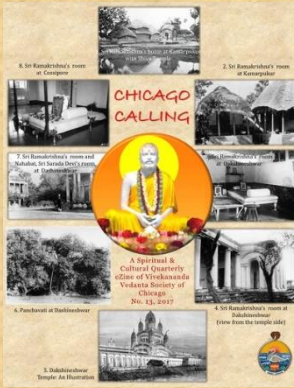
Swami Sarvadevananda, Head, Vedanta
Society of Southern California, Hollywood
Contribution of Women in Human Progress
Swami Purnananda, Head, Vedanta Society of
Ireland

Nivedita: The Daughter of Ireland

Dr. Madhuvanti Ghosh, Art Institute of
Chicago: *Nivedita and Indian Art*

Classical Indian Instrumental Compositions:
Pundit Deba Prasad Chakraborty & Shri Atanu
Majumdar
Dance Performance: Natya Dance Theater

'Chicago Calling' A Quarterly eZine of Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago



**Read Online!
Read Offline!**

**Printed copies of eZine
are from VVSC bookstore
OR Email order to**

**eZine@chicagovedanta.org
\$3 (each issue) \$10 (annual edition)**