CHAPTER - 5

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As the defence of India proceeded, during her tour of America and England, the realization slowly dawned on Nivedita that while fighting and opposing had its own value and justification, more had to be done in India itself to educate the Indians, to make them see themselves in the true perspective (Letters 1: 414). It was becoming increasingly obvious to her that her work lay in awakening the Indians to their glories and possibilities. From defence of India, then, Nivedita was moving on to a redefining of India, of inspiring India - inspiring her with ideals of the old redefined for the needs of the modern epoch.

The inner psychological process that slowly drove her to this shift in perspective has been traced in detail in the introductory chapter. It was shown there how she realized that for easy assimilation and immediate action, Swami Vivekananda’s message needed to be broken into its basic elements, doing which, she was astonished to find that the message that rang unmistakably loudly was that political independence must precede the spiritual regeneration of India. She further saw that in achieving this, Indian women as much as men had to offer their services.

Now it will be shown here how, in this her realization of India’s need for political independence, Nivedita was far ahead of her times. Her idea that the true programme for India was to make her turn the British out, and work for her own regeneration in her own way is first mentioned in that significant letter of hers, written to her friend Ms. Josephine MacLeod from Lyons, Bergen, Norway on 19
July 1901. In this letter Nivedita writes: “...in twenty years from now when the blow is struck, (I know that that will be), there will be suddenly a body of men and women in England, who never thought of themselves in that light before, to rise up and say ‘Hands off! This people shall be free!’” (Letters 1: 436; emphasis in the original). As a matter of fact, India attained freedom in 1947, taking another twenty seven years to fulfil Nivedita’s prediction.

Reading this crucial letter closely, and in the light of the history of freedom movement in India, one will be surprised to discover that Nivedita was undoubtedly thinking ahead of her times. She herself seems to be aware of this fact; for she writes earlier in the same letter: “I feel as if I had something now that no one ever had before. ... [it is] the short sharp view and the clear ringing word that India needs most at this moment” (Letters 1: 434). Lest one conclude that this is a vain claim on her part, it is necessary to trace, however briefly, the rise of nationalism in India.

The advent of the British was basically different from the presence of the Muslims in India from the thirteenth century up to eighteenth. Muslim rule had been longer than the British rule. It affected India very badly, and permanently, as almost one fifth of the people were converted to Islam on the point of the sword. Yet the fact remains that the Muslims were Asiatics who settled in India for good and lived and ruled India as if it was their land of origin; moreover, though there were fundamental religious differences between the Hindu citizens and their Muslim rulers, their outlook and method of governance were medieval, which did not upset the basic social and cultural organization of the Indian society. For the Muslim rulers engaged in feudal exploitation of Indians only and did not touch the core of Indian life. The majority of the population who managed to escape conversion remained Hindu and Indian at heart. And in the face of European cultural and
political domination of India many Muslims proved to be nationalist in outlook, siding with the Hindus in the struggle for freedom.

But Europeans came to India with bourgeois power. The British, with their spirit of modernism, scientific progress and mechanical efficiency and will for economic and political domination of non-European countries, going hand in hand with their sense of their racial superiority, were an unforeseen phenomenon in the eighteenth century India. Their impact was immense and far-reaching. It was this truth that Nivedita so clearly perceived, as is seen in the above letter of hers. They have changed Indian life almost beyond recognition. A catastrophic change has taken place in India by their rule. As a result of the far-reaching impact of various aspects of the British rule, which was not just political but cultural domination, Indians have gone away from their religion, their mother-tongue, Sanskrit and arts like carnatic music which are the products of the nation's native genius. This is drastic to Indian civilization; for India has suffered irretrievable changes. Today millions of Hindus are not only alienated from their own culture but are unaware of the alienation. The truth is that the cultural hegemony of the West for more than two centuries has resulted in a paradigm shift in the Indians' sensibilities. Indians have begun to believe that their gold is useless before the foreigners' brass. This fundamental change, detrimental to the Indian civilization, has been brought to the attention of Indians by Nivedita.

To set right this attitude necessitated "a critical examination of [India's] traditions ... and called forth ... a reassertion of the uniqueness of the basic principles of Indian life. ... In order to rediscover and resuscitate this ethos and build a new India, political independence was a pre-condition" (Chand 2: Preface iii). Following the Revolt of 1857, referred to as the First War of Independence by the nationalists and underplayed as the Sepoy Mutiny by the British, there was a rapid
growth of national consciousness among the Indians (Chand 2: 278). The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 offered a forum to the people to voice their grievances and an organized body to champion their cause. (Chand 2: 306). But by the turn of the century, though the general discontent among the public as well as the nationalist leaders was strong, and though the latter had been demanding that Indians must have some voice in the manner in which they were governed, it was not complete freedom but participation in the government and the establishment of representative institutions that they were demanding.

Dadabhai Naoroji declared on 1 June 1904, at a gathering of the London India Society: “There is only one remedy to the present dishonourable, hypocritical and destructive system ... - self-government under British paramountcy”. (Chand 2: 571; emphasis added). The Grand Old Man of India still believed that British guidance was indispensable. But immediately after the Partition of Bengal the voices which had been mild and intermittent during the nineteenth century suddenly became clamant and continuous. The Partition of Bengal was announced on 6 July 1905 and came into effect on 16 October of that year. Bal Gangadhar Tilak declared, on 25 August 1905: “the time has come to demand Swaraj or self-government. No piecemeal reform will do.” (Chand 3: 324). At the Calcutta Congress of 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji gave the call for unqualified Swaraj: “Be united, persevere, and achieve self-government ... so that India may once more occupy her proud position of yore among the greatest and civilized nations of the world.” (Chand 2: 571). Even now it was the group of nationalists following Tilak, who were termed extremists, who demanded complete independence, while it took the moderates another fifteen years to make that demand. For it was only in 1921 that the moderate wing of the Congress demanded complete political freedom, termed as Home Rule, in the Surat conference of the Congress.
The above brief summary of some of the momentous events in the history of the freedom movement in India during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth shows that the nation was shaken rudely into a realization of the need for complete break from foreign rule only by the drastic measure of the Partition of Bengal in 1905. But the first evidence of Nivedita’s musings on the question of political freedom for India appears in her letters of 1901 itself.

It was becoming clearer to her every day that the Indians were as yet like men in dreams. They were not awake – they did not know to what end their dormant powers might be directed. Day by day the conviction grew in her that it was her mission to awaken them (Letters 1: 457). And in this great task of national awakening, Indian women were not to be left out. “Is it not rather by taking the national consciousness of the women like that of the men, and getting it towards greater problems and responsibilities that one can help? … I think my task is to awake a nation, not to influence a few women” (Letters 1: 482-83).

Barbara Foxe explains this significant change in Nivedita’s perception of her role in India from an educator to one who would show India ‘how to save herself’ (Letters 1: 436) in the following significant words:

[Nivedita wanted to act] like the Hindu mother who sends her sons out to battle, acting as their inspiration rather than their leader … Somebody had to rouse the nation. Was she to be the one? Her entire nature fitted her for it; all the ‘fighting Irish’ in her was awake; she had already proved that she could rouse large Hindu audiences to enthusiasm; she had the undoubted asset, in India, of being a disciple of their much-loved leader; she was a woman and nun, and therefore a mother-figure and liable to be treated with respect; she was a member of the ruling nation by birth, who had become totally a Hindu in thinking and loyalties; that in itself was enough to bring them rallying to her cause. (127-28)
Henceforth Nivedita was accorded by the people of India the same love and honour as was accorded to a national leader, for it came to be known throughout the country that she had a vision for India's future that even the most daring among the Indian patriots did not as yet have. In her lectures and writings Nivedita spoke the one message of the freedom and regeneration of Mother India, towards the achievement of which Indians had to assimilate the ideals of nationality, civic responsibility, national education and elevation of women and the people; they heard from her invigorating new doctrines of dynamic orthodoxy, aggressive Hinduism, above all Dharma as national righteousness.

Barbara Foxe demonstrates in her biography of Nivedita that she was both a woman of ideas and a woman of action. She could work tirelessly during famine, flood or plague and could also be absorbed in reflections on sociological, political, scientific, philosophical and spiritual matters and storm the country with her lecture tours, giving inspiring speeches or enduring writing:

She had always been a woman who loved ideas. Practical as she was, and much as she enjoyed vigorous action, her energy poured into ideas as well. Throughout her life in England, discussion groups had sprung up wherever she went, and her friendship with men of ideas as well as men of action were already beginning to make her known in liberal, political, and philosophical circles. ... She was unable in England to be accepted as an 'ideas woman', for this was unfashionable. She might have been acceptable as an 'unpractical intellectual', which she was not; or as a practical woman of simple faith who worked for humanity, but left the thinking to men; which, also, she was not. (91)

It is this balanced development of hand, heart and head, an ideal blend of feeling and action, in Nivedita that enabled her to be a champion of the Indian people during a crucial period in the nation's struggle for independence. It is in the
light of the above fact that the significance of Nivedita’s work and writings are to be evaluated.

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Nivedita’s creed may be termed spiritualised politics\(^1\). Of course she never directly took part in politics, as did Annie Besant\(^2\), that other Irish lady who worked selflessly for India’s independence and reconstruction. It was politics only in so far as it had to deal with political problems like dealing with a foreign ruler from whom independence had to be wrested. But in its direct message to the masses it was more a spiritually oriented national reconstruction programme, drawing heavily on India’s spiritual and philosophical basis, and applying principles derived from modern knowledge like sociology and history. This is the perennially relevant message of Sr. Nivedita to all the generations of Indians. Patriotism will be a very poor word to reflect the fervour, the sense of religious dedication and the sincerity and fearless readiness to work for Mother India that Nivedita meant by the word ‘Nationality.’

An Indian fired by the spirit of nationality will believe that India is one; to him national unity will be a living presence, not an abstract truth, living in the common home and the common interest. The achievements of the past, in religion, spirituality and intellect, great as they are, will be recreated in the present as nationality. His belief in the past glory of his Mother India will translate itself as work for a future of a greater glory. He is not desirous of the pleasant. Such a one will be prepared to accept sorrow or shame for the Mother. He is content to serve Her (CW 3: 205).

Nivedita offers a vital re-interpretation of dharma as national righteousness. It is “the substance, the self-ness of things and of men.” She tells us how this dharma works in the lives of men. “Dharma makes us the toys of the great world
forces. Do we desire to be other? It makes us as dead leaves borne onwards by the
furious tempests of the conscience. Is there a higher lot? Instruments of ideas; used,
ot using; ... resting not, fearing not, embracing ecstasy at the heart of despair” (CW
3: 418). Dharma traditionally interpreted includes the social conception of law and
conduct and worship. It is the living principle that binds people together – “the
union of traditions, common customs, loyalty and understanding that together make
of society an organic or religious unity” (CW 3: 485). It is in this sense that
Nivedita translated the word “dharma” as national righteousness. If on the personal
level dharma is virtue, on the national level it is the moral power and force of the
people to be united in the choice of the good, the right and the just in moments of
national crisis. For to nations as to individuals character is of the utmost
importance. In the words of Nivedita, “unless a nation be literally sodden with its
religion, it is bound, when the opportunity comes, to throw it away in favour of self-
interest. And this is the defeat of civilization (CW 3: 466) (emphasis in the original).
The devotee of the motherland who is imbued with this sense of national
righteousness will, instead of ringing the temple bells at evening, turn to revive a
dying industry. Instead of altars he will build factories and universities. In this great
sacrifice to the nation “fighting is worship as good as praying. Labour is offering as
acceptable as Ganges water. Study is austerity more costly and more precious than
fasts. Mutual aid is better than any Puja” (CW 3: 467). In other words, all the
diligence and application that a virtuous and industrious people can pour on their
chosen mission in the service of the motherland is national righteousness. Regarded
in this light, all work is sacred, as it is devoid of selfishness, the chief of sins. When
all the people of a nation have a true understanding of this national righteousness
their lives will be transformed and a new civilization will be born. Then to Mother
India each one of her children will bring an offering of their loving thought, their
labour and their very lives. Welcoming such a new era, Nivedita observes hopefully,
“and the new age shall have added to the children of the motherland the race of the saints of the market-place and the field, the heroes of the civic and the national life” (CW 3:468).

National righteousness is the basic principle that any people may apply to their nation. It refers to the state of civilization attained by a people and so has universal applicability. When applied to Indians, Nivedita says national righteousness will take the form of aggressive Hinduism. The West has traditionally understood the Hindu to be the mild Hindu. But to Nivedita it is no virtue to be mild when the nation is in the grip of the organized exploitation of an imperial country. What is needed is aggression. The gentle and trustful hospitality of Indians to the ever so many foreigners who came to their country under various guises as travellers, students, and conquerors was misunderstood by the West to be weak effeminacy and it is this idea of good-natured inefficiency that was meant when it characterized the Hindus as “mild.” And speaking in their terms Swami Vivekananda had declared that the mild Hindu had become the wild Hindu. His disciple has given an original reformulation of this message of power going out to conquer: “Aggression is to be the dominant characteristic of the India that is today in school and class-room - aggression, and the thought and ideas of aggression. Instead of passivity, activity; for the standard of weakness, the standard of strength; in place of a steadily-yielding defence, the ringing cheer of the invading host” (CW 3: 492-93). Going out to conquer, whom? Not any alien nation but one’s own inner self. For Hinduism has never thought of itself in the light of conquering others. Nivedita calls the instinct to conquer others the tribal morality of a people who think they have a right “to extirpate, in the name of this morality, not only the people of other tribes but also their gods!” (CW 3: 480) She is happy that India has never yielded to
this tribal morality. Yet it has to have the energy and the drive of a conqueror. This principle of conquest will make Hinduism aggressive. In this new avatar Hinduism is no longer the preserver of Hindu custom but the creator of Hindu character. The aggressive Hindu has to wage a war against deep-seated tamasic tendencies that make him mistake laziness and defeat for renunciation and exalt weak selfishness as desire for salvation. Instead he will overcome the thirst for mukti and realize that to protect another is infinitely greater than to attain salvation (CW 3: 495).

Once having conquered the realms within, the aggressive Hindu can turn his gaze outward; but even here it is not for any physical conquest of another’s land or wealth. With her fine sense of history, Nivedita shows how, from the year 1858 onwards - when the Indians were first united in rebellion against the foreign Government - the process of assimilation of the modern consciousness had started in India. Physical and geographical unification of the entire earth through empires, advance of science, mechanization and accuracy and efficiency overtaking human consideration - these according to Nivedita characterize the modern epoch (CW 3: 498). It is a coming to terms with the true significance of the modern era that the Hindus have to achieve. It is nothing less than an achievement because the spirit of modernism is directly opposed to theocratic consciousness, which has been India’s all these centuries. This coming to terms with the present at the world level is nothing short of a conscious, intelligent self-adjustment to a situation of threatening power, which will swallow one if one is not endowed with the power to take it on equal terms. Nivedita points out that in this era when advances in knowledge as well as advances in mechanization are rapid, ‘provincialism’ is a sin (CW 3: 499). Aggressive Hinduism will endow the Indian with the power to overcome this sin, by enabling him to have “the realization of the national idea, [which] must be realized everywhere in the world idea” (emphasis in the original). In this conquest of knowledge the aggressive Hindu with a modern consciousness
should be ready to “break through any barrier of custom.” It is possible that Nivedita had in mind the Hindu belief that to cross the seas is sacrilege. Now, of course, such a belief is no longer held by the majority of the Hindus. But Nivedita was not unaware of the danger in this injunction. Custom may be broken for selfish reasons or to serve the desire for enjoyment. Warning against this danger, Nivedita says that only through a perfect realization of his own nationality can one win “cosmo-nationality” or a sense of humanity and that before embarking upon custom-breaking one should have achieved the real purpose of custom, namely, creation of character (CW 3: 500).

An expression of this cosmo-nationality is the development of comparative studies in all fields of knowledge. And India has not proved her worth in this area with her contribution to world knowledge. The reason is not far to seek. Nivedita points out: “Indian people as a whole had been as men walking in a dream ... without power to react freely against conditions” (CW 3: 501). But she has tremendous hope in the Indian people and is assured that all this inertia, lack of originality and confusion will be left behind the moment Indians consciously adopt an aggressive outlook, that is, an attitude of eager willingness to take up the responsibility for Indianising India, for organizing national thought, for making policies and programmes for our welfare. Nivedita perceives great hope for India when the whole nation is vowed to the task of bringing about a change in perception and a vigilance and readiness to act.

Indian writers and thinkers are no doubt making the Indian presence felt in global contexts in certain intellectual areas. But it is only the success in the all-important but necessarily difficult and complex process of Indianising India or “decolonising” the Indian mind that would mean real victory for India in the eyes of Nivedita. India must be said to be still making experiments and is still only
stumbling and fumbling about; Indians are yet to acquire a robust conviction that
their ancestors were more wise in certain attitudes to life, and more successful in
certain experiments with life, that they, the modern-day Indians, have more to learn
from their worthy ancestors than from any other sources. Indians have not made
themselves sufficiently Indian and sufficiently aggressive in Nivedita’s sense before
they could think of assimilating Western attitudes. It is here that the principle of
dynamic orthodoxy has much to contribute.

To the pure theory of national righteousness and its application in aggressive
Hinduism, Nivedita adds the action plan of dynamic orthodoxy. Dynamic orthodoxy
is her programme for India for a meaningful relation to her great past in order to be
inspired to understand, assimilate and activate the forces of the present, to create a
greater future. As Swami Lokeswarananda comments aptly, Nivedita urged “the
country to shed its sense of defeatism and proceed with its programme of
reconstruction entirely on national lines, [and in this she] used her superb intellectual
gifts to great effect” (NCV 15).

In all her lectures and writings Nivedita exhorted Indians to realize that they
are a mighty people, whose customs are great and require no apology. The one duty
before Indians was to learn their strength and as a result of that self-understanding to
strive mightily in that strength.

In matters religious and social, Nivedita constantly reminded Indians that
they had nothing to learn from the West. This was no flattery; Nivedita was only
infusing self-confidence into a people who had been told by the foreigners that their
fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers were fools who had no civilization.
If, earlier, she had to defend Indian customs and practices to the West, now she had
to keep reminding Indians how great their past was. “The Indian people have heard, so far, of nothing but their weaknesses. The time has now come when they should meditate on their own strength and proceed to prove it” (CW 4: 277) (emphasis in the original). This had to be her approach not only to raise the Indians who were abject in their lack of self-esteem but also to dissuade those misguided Indians who were heading for an uncritical admiration and adoption of Western ideas and customs. Thus we find her exhorting the women of India not to abandon their original cultural values or imitate the West:

I urge each of you to study the grand literatures of your East in preference to the literatures of the West. Your literature will uplift you. Cling to it. Cling to the simplicity and sobriety of your domestic lives. Keep its purity as it was in the ancient times and as it still exists in your simple homes. Do not let modern fashions and extravagances of the West and its modern English education spoil your reverential humility, your lovable domestic ties. (CW 2: 461-62)

If Indians are neither to imitate the West nor to unintelligently continue the past, what should they be at? Nivedita infuses new thought and strength when she tells them how they have to find, in their own stock of ideas, that one which would enable them to meet the foreign nation on its own terms. Compassion for the suffering of the masses, shraddha or faith in the nation’s destiny, readiness to lay down one’s life if necessary for the nation, true understanding of and pride in the past, unflinching devotion to the work on hand - on and on goes the Sister’s earnest enumeration of the qualifications of a true patriot (CW 2: 466). And an Indian with such possessions of the hand, heart and head – what is he to do with them? Nivedita answers:

What then is the task before us? Our task is to translate ancient knowledge into modern equivalents. We have to clothe the old strength in a new form. The new form without the old strength is nothing but a mockery; almost
equally foolish is the savage anachronism of an old-time power without fit expression (CW 3: 502).

This generalized suggestion for action is further developed into a detailed blueprint for a rebuilding of the Indian nation: in the realms of ideals, the Indians should explore new conceptions of life and duty and freedom; of citizenship; of love and friendship. "A history of India is to be created in living terms. ... a history that is "humanized, emotionalized, made the trumpet voice and evangel of the races that inhabit India" (CW 3: 502). Great literatures, the Sister desires, have to be created in each of the vernaculars, which will constitute the material for effective education of the women. Art must be reborn, not the miserable travesty of would-be Europeanism then in vogue. And in all this the conscious aim must be two-fold: "not only to utter India to the world, but also to voice India to herself" (CW 3: 504).

Nivedita illustrates what she means by dynamic orthodoxy. In opposition to the process of decay that started in her days in the form of new standards of comfort like chairs instead of mats to sit on in houses, soap, pen, paper, mill goods in textiles and manufactured goods in numerous other household articles, orthodox people considered it vulgar to give a piece of English cotton as wearing apparel to a friend. But this kind of orthodoxy sounds mere prejudice. It would be dynamic orthodoxy according to the Sister if all Indians, by a willing and concerted effort, decided to use only that which the Indian people can make. In other words, swadeshi is orthodoxy as well as economy suited to the modern needs at the same time.

But this might have been true of the India of Nivedita’s times but today Indians ordinarily not only have a craze for foreign made goods but, where they choose to be swadeshi, they have managed to be swadeshi without at all being orthodox. Westernisation is silently and successfully corrupting all walks of life that
a stage has come when those aspects of Western civilization which are diametrically opposed to the theocratic or the spiritual consciousness of the Indian civilization are rapidly being internalized. A bizarre example that would make Nivedita faint were she to come alive now is that recently a beauty contest had been held in Mumbai exclusively for married women! Of course this is the already Westernized Indians confirming their deIndianisation. The majority of Indian women are still untouched by such vulgarities. But the international TV channels, controlled by America or Europe, display many culture forms native to the West as being natural and harmless for every one that it may not take a long time for such things to become more common among the unwary Indians. Even now beauty contests are becoming part of the cultural programmes in many a school and college! But it is in these times of the lowering of moral standards that Nivedita’s message becomes all the more relevant and needs to be taken to all.

To conquer this danger Nivedita suggests that India understand that the West conquers the East as long as the latter shuns it as contamination or accepts it as a bribe. The beauty contests for married women and schoolgirls are exactly one such bribe. “One needs to know,” as Swamini Pramananda observes, “where universality of truth and vision lie and where it is meaningful to bring in certain specifics of time, place and history”(13). In other words, Indians should be vigilant to distinguish between Western concepts and cultural forms that they would do well to understand and adopt and those they would be critical of, in the light of their history and culture.

In the realm of intellect, the Sister’s answer is that the already keenly logical Indian mind should set about the task of grasping and pursuing Western science for its own sake. India must produce a great Indian school of science. Whether independent Indian schools of science are created or not, research activity is being carried out in various branches of science in India. Indian scientists are being
accepted all over the world as efficient in their chosen fields. Nivedita says that the
development of mechanical skill should be only an incidental result of such research
in theoretical knowledge carried out in India itself and never as its goal. Otherwise,
the Sister warns, the danger of mercenary science that Indians of earlier generations
successfully avoided would engulf the present generation.

As another instance of dynamic orthodoxy, Nivedita points out that when
India enters upon the mechanical era freely, that is, on her own footing and not in
imitation of the West, she will “restore to the factory hand those human qualities and
ethical prerogatives which in the West he tends more and more to lose” (CW 2: 80).

Nivedita finds another field where dynamic orthodoxy may operate in the
social institution of family in India. In the erstwhile joint families of India,
household duties occupied so much of the time of the women that it did not leave the
women free for a civic life. Now in the breaking up of the joint family (which had
started in Nivedita’s time) into nuclear ones, women should be able to channellise
the energy saved from household responsibility to be diverted to national and
communal responsibilities.

Every ritual, every sacrament, is full of unwritten history and the fertile and
ever original imagination of Nivedita finds here an opportunity: the fact behind these
rituals and sacraments should be delved into and the direct and simple knowledge be
made available to the people. This will “fulfill orthodoxy and carry it to its highest
power” (CW 2: 81). Other more serious areas for the working of the dynamic
orthodoxy are education, and the improvement of women and the people. Each
deserves full-fledged treatment and will be dealt in some detail a little later.
“Cities are the schools of Nationality, even as a nation is made up of all its citizens” (CW 4: 207). This is the first principle in Nivedita’s credo of nationality. Citizenship or the civic ideal needs to be understood as the training ground of the higher goal of nationality. For learning to follow the civic and national principles is the sure way of conserving the theocratic achievements of our forefathers, as civic ideals foster self-organization and mutual aid, which alone, avers Nivedita, will give the Indians the competency “to deal with the modern world and all its forces of aggression” (CW 4: 209). The task of creating a strong sense of nationality based on civic ideals is not impossible for Indians, hopes Nivedita, because Indian history, literature, traditions and customs abound in the elements of civic and national ideals. All that is needed is that Indians should understand the need for a national consciousness and the method of achieving it. Of the two national epics, the Mahabharata is pervaded by a sense of nationality while the Ramayana abounds in the civic sense. In the Ramayana the scene where Hanuman contends with the woman who guards the city of Lanka, saying “I am the city of Lanka” (CW 4: 210) is remarkable for Nivedita because she finds captured here the fundamental need of the civic spirit, namely, thinking of one’s city “as a being, a personality, sacred, beautiful, and beloved. This, to Rama and his people, was Ayodhya. This, to Ravana and his, was Lanka” (CW 4: 210). The city as a symbol of the unity of its citizens is “more than the aggregate of the homes that compose it” (CW 4: 211). To deserve the name citizens, the people occupying a city are to transcend all other units that have claimed their loyalty so far like family, caste, religion, race, language, and sex. Not that these are to be eschewed. They cannot and need not; but Nivedita says that they must all feed the sense of civic unity which will in turn lead to national unity. “Henceforth, all born of one birth-place are brethren. Henceforth we are neither Mussalman(sic) nor Hindu; neither orthodox nor reformed; henceforth we are all
Indian, all workers together for the Swadesh, sons of a common motherland” (CW 4: 215).

In this conception of civic and national ideal mutual co-operation plays a very important part. By a sharp contrast in comparability, Nivedita points out that if empire represents the combination of the few for the exploitation of the many, nationality, as its antithesis, demands, the co-operation of all for the equal good of each (CW 4: 215). Libraries, reading rooms, concert rooms, lecture halls – all such facilities are forms of self-organization and civic ownership which, Nivedita points out, are the obvious solution to the problems created by the costliness of modern facilities (CW 4: 217). While clarifying what the elements of the civic ideals are, Nivedita is glad to note that there is many an element in Indian life that comes close to the civic ideals. But it is a simplified form of the civic that one finds here (CW 4: 230). The union of people is based on religion or caste. This renders the unity communal and parochial rather than civic. On the contrary Nivedita reiterates that the ideal city is the meeting place of people of all religions, castes, occupations and even nationalities. Nivedita contrasts the basic element of unity in India with the civic. “The fractional unit … is not the civic unity” (CW 4: 231). But India is not altogether bereft of the true civic sense. Nivedita is happy that in Indian townships, when distinguished guests are welcomed Muslim as well as Hindu citizens are included. Nivedita repudiates the general impression that India is sectarian. “India is supposed to be sectarian, but no one ever heard of the members of one sect trying to exclude those of another from collective action! In such mutual courtesy and recognition, we have the largest possible basis for civic self-realization of the highest order” (CW 4: 232).

Citizenship does not merely lie in the citizens doing all the work of the city. It is also a coming together for rejoicing (CW 4: 232). In this respect the religious
processions and the marriage processions of Indian towns and villages seem to Nivedita to embody the true civic spirit. “The whole Indian idea of enjoyment is communal, and even at a marriage, processions form the typical delight.” But to “the India-obsessed Sister” the latest and most symbolic of the idea of city and nationality are those processions in which the members intone “the sacred address to the motherland, Vande Mataram” (CW 4: 233). The dream of her heart is that “To Indian hearts, Hindu and Mohammedan (sic) alike, high caste and lowly-born, woman and man, there will be no symbol so holy as, firstly their motherland, and secondly, their city…” (CW 4: 234).

With a sense of mission in giving to the Indian people the one word “nationality”, Nivedita writes that “the most important problem before [India] is the creation of a national idea.” But the creation of the national idea must be preceded by an earlier “awakening of a sense of history…. [which] reveals the essential features of the past and gathers from them the prophecy of the future” (CW 4: 257). For a strong, conscious, national life, love of place, pride of birth and confidence in the past culture are not sufficient, though they are all constituent elements of the national life. But what is more important is that in addition to all these there must be the irresistible instinct of co-operation, the tight-knit discipline of a great brotherhood.

Moving on from national life to the making of national history, Nivedita arrives at the creative principle at work in great imaginative historians, who are “great singers of the song of a people’s evolution” (CW 4: 257).

History will be chaotic, according to Nivedita, if it does not recognize the central laws of the communities or periods it seeks to narrate. Studying India in the
light of the national idea, it is for the historian to discover these guiding ideas; his task is not the massing of details. For, it is the coordinating influence of the recognition of guiding principles that is important to the writing of the true history. After the recognition of the guiding principles, the most potent factor is “a trained sense of contrast” (CW 4: 258). The idea of continuity comes next. The ability to perceive contrasts and continuities should be directed at the visualizing of the modern epoch, whose significant prime distinction is that “the era is one of consolidation.... of internationalism” (CW 4: 259). Having recognized the distinctive features of the modern period, the historian must also be able to analyse the series of events which have brought about this complex result. Nivedita’s clear analytical power throws light on how the rapidity of locomotion and discovery of the mechanical uses of steam and electricity are the causes of internationalism (CW 4: 260). Considering the fact that this was written almost hundred years back, one cannot but recognize the central truth of this exposition of the causes of modern internationalism. In these days of globalization we would only add the electronic mode of communication that has led to the world becoming a global village. The dangers of the modern epoch according to Nivedita are that it is “at bottom the mechanical epoch. The machine is its ideal; the exploiting of increasing areas of force, its dream. In constitution and effort it is not so much immoral as un-moral”(CW 4: 260). Its points of greatness are: (1) organized knowledge in science; (2) organization of travel; (3) organization of information as can be seen in the various print and electronic media (Nivedita of course, mentions the daily press). The social effect of this advance is that the power of the priesthood of olden days is reduced to a very great extent. But at the same time she warns us that we should be wary of the modern priesthoods in the person of journalists. Seeing the power of today’s media to make or mar a man’s reputation, one would readily agree with her. Apart from the media, Nivedita notes the significance of the shift from the lives of
saints to the dictionaries and encyclopedias in the formation of libraries (CW 4: 260). The requirement of this external internationalism is an intellectual synthesis.

Nivedita does not lose sight of her original objective of setting forth the features of the historical sense required by Indians. The necessity of specialism in the visualizing of the modern epoch is that it gives one the power to concretize other periods – the other periods in history being “in Europe, the Classical, the Medieval and the Renaissance; in India, the Buddhist, the Puranic and the Mogul” (CW 4: 261).

Now follows a brief description of the two great periods of nationality in Indian history which, according to Nivedita, are the Buddhist and the Mohammedan. Throughout her writing career, Nivedita had spelt out her conclusion that Buddhism was no new sect in India but only a nationalized, democratized version of Hinduism. Nivedita propounds the theory that Hinduism as it was could not have created a nationality because of its tendency to the exclusiveness of the Brahmin caste, though Nivedita is quite in agreement with the fact that the ideal of the Brahmin caste, namely learning and austerity, are naturally and rightfully the central type of Hinduism as well (CW 4: 262). In one of her beautiful axiomatic expressions Nivedita catches the boon and bane that Brahminism is: “learning and austerity are the characteristic virtues of the ideal. Exclusiveness is its characteristic weakness and vice” (CW 4: 262). Nivedita points out that only when there is a counter-centre to Brahminism can Hinduism become national. And this counter-centre was found in the personality of the Buddha.

This view of Nivedita (that a counter-center to Brahminism is needed for an all-round development of the nation) may be misread as being self-contradictory when read side by side with her spirited defence of the caste system elsewhere. But
analysis will reveal that there is no contradiction. The position of Indian women and the question of caste were the two subjects that missionaries attacked most virulently. In order to justify the continuance of their imperial practices in India, the British administrators and their collaborators - the missionaries and the oriental scholars - needed to convince themselves and their fellow countrymen at home that Indian society was rampant with many evils and hence projected a negative image of the Indian religious and social institutions, customs and beliefs. They found in caste a fertile field in this respect and missionaries were never tired of painting it as an unmitigated evil (CW 4: 518-27). It is to answer their charges and present matters in the right perspective that Nivedita took up the task of explaining the salutary features of Indian social institutions like caste as she perceived them. And on the Indian side, she felt that Indians themselves needed to regain their self-respect by reviving their faith in their ancient customs. But if the world needed to know the truth about India, if Indians had a greater need for self-discovery, it could not be achieved with any half truths. As one committed to truth, to the Indian cause and to justice on the British side, Nivedita knew well that to be fair to all concerned, she should bring to light not only the praiseworthy aspects of Indian life but those aspects of it which deserved to be criticized. Hence she touched upon what seemed to her to be its vices or shortcomings. Thus in her observation about the virtue and vice of Brahminism Nivedita was just being logical and true to fact and not self-contradictory. If the missionaries found caste to be unmitigated vice, Nivedita would not go to the other extreme of claiming that there is no evil side to it at all. The same impartiality can be seen in her views about the virtues of Indian women as well as her sense that Indian women needed modern education that would not endanger the old insistence on character. As pointed out earlier, she was a champion for truth and not a salesperson for India.
To continue our main point. After the advent of Islam even this could no longer be sufficient. To the ethos of Hinduism was combined the Islamic ideal of brotherhood of Man in the reign of Akbar and Shah Jahan, who became the representative figures of the new conception of nationality. And in this survey of Indian history the function of the present era according to Nivedita is the sweeping away of the last trace of religious and social prejudice, after which the idea of nationality itself, “pure, radiant and fearlessly secular,” is to emerge in triumph (CW 4: 262).

This new nationality will thus be democratic in the opportunity it gives to the people. This is most welcome. But Nivedita does not like the form that the democratic spirit seemed inclined to take - in imitation of the West - “mutual recrimination and mutual attack.” Seeing the functioning of the Indian National Congress from close quarters as a sympathetic observer, Nivedita found the members engaged in turning their weapons on each other instead of on a common foe, which she felt was only waste of time and ammunition. In the context of the early twentieth century struggle for freedom, Nivedita wanted India to realise that “hers is not a movement of partisan politics at all, but a national, that is to say, a unanimous progression” (CW 4: 271). Nivedita does not mince matters when she talks about the real character of Indian politics as being largely imitative, which is apt to imitate the wrong things.

Nivedita sets Indians in the right perspective from which to observe the national movement in India. The Congress is “not a political or a partisan movement, but the political side of a national movement” (CW 4: 272), which is a very different thing. In the present crisis, then, the task of the Congress is “the
education of the whole nation, in all its parts, in a common sentiment of unity with each other and with their soil” (CW 4: 273).

The task of national education, which cannot wait for the schoolmaster, is to "nationalize and vocalize two great areas of moral force that are at present nationally almost mute - these two areas are the women and the peasants” (CW 4: 273). The national movement should produce and train 'missionaries' who will be dedicated to the education of the masses and the women, by going to the villages and collecting them, “entertain them in the garden, in the courtyard, in the verandahs, beside the well, and under the village tree with stories, songs and descriptions, of which the refrain is always India! India! India!” Nivedita visualizes how through such constant nationalizing activity through the length and breadth of the country the one thought that would vibrate would be “This and no other is our Motherland! We are Indians, every one!” (CW 4: 274)

These are nation-makers dedicated to the task of nationalization; that is, creating national consciousness among the people. At the other extreme will be the original workers in science, in history, in art, in letters. It will be a race for excellence in which these workers of Mother India are sworn never to allow a European to outdo them.

The relation between the majority of the people of the nation-making generation to these missionaries and architects of the national consciousness must be, Nivedita says, like the relation of the Grihastas to the Sanyasis or the householders to the monks. The old dharma asked the Grihasta to support the Sanyasi by offering him food and other hospitality. Similarly in the developing new social context people should, “by their sympathy and silent support,” make the nation-making process possible. For this the motto should be “Mutual aid, Self-
organization and Co-operation” (CW 4: 274). In more plain terms, it is the duty of the Grihasta to achieve worldly success so as to undertake the financing of – Nivedita has quite an impressive list of activities to be financed by the Grihasta – “national defence associations, farmer’s aid organizations, co-operative credit enterprises” (CW 4: 275), which alone will form the movement for Indian nationality, gradually transforming itself into the Indian nation.

Reading these musings of the Sister on the task before the Indian National Congress, one realizes her acute political and historical sense. The history of India’s freedom struggle as led by Mahatma Gandhi and the sacred sacrifice at the altar of the Nation made not only by the elite leaders but also by women and the masses of the nation, seem to be epitomized in the words of Nivedita years before Gandhiji came on the scene. But the political scene India presents today seems to spell disaster for the country as the Congress or the other parties consider themselves only as political and partisan, having a divine right to enjoy the benefits that would accrue to them when governance of the country comes into their hands. Nation-making seems to have been forgotten by them. And though the external danger of foreign rule is no longer there, the nation has still the internal problem of lack of unity and coordinated work for the recreating of the glory of the Motherland. Nivedita’s words “mutual aid, self-organisation and co-operation” still have the ring of urgency and supreme relevance as when they were uttered almost hundred years ago.

As in the case of the invigorating ideas of nation-making, so in those regarding Swadeshi, Nivedita’s utterances have a power to touch the present day conditions and seem to offer the only solution to the problems that are slowly and imperceptibly eating into the vitals of the nation today. “It is the duty of the Indian
people to refuse to the very utmost of their power to participate in that conspiracy of modern trade by which their own country and their own people are being impoverished in an accumulating ratio" (CW 4: 276). These are words uttered by Nivedita hundred years ago. But their tone of moral urgency and economic realism are indisputably relevant to the India of today. This refusal to participate in the conspiracy of modern trade is what is exactly needed today when economic giants and superpowers like the United States of America, in the name of GATT, are slowly bringing many smaller nations of the world under a kind of economic imperialism, a disguised variant of the imperialism of Europe of the last few centuries. In this context if India is vigilant, it can not only save itself but show the world a way out.

To Nivedita the swadeshi movement "is an opportunity for the Indian people to make themselves respected by the whole world". It is "strong, intelligent and united action", because throughout the swadeshi movement, which she calls "Swadeshi Tapasya," "the note of manliness and self help is sounded" (CW 4: 276). Nivedita points out the inevitability of the swadeshi duty in her times, because that is the only weapon now left to the Indians to show resistance to the foreign ruler and the only mode of expression for the impulse for self-preservation (CW 4: 277).

According to Nivedita the swadeshi movement is a rousing call to the moral instinct in the Indians, who are prepared for it by generations of austere and clean living by their ancestors. But seeing today vulgar consumerism taking hold of the imagination of the people, one wonders if the nation still holds the moral power for simplicity and the spirit of abstention. Nivedita wants Indians to realize and prove the superiority of the poverty of the motherland, over the luxurious magnificence of Europe. Nivedita relies on the moral strength of Indians of her times who did not fail her - as they were "educated in a system of cooperation for self-sacrifice," while
"I can teach a man to draw and paint, but I cannot make him an artist or a genius!"
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The practical shape this love of the land is to take is a creative involvement in the destiny of the common man. In the powerful words of Nivedita “The man who has not entered into the whole culture of his epoch can hardly create a supreme expression of that culture. The man whose own life is not tense with the communal struggle cannot utter to those about him the inner meaning of their secret hope.”

Nivedita voices a fundamental truth when she says that unity of ideal, of a common national consciousness, permeating all classes of people alike, will also carry forward on its high tide the artist in his obscure corner (CW 3: 13). And the artist, now a high priest of Nationality, is to find for the theme of his art that which will rouse the love and aspiration of the people. The daily life of the Indians will itself offer innumerable opportunities for artistic expression. It will be noticed that the more deeply involved in the subject Nivedita becomes, the greater the intensity and greater the tone of a prescriptive idealism in her utterances.

In enlisting the services of the artist in the nationalist cause Nivedita is not alone. Visionaries with a message for humanity look to art for a proper vehicle. Moreover Nivedita was herself a connoisseur of art and, together with E.B. Havell, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, worked for the revival of Indian art. She inspired many an artist to give up being imitative of the West and look to their nation’s past for inspiration.
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the opposite was true of the West - who were “educated in a system of cooperation for self-interest” (CW 4: 278). Powerful words that catch the spirit of materialism and suggest the antidote to that moral disease! But all is not dark in the present day India. In the spectacular success of the Self Help Group schemes\(^9\) introduced for the improvement of the rural women of India, we have a new variant of the swadeshi movement of a century ago. Nivedita’s identification with the masses of India is total and sincere: it is worth quoting in full her narration of an incident that moved her as an example of the power of the swadeshi movement to touch the lives of the poor. Today if we substitute the rural and urban poor women of India in the place of the original speaker, the sense of relief expressed by him will exactly represent that which is now felt by the women, who have found a solution to their woes in the Self Help Group Schemes.

Once Nivedita heard a Bengali Muslim addressing a crowd of his fellows. “Brothers,” he was saying,

\[\text{a while ago, we could not earn four annas}^{10}\text{ a day. You know that a man had to steal for his opium, and how many of us spend eight months of every year in prison, while our women ate outside their homes! But now, how everything is changed! Ten annas a day, with comfort and decency. No more stealing, no more prison, and our women cook for us and for themselves! (CW 4: 279)}\]

Moved by the fact that the earning of such a ridiculously small sum as ten annas should thrill a man, Nivedita cries in empathy: “Oh voice of the Indian People, voice of the downtrodden, voice of the ignorant and helpless, speak louder yet, that we, your own flesh, may hear your cry, and know your innocent gladness, and join our hands and hearts with yours, in a common suffering and a common love!” (CW 4: 280)
Rabindranath Tagore, the famous poet and visionary of Bengal, and a contemporary of Sr. Nivedita, called her ‘Lokamata,’ i.e. “Mother of the People” (Atmaprana 204). And Mahakavi Bharati, the nationalist poet of Tamil Nadu, and disciple of Nivedita, called her “Thai Nivedita” (Mother Nivedita) instead of the customary Sister Nivedita. And surely the blessings of Swami Vivekananda have fully borne fruit when he blessed her to have “the mother’s heart and the hero’s will.”

The swadeshi tapasya is nothing but Dharma as it brings food to the starving and gives the lazy an education in labour. And the fire of justice along with love of India must have so completely burnt out the last trace of the partisan spirit in her, if any, that Nivedita teaches Indians to cry with her “Let Manchester go! Let London go! It is for the Indian People to do their own duty” (CW 4: 281) (emphasis in the original). The effect of the swadeshi tapasya, set in motion by the people of East Bengal, and caught by Indians all over the country, is that it gives greater strength and faithfulness. A more tangible result is the inevitable economic prosperity of a nation, so far drained by the imperial machinery. The difficulties to be met and overcome in the swadeshi movement are, according to Nivedita, not moral, because Nivedita is confident that the Indian women and the priests have the moral strength accumulated by generations of simple living. The real difficulties lie in the fields of production and distribution. With her natural versatility coming to her aid, Nivedita goes into the minute details of the factors of successful production and distribution of swadeshi goods, with such enthusiasm and knowledge of the question in hand as equal her passionate advocacy of moral principles (CW 4: 282-84). Nivedita’s impassioned account of the swadeshi tapasya is to posterity an indisputable proof of the fact that the England-born Sister offered herself - with all her heart and with all her soul - as an oblation in the sacred flames of the altar of national righteousness in Bhārat.
All was grist that came to Nivedita’s mill, when the question on hand was the all-important nationality. She who saw the beauty and message of the Buddhistic art of the Ajanta and Ellora, who saw the definite hand of a nationalizing influence in the final recension of Mahabharata, and who waged a scholarly war with Western art historians who wished to establish Hellenic and Gandharan influence for Indian art, and succeeded in establishing that Indian art was Indian in origin – it will be hardly surprising to note that such a person as Nivedita who accomplished all these was convinced that art had a definite function in the shaping of Nationality.

The great school of symbolism that Hinduism is, Nivedita finds a world of opportunities in it for spreading the message of Nationality. Nivedita has great hopes about Indians’ fine taste. “Every peasant, every humblest bazaar-dweller understands and loves a picture, a pot, a statue, a decorative emblem of any sort. The culture of the eye is perfect in this land … and the ancient habit of image-worship has made straight and short and much-travelled the road from eye to heart” (CW 3: 5). Hence she is sure that art offers the opportunity of a great common speech and holds great possibilities in the forging of national consciousness. Therefore the reawakening of art in India is essential to the reconstruction of the motherland. In this reawakening of Indian art Nivedita wants artists to take their inspiration from the achievements of the past and employ fruitfully the traditional art conventions of the land. But these must be the vehicles of new themes and must assimilate new knowledge without degradation. And the Indian artist who is going to make his art a vehicle of a great message must be a poet, a dreamer, a prophet of the future. These are all qualifications of his technique. There is a greater qualification that he has to acquire; and according to Nivedita it is the love of the motherland. In one of her letters to Josephine MacLeod, Nivedita mentions her visit to an art school. There they say
“I can teach a man to draw and paint, but I cannot make him an artist or a genius!”

And my spirit laughed behind its mask of features and said, “Fools! but I CAN....”

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The phenomenon of nationalist movements in non-Western countries has been variously criticized by critics, both Western and non-Western alike. Some Western critics like Elie Kedourie condemn the nationalist movements of the colonized countries as imitations of Western political behaviour. Others like Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner consider nationalism as a form of political behaviour that has been made irrelevant by present day realities like modern economies, electronic communications and superpower military projection. Edward Said (from whose lucid analysis of culture and imperialism the above ideas have been taken) comments on these views as the cultural inability of the West to understand the truth that “formerly subject people are entitled to the same kind of nationalism as the more developed nations like, say, Germany or Italy” (Culture 262). There are also critics from those once colonized nations themselves who review the nationalist movements in their own nations. An example of such self-critical endeavour in India is that by Partha Chatterjee, a member of the subaltern studies group in India. Chatterjee observes that much nationalist thought in the nineteenth century “was born out of the encounter of a patriotic consciousness with the framework of knowledge imposed upon it by colonialism. It [led] inevitably to an elitism of the intelligentsia, rooted in the vision of a radical regeneration of national culture” (79). But Nivedita’s concept of nationality is not elitist, though it has much to draw from the national culture. “Rooted in the vision of a radical regeneration of national culture” it certainly is, and to be so is no discredit; but from the outset Nivedita considers the national movement as a movement of the people. In her conception nationality is that spirit of reverence to motherland based on a common national consciousness that transcends all elements of unity at the minor level like family, caste, race, religion, and language (CW 4: 212). It was Nivedita’s firm conviction
that Nationality is mainly the awakening of the women and the people, the subalterns in a patriarchal society. It is thus all-inclusive and far from elitist.

Edward Said speaks of the need for “new and imaginative reconceptions of society and culture that are required in order to avoid old orthodoxies and injustices,” once independence is achieved. In Nivedita’s concept of nationality this need is fully met by the principle of dynamic orthodoxy. Talking about Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social reformer of the early nineteenth century India who worked for the abolition of Sati, Said observes that the first intellectual stirrings against injustice included attention to the abused rights of all oppressed classes (Culture 263). It was not just reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy who spoke against the injustices perpetrated against women. There could not have been a severer critic than Swami Vivekananda in attacking the inhuman treatment meted out to the low caste people or the drastic need for changes in the lives of Indian women. And his disciple, who, while in England, had been an ardent advocate of reforms for the poor workers of the Wrexham coalmine (CW 5: 379–385, 416–424) or for women’s rights (CW 5: 386–411), was not blind to similar abuses in Indian society. In one of her talks in Madras, Nivedita refers, with dignified severity, to the social evil of untouchability:

to touch these people [the pariahs, the outcastes] seems to be such defilement that you have deliberately added to their degradation and unhappiness through unnumbered ages. ... you had been guilty of living in your own country as a foreigner. But ... the inner trend of the great civilization that has grown up on this different soil is something very different. There is nothing that Hinduism has recognized so clearly as the need to Hinduism of the lowest castes. (CW 2: 453)

Nivedita held that all exclusiveness is to be eschewed, and in the awakened Bhārata all alike are to enjoy the blessings of the mother country. The power to fight such evils as untouchability, while retaining the great ideals that the Indian
civilization has given to the world, must be fully exercised. Nivedita had nothing to
do with assertions of racial particularity or of solidarity without criticism.

Humanitarian scholars like Said are anxious that old colonial structures
should not be replaced by new exploitative structures (Culture 269). Nationalism
should not degenerate into nativism. The latter is a degenerate form of the national
spirit, which asserts a native past, narrative or actualITY that is unsullied and pre-
colonial. But the danger of nativism is that its essentializations “have the power to
turn human beings against each other” (276). As an antidote to this diseased mental
attitude, Said suggests that there are three possibilities. (1) the possibility of
discovering that the world is not constituted of warring essences; (2) universalism,
which is free from the self-righteous claims that none besides oneself has that
attribute; (3) the possibility of a nation moving beyond nativism without having to
abandon nationality. Nivedita’s theory of organic unity is only a variant on the first
possibility that clashes are not inevitable or essential to life on earth. In fact Nivedita
was an ardent advocate of the opposite view that it is mutual aid and cooperation
that can be a life-affirming principle. As to universalism, Swami Vivekananda’s one
mission in life was to preach unto mankind universal brotherhood and the divinity of
man. Nivedita’s dedication to India is a proof of that universalism of Swami
Vivekananda; she was deeply concerned with the moralization of international
relations and believed that true education must liberate the mind from all kinds of
parochialisms and have the universalizing effect on the mind of the educated. “There
is a level of achievement,” observes Nivedita in one of her papers on education,
“where all the educated persons of the world can meet, understand and enjoy each
other’s associations. This level is freedom. Intellectually speaking, it is Mukti” (CW
4: 353). As to the third remedy for nativism, her brand of nationality is already free,
from beginning to end, from all elements of nativism that Nivedita needs no such
assurances at all. Nivedita was a true humanist. And hence, though in the works of
Said, especially Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, there is no sign of the works of Sr. Nivedita being known among the numerous scholars and thinkers who find a place in them, his description of nationalism free from the poisonous influence of nativism exactly fits in with Nivedita’s humanistic interpretation of nationality.

At this stage, it will be helpful to bring in Frantz Fanon’s contribution to an understanding of the working of empires and how the colonized nations strive for freedom from the imperial mother countries. As John McLeod points out in his Beginning Postcolonialism, it can be said that along with Edward Said, Fanon taught critics to understand the “simultaneously candid and complex fact that empires colonise imaginations. Fanon shows how this works at a psychological level for the oppressed, while Said demonstrates the legitimation of Empire for the oppressor”(22). Deeply affected by his experience of racism at the hands of the French, Fanon became an active revolutionary and political ideologist with Marxist leanings. But underlying the apparent dissimilarities between Fanon, who was an angry protestors against the inhumanities of the French colonizer and Nivedita, who was herself a member of the colonizing Britain with a conscience, there may be found some striking affinities between the two. Both were intensely anti-colonial and anti-imperialist; both worked for the independence of their countries. Apart from these superficial points of oneness, there are the greater points of unity in some of the deep-rooted convictions of the two. In his work The Wretched of the Earth Fanon develops a theory of national consciousness and social consciousness and talks about the service of the past culture of a nation in national reconstruction, which remind one of similar ideas in Nivedita. Fanon advocates an approach to culture which is dynamic and responsive to historical circumstances which will result in a culture unique to the moment of production rather than a repetition of the pre-existing culture (McLeod 88). In Fanon’s view cultural inheritance remains a
fundamental resource in forging a national consciousness. Equally important is his view that a sense of collective action is fundamental to the sustenance of the nation. Fanon was deeply involved in the theory of the construction of national consciousness which according to him was inseparable from national culture. Fanon believed that in a true relationship to the past, inert cultural traditions will not be cherished simply as traditions. But there is a dynamic relationship between the cultural inheritance of the past and the people’s struggle against colonialism in the present, which will modify, reinterpret and re-form traditional culture at the service of the national consciousness (McLeod 87). Fanon also warns the people of the danger of the national consciousness ceasing to contribute actively to national life once independence is achieved. To avoid this danger Fanon proposes that national consciousness should be succeeded by that which he calls social consciousness.

In Nivedita’s programme for nationality the same emphasis on unity of purpose and action is heard. National consciousness according to her is a vivid sense of one’s rootedness in one’s motherland, before whose paramount importance every other social mode of unity like family, caste, language, race and creed pales into insignificance. Fanon’s idea of social consciousness takes the shape of civic responsibility in Nivedita’s programme. Again Nivedita’s concept of dynamic orthodoxy is echoed in Fanon’s desire to use culture in a creative way and not in an imitative or repetitive manner. Similar is the application of culture for political purposes by the political theorist Frantz Fanon. With these the similarities cease; but even as it is, it is remarkable that the two thinkers, differentiated as they were in time and circumstances of life (Nivedita lived from 1867 to 1911 mainly in England and India; Fanon from 1925 to 1961 mainly in France) had so much in common. And post-colonial theory and criticism, which is so prolific, has not taken notice of Nivedita. Her writings are marked by all the typical characteristics of post-colonial discourse: she is vividly aware of the inequities of the Empire like organized
exploitation of the colonised, the implanting of the inferiority complex in the soul of the colonised (to use a vivid expression of Fanon); the silent consensus of the people of the imperial mother country; the constant creation and circulation of false opinions about the 'other,' which are held tenaciously as ultimate truths in the European communities and the inhuman oppression and gross injustice done to the colonised. She also spoke for the subaltern. Her understanding of the modern epoch with its economic imperialism and worship of machine and science to the neglect of arts; her world sense or the understanding that nations are to unite in a common human purpose – in all this intellectual and deeply moral understanding of the human reality she is one with the best minds of the twentieth century. In short she is a thinker who is thoroughly 'post-colonial' in the heyday of colonialism, living and working in one of the biggest of empires, constantly striking back at the imperial mother country. Her vivid sense of history enabled her to see the truth that the imperial scholars will not do justice to the colonised nations whose history they wrote for their own purpose. Hence she constantly emphasised the need for a revisionist history by the so-called native people. In spite of such a deep involvement in the politics of the empire, she was truly international and humanitarian.

This is not to suggest that Nivedita was a post-colonial theorist like Edward Said or Frantz Fanon. As was pointed out in the first chapter and dealt with in detail in the beginning of the present, by nature she was intensely political in her consciousness, which was nurtured by her early upbringing by her grandparents (who were active participants in the Irish nationalist movement), and by her close association in her youth with Irish nationalists like Yeats. And by conscious choice she had united her life permanently with the destiny of the Indian nation, which was politically under the control of Britain.
In the circumstances it is to be expected that her political consciousness would inform all her ideas and activities for awakening a nation in which such a consciousness had not yet been roused. But what is striking in it is that it led to a perception of the situation whose keenness and accuracy on the one hand and broad sympathy on the other, along with an active idealism, would compel one to consider whether she is not a thinker and humanist worth the serious attention of intelligent readers with a sincere concern for the well-being of humanity. Nivedita’s insights into the political situation obtaining in India and Europe and her solutions to what she saw to be the problems are the results of keen observation of what was happening around her, of deep intellectual reflection, sustained by a rigorous scholarship in various fields13 enriched by a sublimation of her intensely loving feminine nature into an impersonal love of that part of humanity that manifested itself as India. No, she was not a theorist, but what the theory pointed to – a true humanist.

Nivedita was not the type of nun who would shut herself up in a cell and lose herself in ecstatic visions of the Divine. Before meeting Swami Vivekananda she had actively engaged herself in efforts to mitigate, in her own way, the problems of the poor people and women in contemporary England. She was fully aware of the efforts that were being made for women’s emancipation. She had contributed six papers on women’s rights to journals (as was mentioned in p.32 above), the general theme of which was the improvement of woman’s lot by the spread of education. Her attitude during her England days, which may be described as one of militant feminism, was well-known among the circle of her friends. One of them, Mr. Eric Hammond, wrote about her thus: “She appeared to find joy in stinging men with a lash of caustic criticism; in making them comprehend that in her consciousness,
women occupied a loftier level ... than man was destined to attain” (Hammond 557). Swami Vivekananda knew her attitude. Barbara Foxe explains this feminism of Margaret thus: “The cause of much of her championing of women and her bitterness against men in general ... was that she was unable in England to be accepted as an ideas woman” (91). But this attitude was active in her before she came to India. Indian women were to teach her a different lesson. All her writings bear testimony to the fact that her ideas underwent a sea change after her living in the orthodox quarters of Calcutta. In the past few decades Third World feminists have also expressed very definite views about women in the Indian society and hence it is quite relevant to see Nivedita’s views about Indian women in the light of feminist interpretation and show how her changed views were an illustration of her dynamic orthodoxy.

Ever since their origin, feminist movements all over the Western countries have been a fight for women’s rights. Feminism was, and still is, an assertion of women’s rights, of freedom of thought, speech and action independent of men. In the Indian context, a different scene is presented. Some of the rights like the right to property Indian women already enjoyed. Though the home was almost the only sphere of activity for the majority of Indian women, great women administrators, rulers, poets and saints were not in wanting in the Indian society. Some of the ancient rishis whose hymns were recorded in the Vedas were women and there were brahmavadinis or women who had not only attained to knowledge of Brahman or the Absolute Reality but were also capable of engaging people in disputations about brahmavidya. Gargi of Upanishadic fame was such a brahmavadini. Nivedita was untiring in her efforts to show that India was a land of great women.

As for the common run of women, she was not left in the lurch. Nivedita saw that in Indian households women were held in such respect that men did not do
anything without consulting their wives and mothers. Nobody would like to incur the displeasure of a woman; and in matters concerning the family men in general would never do anything contrary to the wishes of their wives. Nivedita recognized that women were honored in India. In one of the charges made against Indian women, missionaries quoted a few misogynistic verses to prove that Indians considered women as a gateway to hell. But feminist studies today show that it is the West that is groaning under the negative burden of such a view, whose origin is to be sought in the Judeo-Christian myth of woman being the cause of man’s fall (Singh 25). The mythological representation of woman in India on the other hand has always been one of life, prosperity, auspiciousness, beauty, love and truth. Learning, Prosperity, and Strength are personified as the Goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga. The Divine principle that sustains the universe is thought of as Mother (CW 2: 326). The entire universe is said to be the effect of the stirring of the feminine consciousness in the undifferentiated That (CW 1: 120).

Mythology may be grand. Ideals may be sublime. But what about reality, it may be asked. It is here that Nivedita comes out with her firm assertion that in India people from all classes, from one corner of the land to the other, honored womanhood in the reverence shown to the mother and in the general respect shown by men to women. She was too pragmatic to romanticise any non-existent virtue in the Indian society, for, that would help neither the Indian woman nor the West that denigrated her. Nivedita referred again and again to that touching scene in which she held in her arms a dying child of the slums, a plague-stricken boy of twelve, in the final stages of the virulent disease, who, even in the midst of the excruciating pain, cried, “Mataji! Mataji! Honored Mother!” (CW 2: 21) To Nivedita it was indisputable proof of the reality of the reverence in which India held the mother, among high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned.
Western feminists have always assumed the role of a fighter, a crusader for the cause of women. Woman is thought of as an object of victimisation, and naturally the feminist consciousness is one of opposition. Sushila Singh quotes Engels' view on marriage which he held to be “founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife” (65), and is characterised by “the familiar double standard which requires sexual fidelity from the woman but not from the man” (Singh 29). But from her close observation of the Hindu households of the nineteenth century India, Nivedita denies that there is any form of domestic slavery in India:

The lives of Indian women may be considered as a vast cooperation of the race to perform necessary labour, dignifying it meanwhile by every association of refinement, tenderness and self-respect. And it might also be claimed that the orthodox Hindu household is the only one in the world which combines a high degree of civilization with the complete elimination of domestic slavery (CW 2: 57) (emphasis added).

The implication of Engels' observation, to which feminists would readily agree, is that woman as wife was treated more or less like a slave, the purpose of whose existence was to do the household work for man. But Nivedita understands the allotment of all household work to the wife to be the wise division of labour arising out of the cooperation of the race. It is the “vast co-operation of the race” because Nivedita recognizes that in a society that is basically agrarian and that is characterized by settled peace, not much need arises for man to venture out as in a pastoral or sea-faring community. Similarly there is no opportunity for woman to have outward mobility either (CW 2: 66). Consequently all the work necessary to maintain the household was given to woman, while bringing in the sustenance was the responsibility of man. That this allocation of the household work did not enslave the Indian woman Nivedita indicates by observing that the work was dignified “by
every association of refinement, tenderness and self-respect.” Labour becomes slavery only when no respect is shown to the worker, when the worker does not feel any self-respect and when no economic independence accrues to the worker from the work. But in the Indian milieu Nivedita saw that woman was respected and was legally entitled to inherit property. And the ethical idealism of the people instilled in her through her familiarity with the national epics, the puranas and the lives of the saints had given her self-awareness – an awareness of her importance to the household and to the society. In fact this self-knowledge was so powerful that every Hindu woman knew that it lay in her power to make or mar homely happiness by her willing co-operation or refusal to co-operate. Hence the upbringing and education of Indian women lay in enabling them to accord this co-operation willingly. Only the introduction of Western ideas of individuality and independence has given rise to such notions as that woman’s household work is unpaid and unrecognized and that it enslaves her. Nivedita, who saw the peasant happiness of Indian countryside and that of the distant cities (CW 2: 58), had every reason to assert that Indians had successfully eliminated domestic slavery.

But in the passages referred to above, while according to Engles “domestic slavery” means the position of the wife, to Nivedita, it has another connotation as well: it refers to the position of dependents in the houses. When she observes that “the orthodox Hindu household is the only one [where there is] the complete elimination of any form of domestic slavery,” she has in mind the position of persons bought in childhood and living in the household as dependents. This is clear from what follows the above claim of hers. Nivedita points out that “slavery in Asia .... has never meant what Europe and America have made of it”. She writes that there were still living persons “who were bought in their childhood .... brought up and educated along with the children of the household, but made useful in minor ways” (CW 2:57). The masters of these dependents never felt they had any claim on
their wages when the days of wage-earning arrived; but they took it upon themselves as their duty to marry these dependents off and settle them in life. Nivedita calls this "the humanity of custom" and says that it is the reason why the word 'slave' did not sting the Asiatic consciousness as it did the European\(^{16}\) (CW 2:58).

The fundamental difference in the world-views of the East and the West is evident in the perception that household work enslaves woman. As opposed to the clamour for rights, Indian thought emphasizes duty or dharma or moral obligations suited to one's station in life. Man has his duties as son, husband or father, as much as woman who has her duties as daughter, wife or mother. If household work could enslave woman, man's outdoor work could enslave him. Hence to avoid falling into the snare of questions of slavery or equality, all work related to the family — whether the profession of the man for earning livelihood or the household work of the woman for the day-to-day life of the family - is regarded as Dharma or duty, which is not only personal or familial but something that has a social significance. Hence marriage is thought of as a duty to society rather than as an opportunity for personal happiness. The former does not negate the latter but merely takes precedence over it. And purity or chastity is insisted on for man, as much as for woman, through monogamy. In fact many a Western observer had noted that Indian men showed a greater fidelity to their women than was the case in the West. In the Indian context feminism would be an aberration.

There might be historical compulsions for the Western feminist consciousness to be "the consciousness of victimization" (Singh 31) and for the oppositional definition of feminism to posit itself as "the necessary resistance to patriarchal power" (Singh 34). And Indian feminist scholars have created their own variety of feminism, which nevertheless, agrees with First World feminism in the main. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has developed, for instance, in her *In Other
Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (1987), "a materialist, anti-imperialist feminism which draws on the insights of recent poststructuralist and postmodern theory" (Singh 37), which agrees in general with the Western idea of oppression and the need to oppose. But, as Nivedita points out, it has never been the method of India to agitate and raise a hue and cry over issues. Rather, it has been her way to raise the banner of ideals in times of crises. It is through an original reinterpretation of orthodoxy, arrived at through a living relation to the past and an intelligent understanding of the present that the ills of Indian society are to be cured. This in Nivedita's view is dynamic orthodoxy. Feminists with a Marxist leaning eagerly agree with Engels when he says (in the passage cited earlier) that monogamy is a social arrangement calculated to ensure the accumulation of wealth in the hands of man while keeping the woman ever under subjugation. In the worldly lives of human beings, caught up as they are in a net of desires, it is impossible to dissociate human life from the overpowering hold of money, as long as gratification of sense pleasure is held to be the end of life. Hinduism makes room for this point of view also in its recognition of pleasure as one of the purusharthas of life. But that does not mean that economic considerations have to be the only or even the primary motive behind any social institutions. They could very well be incidental effects rather than the efficient causes of these social phenomena. It need not be reiterated that Nivedita was opposed to such a view of marriage. The double standard that insists on chastity on the part of women while ignoring the same for man has not escaped thinking minds in India. It is a serious moral lapse, against which the great Tamil Nationalist poet Subrahmanya Bharati lashes out in one of his poems. It will be relevant here to point out that Bharati was one of those numerous young men of India who were inspired by Nivedita to a passionate love of Mother India in whose service, as in life in general, Indian women were to be recognized by men as their
legitimate partners. Woken up to reverence for womanhood by the inspiring teachings of Nivedita, Bharati speaks through the mouths of the New Women:

Karpu nilai endru solla vandar – iru

Katchikkum ahdū poduvi vaippom (Bharati 211)

“They come to tell us that chastity is the great established virtue for woman. Yes. But let us place it before them also as a virtue common to both the parties.”

(Translation mine)

Hindu logic, patriarchal or not, argues that the failure to observe or the indifferent observance of the ideal of chastity on the part of men is no cause for Indian women to demand a similar laxity for themselves. Rather the answer is to insist on the man’s acceptance of the ideal, which for him is not mere outward adherence to monogamy but a real truthfulness to his wife. It seems to this scholar that the collective unconscious of India entrusted with woman the great responsibility of guarding the society from moral depravity by herself ever being the model of shining purity, while to man, as a member of the highest caste, the duty of austerity and devotion to scriptural study was assigned. No doubt both involve great sacrifice. But the secret of true happiness is renunciation and never enjoyment. Nivedita recognized that the central virtue of Indian society is the purity of its women. Notwithstanding talks about widow remarriage and other notions of happiness that bear unmistakable marks of the influence of Western ideals, Indian woman is still being true to the mission entrusted to her. The difficulty of maintaining a high level of moral consciousness should not be allowed to dim the vision of the need for such consciousness.

The central point of feminist theory being that man victimizes woman, which makes conflict inevitable, an attitude of confrontation is assumed, as is done by the Marxist philosophy in the field of economics. For both approaches to life there
seems to be ample justification in the thousand and one atrocities perpetrated by man. Yet the truth remains that only at the lowest level of existence is competition the order of the day.\textsuperscript{19} A more advanced stage of human consciousness would be co-operation or mutual aid. Man's interest is not opposed to woman's and if both are truly comrades in their brief sojourn on this earth, life would be so much more desirable. Hence man and wife are united in marriage to aid each other in the discharge of the common duty of caring for the five types of beings\textsuperscript{20}: the forefathers, the family deities, the monks, one's own kith and kin and of course oneself. In this lofty of vision of marriage as a social obligation, as was, noted above, earning the livelihood fell to the lot of man, while caring for the family and maintaining the household to that of woman. In the changed conditions of living in the present day India, woman has also taken up jobs to support the family. While this change has taken place in the man-made arrangement, nothing can be done in the biological function of child-bearing and child rearing. Life seems to say to humanity: "Not equality but unity and cooperation." It is this message with all its inevitability that India understood and held as its ideal before the couple. Not equality but companionship in discharging apparently differing duties. Nivedita saw the point in this and found the Hindu household to be an instance of love and cooperation.\textsuperscript{21} One must remember here that Nivedita was only recording what she saw in the Hindu households of early twentieth century India. Today the kitchen fires and dowry deaths that occur in some Indian families are so much publicized by the media that a Western observer comes to know of that phenomenon, while it is not known to many that in the twenty-first century, when a great number of Indian women are educated and hence seek jobs to increase the family income, the custom of demanding dowry has slowly disappeared, at least among the higher castes of South India. And Nivedita's claim about Hindu households being instances of love and cooperation will not sound exaggerated if the impression of Western observers
of the families of expatriate Indians is considered. They find that the mutual fidelity
of the Hindu couple, the closeness of the relation between Hindu parents and
children and their cooperation in hard work, frugal living and early acquisition of
family property are really impressive.22

But it is heartening to note that in the recent past, along with the emphasis on
preserving the ecological resources of the planet of earth, the need for mutual co-
operation between man and woman has also been realized by Western feminists.
Sushila Singh describes Karen Offen as articulating the changed point of view in
French Feminism, where the man–woman phenomenon is not one of dichotomy but
of a complementary relation. “The relational feminist thought proposed a gender-
based but egalitarian vision of social organization. It mainly featured the primacy of
companionate, non-hierarchical, male-female couple as the basic unit of society”
(Singh 38). This is termed “relational” feminism, as opposed to “individualist”
feminism. Till the 1970’s the latter held the day but now the emerging trend is one
of co-operation rather than competition. Feminists have also come to see that
heterosexual relationship is the only relationship that will sustain human society and
not the gay individualism of the extremely disposed natures (Spivak In Other
Worlds 82). Both father and mother together have a responsibility in bringing up the
child and in making a happy home for it to grow in. This is nothing but the grihastha
dharma or the obligation of the householder that the Hindu sastras elaborate so well
and which Nivedita saw realized in the Hindu household.

While assessing Pandita Ramabai’s contribution to Indian feminism, Kumari
Jayawardena notes (62) that Ramabai destroyed her chances of leading women’s
struggles in India by her narrow preoccupation with Bible translation and
conversion. It is obvious to her that Ramabai substituted the patriarchal domination
of the Brahmins with the patriarchal ideology of Christian fundamentalism.
Moreover Ramabai’s failure to challenge colonialism, which resulted from her conviction that Christianity and British rule alone would save India, also foreclosed any possibility of her emergence as a nationally accepted figure in India. It is infinitely to the credit of Nivedita that she escaped both these dangers. What is more, it is her application of the principle of dynamic orthodoxy to the Indian women’s problems that contains the possibility of evolving the necessary solution. Substitution of Marxism will be as ineffective and harmful as Ramabai’s substitution of patriarchal Brahminism with fundamentalist Christianity. Only as long as she does not distort the traditional insistence on the value of character (which she is right to insist for Indian men also), can the Indian feminist benefit Indian women but not otherwise. When such is her aim she will find a sympathetic and perceptive predecessor in Nivedita, from whom she can learn much. No other type would be of much real usefulness to India, outward support from cosmopolitan Indian women notwithstanding.

There is no doubt that without freedom there is no growth, but without responsibility, freedom cannot achieve anything. Towards giving both freedom and a sense of responsibility, education is to be given to the women, and the masses. This was the one recurrent theme in Swami Vivekananda’s teaching, to give a practical shape to which Nivedita had come to India. She was no ivory tower idealist, and, for all her passionate admiration and spirited defence of India, knew that the society needed a recharging of its mechanism in its time-tested ideals and that the means to achieve this was education. Hence Nivedita’s concept of Indian national education will now be dealt with.
It was Nivedita’s conviction that the future of India depends on Education - technical education, higher research, education of women as well as men, above all, education of the people. For all these India, as a country under imperial rule, could not expect the government to take steps (CW 4: 457), and hence Nivedita proposed that Indians be self-dependent and “organise an army of educators” (CW 4: 331). She pointed out to the Indians that the establishment of technical schools alone would not be adequate; “unless a people have established amongst them the spirit of science, the habit of original thought, and the ability to advance human knowledge itself, their very applications of other people’s scientific discoveries will become increasingly inefficient” (Letters 2: 840). Indian scientists have proved that they understand every word of this warning.

But technical education and higher research, essential though they are, are for the few and according to Nivedita, it is national education, or in today’s jargon, education for the masses or the so-called subaltern classes, that is the crying need of the day. Writing in an India that was still a colony, Nivedita wanted educated youth to devote at least three years of their youth to educate their brothers in the rural areas. And those who volunteer to dedicate themselves, whether only for the three compulsory years, or after that, their lives (for, Nivedita is hopeful that at least a few would joyously make a life-long dedication), it must be entirely self-supporting and self-propagating. Nivedita gives such a great priority to this elementary education of the people that she says with fervour: “We have to build up this idea of the sacred duty of giving education to the people as one of the elements of our civilization. Already we have the idea of giving alms. The one is only an extension of the other” (CW 4: 330).

In any educational effort primary importance must be given, according to Nivedita, to the training of the faculty, that is, the development of the mind. All the
national effort in India had been spent in the past in “the training of the attention rather than the learning of any subject” (CW 4: 334). Nivedita is anxious that this precious national gain should not be lost sight of. Here India has nothing to learn from the West. But Nivedita does not fail to point out in the interest of Indians that the superiority of the West lies in its united effort for creating a fund or a body of knowledge. In the West in his rigorous search for truth, for knowledge, the seeker is not alone. The entire academic world is with him, behind him. It is building this intellectual home for their countrymen who are knowledge seekers that Nivedita wants Indians to learn from the West.

Nivedita is too idealistic to rest content with education as a means of bread winning. She wants it to be raised to great heights; it is not for the welfare of a single family or a social group alone (that is, one’s own community or caste) that one is to pursue knowledge. Rather, it is the entire nation that is to be the beneficiary of his intellectual realizations. In the eyes of Nivedita it is this national outlook that is to give the glow of idealism to an otherwise cold intellectual effort. The student has to free his motive from self-interest and dedicate it “to the common weal, to the good of the whole” (CW 4: 337).

Nivedita notes that it is difficult in modern times to recognize greatness unless it speaks in the language of the fund of information gathered and made available now - in science, art, history, the crafts, business, the development of men on planes external and internal; this intellectual acquisition has become essential to the development and manifestation of the modern personality. Fine illustrations spring to her mind when Nivedita thinks of the importance of objective knowledge that has become a crucial part of the modern culture. “The Homers and Shakespeares of history are partakers in the world-culture of their times” (CW 4: 341). Intellectual formulae may also be made a great help for moral development.
Hence it is the duty of every Hindu man and woman to develop his intellectual powers and thus perform rishi yagna or fulfil his obligation to the rishis. Nivedita translates this ancient concept of India into terms that suit the present day context as “obligation to jana-desha-dharma” or one’s duty to the people, the land and the values of one’s country. The importance Nivedita gives to this idea is seen when she observes: “a nation stands or falls, in the long run, by the number of such souls [as are dedicated to jana-desha-dharma] that she is capable of producing, out of the rank and file of ordinary education” (CW 4: 342).

Nivedita’s concept of education is so comprehensive that it leaves out no aspect of the individual or the society or the nation. In a holistic approach to education, Nivedita avers that the entire personality of the child - will, emotion and cognition - is to be shaped by education. The harmonious development of the Hand, the Heart and the Head is to be the end and means of education. The educational process should train the learner “to feel nobly and to choose loftily and honestly” (CW 4: 344). But Nivedita notes with concern that “modern education, in its first inception, ignored this factor altogether and thus produced faculty out of relation to its environment” (CW 4: 346). And it is the duty of Indians to see to it that this anomaly is avoided and that education is answerable to the conscience of the educated, that education is for the development of the child for the good of the people.

Nivedita makes a fine distinction between national education and nation-making education in her Hints on National Education in India. National education is education for the people. A more easily understood modern-day term would be mass education or education for the under-privileged masses. This concept does not have now the revolutionary ring it had hundred years ago. In the old system of education prevalent in India till the advent of the British, education was fairly common. The
British parliamentarian Keir Hardie is said to have observed in his book *India* that “Max Muller, on the strength of official documents and a missionary report concerning education in Bengal prior to British occupation, asserts that there were then 80,000 native schools in Bengal, or one for every 400 of the population.” (qtd. in Shourie 169) Ludlow’s *History of British India* is said to portray what happened to this wonderful native system of education: in every Hindu village which had retained its old form, the children generally were able to read, write, and cipher, but where the British rule had swept away the village system, as in Bengal, there the village school had also disappeared. This was ascribable to the gradual but general impoverishment of the country due to imperial exploitation. The middle and lower classes could not only not find the wherewithal to defray the educational expenses of their children but were being forced by poverty to engage their children in labour at a tender age (Shourie 169-70). So here is the origin of child labour, a social evil against which every social reformer raises a hue and cry in India today! Going back to British India, even the few schools that survived this general economic disaster had no government grant whatever, and were surviving with difficulty. In the circumstances, in India, which was known for the reverence with which it held all learning, education was shrinking and was confined to a few, and that too to the male members of the privileged class. And the outcastes never had had any access to education.24 It is to the sisters and brothers of these down-trodden classes of India that Swami Vivekananda had wanted education to be taken.25 It was in such a climate in India that Margaret had been called to India to help Swami Vivekananda in his plans for the education of the Indian women.

Here an explanation is needed. As an interpreter of the Indian way of life to the West (as in *The Web of Indian Life*) or while writing in its defence (as in *Lambs Among Wolves*), Nivedita always emphasized that Indian women were not uneducated. But in her exhortations to Indians, (as in *Religion and Dharma* or
Aggressive Hinduism) and in her programme for Indians, especially in her works like Hints on National Education, she elaborately chalks out the features of the type of education to be given to Indian women. Now, if Indian women were not ignorant, why were they in need of such a programme?

One must remember that in works like The Web of Indian Life or Lambs Among Wolves Nivedita takes this stance in response to the constant missionary projection that Indian women were deliberately kept uneducated and that their ignorance was appalling. As the opinion of the average Westerner was formed on the basis of such misrepresentations, Nivedita had to point out that Indian women might be illiterate but not uneducated: they were educated in the old way. The central aspect of this old education was moral and ethical, which was accomplished mainly by the thorough knowledge they had of the religious lore of the land like national epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the puranas and the lives of great saints of India. Women also gathered knowledge of the philosophical principles of Hinduism through various other sources like the traditional storytelling methods such as ‘kathakalakshepa’ and from many mendicants, who were not beggars but in fact wandering monks of great knowledge and culture. An instance of the astonishing effect of such informal education has come to light recently. A child-widow in a Brahmin family in Shencottai in Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu was instructed for a few months by a sanyasi who came to the village. After his departure, the woman kept reflecting on what he taught. And in course of time, her meditations bore fruit not only as a deep and abiding peace in her heart but flowered forth as poetry. She had not attended any school but she wrote verse, the literary merit of which is by no means of a low order. The famous Tamil national poet Subrahmania Bharati has recorded his appreciation of this woman poet-saint, who was his predecessor by several decades. (Nityananda xvi-xxv) More instances may be brought to light in all regions of the vast sub-continent of South Asia.
All women could not be poets, but certainly all knew much poetry by heart in
the form of poems that retold the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the regional
languages. Bhuvaneswari Devi brought up her son Narendranath (who became
illustrious later as Swami Vivekananda) on the rich literary fare of the songs that
retold the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Life 14)

As to practical knowledge Nivedita saw that all Indian girls were trained at
home by their mothers and mothers-in-law in cooking, child rearing, sick-nursing,
maintenance of cows and taking care of the old and the helpless (CW 4:523). Some
were experts in management of property

This account of the type of education received by women in India until the
nineteenth century may not sound as education at all to modern ears, as we have
learnt to equate education with literacy. Anticipating the objection of such minds,
Nivedita observes:

When we come to the charge that Indian women are ignorant, we meet with a far
deeper fallacy. They are ignorant in the modern form, that is to say, few can write,
and not very many can read. Are they then illiterate? If so, the Mahabharata and the
Ramayana and the Purana stories every mother and every grandmother tells to the
babies are not literature. But European novels and the Strand Magazine by the same
token are. Can any of us accept this paradox? The fact is, writing is not culture
though it is an occasional result of culture. (CW 2 452) (emphasis added)

But Nivedita was keen-sighted enough to discern that, excellent as this old
education of Indian women was in its own way, “we cannot refuse to admit that
some great educational readjustment is necessary at this moment” (CW 2: 74), that
the old education needed to be reinforced by modern education. It is in this context
that Nivedita wrote elaborately on the need for education of Indian women. And it is
to impart such modern education that Swami Vivekananda called her to India. Hence
national education is not the education meant for the elite few but for the women and the under-privileged masses of India.

Nation-making refers to the character of education, whose purpose is to create a love of the nation, a national sense, in the hearts of the educated. “National education” defines education in relation to the recipient of education while “nation-making in education” describes the purpose of education. It is to be noted that national education will undoubtedly have the element of nation-making in it. This was the aim of Swami Vivekananda in his educational mission, which his illustrious disciple expresses so well in her Hints on National Education in India: “And so the great masses of the people might be swept within the circle of articulation. … Knowledge to the people [is the truth to be remembered]” (CW 4: 331). She continues: “We must surround our children with the thought of their nation…. Let love for the country and countrymen, for People and Soil, be the mould into which our lives flow hot. … Faith in the Mother and Bhakti for India…. Here we have the true course of a nation-making education” (CW 4: 349). Further on in the book Nivedita talks of the reconstruction of the nation, which has to begin with its ideals and take into account three elements of the nation – jana-desha-dharma, that is, the people, the region and the ideals.

National education is, first and foremost, education in national idealism. But the child should also move from knowledge of the history and geography of his country to that of other countries in the world. According to Nivedita intellectual mukti lies in gaining this world-sense. Thus the consciousness of an ideally educated child will first take root in his village, and then expand to cover the motherland and finally permeate the whole world. In this scheme of education, Nivedita recognizes that there is a place for foreign culture; but she takes care to warn that it is never at the beginning of the education. In pure knowledge there is no native or foreign.
Science is such. But in the realm of emotion, deep-rootedness in the familiar soil is essential. And Nivedita says that one has to be wary in this respect. A severe standard of self-respect and self-restraint must first be created before contact with foreign culture could be thought of. In independent India so many Commissions have gone into the nature, scope and function of education; none of them seems to have had the breadth of vision and passion of conviction of Nivedita as seen in her *Hints on National Education in India*.

As was seen above, it was Nivedita’s conviction that Indian women were already educated but in the old way. Hence to Nivedita education of women was no new project but a revision of what already existed. In keeping with the Indian insistence on the moral imperative of the development of character, Nivedita is clear that the new education should also aim at the development of “the faculties of soul and mind in harmony with one another” (CW 4: 363). This purpose of education was so well fulfilled in the earlier ages that Indian history is full of great women and their great deeds. The ideals they stand for are constructive ideals common to the entire nation. Hence the Indian child must be trained to contemplate their holiness, simplicity, sincerity, in a word, their character. Nivedita emphatically puts it down that “there can never be any sound education of the Indian woman, which does not begin and end in exaltation of the national ideals of womanhood, as embodied in her own history and heroic literature” (CW 4: 364). Once the importance of character-building is understood unmistakably, the other aspects of women’s education may be grasped for efficient execution.

First is efficiency. Women must be made efficient. Before becoming the ideal wife Sita was a great woman. That greatness or efficiency is the ability to face any situation in life. The secret of the efficiency of woman Nivedita finds in womanhood and the basis of womanhood is the fundamental principle of her
humanity. Hence efficiency or trained faculty to meet the exigencies of life "is something," according to Nivedita, "at which the education of the girl must aim, in every age" (CW 4: 364).

But the new manifestation of the moral ideal of character and efficiency in women should now take the form of "the national and the civic," in which also the Indian woman should be trained to play her part. This efficiency, to be ideal, should be capable of facing modern life. In order to achieve the ideal efficiency, the modern synthesis has to be achieved. In a thorough-going manner, Nivedita tells us where this synthesis lies. It is in the study of science, history and geography. Forestalling any objection from orthodoxy to woman studying these branches of knowledge, Nivedita stresses that woman, as much as man, must achieve this knowledge. The result of the acquisition of this knowledge, Nivedita reiterates, is a conception of nationality. Nivedita’s standards for women’s education are so exacting that no aspect worth the name of education will be omitted by her. Side by side with training in nationality, the Indian women are also to achieve the civic sense by a study of the cities.

Nivedita’s ambitious plan for women’s education will not stop short of giving it all the benefits of the education envisaged for men. From a knowledge that helps form a conception of the nation, the Indian woman must proceed to an enlarged vision of the world scene. She should study the histories of other nations. History and geography should be mutually inclusive. One should not be studied without the benefit of the study of the other. And science, that study of universal, abstract facts, is also to be studied. Without knowledge of modern science, modern efficiency cannot be acquired by Indian women. In the teaching of all these forms of modern knowledge, lecture as a teaching method ought to be supplemented with traditional teaching modes like ‘kathaka’. "The highest ambition of the school must
be," in the eyes of Nivedita, "to give moral support to the ideals taught in the home, and the home to those imparted in the school" (CW 4: 367). Nivedita warns against any going back; every generation of Indian girls must enjoy the privilege of going to school. The first generation of Indian women will necessarily have to get educated by men who, Nivedita warns, must desist from the cynical practice of criticising the women or of questioning the success or feasibility of the new process. And Nivedita's final hope is that a new generation of educated Indian women would come forward to dedicate their lives to the education of their sisters. "Thus a race of women would be created, who should be nothing less than "Bashi-Bazouks of religion", and "they should work out the problem for women. No home, save in their work; no ties, save of religion; no love, but that for Guru, and people, and motherland" (CW 1: 195).

It is obvious to the later generations of Indian women that most of the things proposed by the Sister have come to be a permanent aspect of Indian society. The only serious lapse is that the moral element, emphasized by Nivedita with great fervour, is not taken seriously enough for a sincere effort to include it in the curriculum. Whatever Nivedita says about the purpose, method, and execution of the Indian women's education is directly related to her own best practice in India. Education is always the basis of national regeneration and the attainment of political freedom has not absolved Indians from the need to reformulate national education. India still needs to pay attention to the far-sighed ideals of education that Nivedita proposed for it, not with mere moral earnestness alone but with a firm grasp of the spirit of the modern epoch and a sound expertise on pedagogy.

"Ideals never die. The new is always superimposed on the old and never substituted for it. ... That new motives may be introduced, or old ardours intensified are both possible, but the destruction of anything that is good and true can never take
place thus” (CW 2: 415). The incorruptible idealist that she was, Nivedita took a few aspects of Swami Vivekananda’s vast message to humanity and forged out of it a message for the regeneration of India, which is also a message for humanity. National Righteousness, or Dharma in its vast national significance as conceived by Nivedita, covers the entire civilization of a nation. Hence fervent patriotism will have to apply itself in every age to the needs of the people in the redefining of the economic needs and social ideals of a nation. But man does not live by bread alone. He is mind and soul, though encased in body. And programmes and doctrines for the welfare of a people that ignore moral and spiritual values will do more harm than good. Hence we find Nivedita engage in earnest elaboration of civic responsibilities, educational ideals, historical researches, artistic adventures and championship of women and the people. But Nivedita is more ambitious: love of motherland should lead to love and hope for humanity and spiritual oneness with all creation. The next chapter will consider the relevance of this message and the literary beauty of the writings in which this message was clothed.

The principle of nationality is a principle of duty - one’s duty to one’s motherland, for “the people of a country have an inalienable right to do the whole work of their country” (CW 4: 286). In her philosophy, duty and rights merge. Right is not enjoyment; duty is not unsavoury. Both are one. This is Dharma. Nivedita speaks from a high level of moral force, charging her words with a power that infuses the same courage in her readers. Nivedita calls one and all her readers to realize that they are all free members of a great nation, loyalty to which should be over and above loyalty to family, class or sect. Nivedita reiterates this truth with untiring zeal.