CHAPTER - 6

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Sr. Nivedita’s claim for a place as a significant English writer depends on the literary merits as well as the thematic relevance of her writings. The first section of this chapter will discuss a few literary aspects of her writings such as the structure of her works and the different literary forms into which her writings can be classified, briefly discussing her works in each form. Nivedita considered herself as an interpreter of the East for the West and hence her effectiveness in this role will be discussed briefly. Having in mind the fact that among the journalistic writings of Nivedita there are several collections of essays, a comparison with Addison and Steele as essayists will also be attempted. Characteristics of her style like comparison, translation of Indian terms, imagery, shifting of consciousness or person and brevity will be illustrated. Of these comparison and translation are treated as special methods of interpretation. The literary qualities of Nivedita’s letters will also be considered. The concept of rishihood and why Nivedita may be considered a rishi of the modern days will be the matters taken up for discussion in the second section.

I

The overall structure adopted by Nivedita in her books is that of a collection of prose compositions connected by a single master theme, each being a detailed exposition of its own theme. Works like Lambs Among Wolves and Aggressive Hinduism are comparatively shorter and their inner coherence is easily perceivable. In her longer works like The Web of Indian Life and The Master As I Saw Him a closer look at the chapters will reveal the plan and pattern of the work. As an
illustration the structure of The Web of Indian Life will now be studied briefly. The book consists of sixteen chapters. The central theme of the book is beautifully conveyed in the imagery expressed in the title of the book. The first and the last chapters, aptly called “The Setting of the Warp” and “On the Loom of Time,” are also closely linked to this central imagery. Of the sixteen chapters of the book, the first six are devoted to a description of the Indian family life and the place of women in Indian life. To the national epics and to the institution of caste a chapter each is devoted. The central chapter of the book, which is also the longest, is devoted to the theme of the synthesis of Indian thought, wherein Nivedita traces the history of thought from the Vedic period till the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. A few representative tenets of Hindu philosophy like the theory of karma and rebirth and religion as realization are dealt with and the philosophical significance of the Hindu gods Mahadeva and Sri Krishna are expounded in the chapters that follow. The last chapter is a study of the features of the modern epoch in Europe, which is contrasted with the Indian ethos, and a historical assessment of Islam and Christianity in India as well as the modern reformist sects is attempted. The book closes with the note of hope that the civilization which, in the past, successfully met challenges and absorbed shocks, can accomplish the same feat again for its own higher fulfillment and that of humanity. From the concrete social life of the Indians the author unobtrusively takes the reader to abstract thought and there is a movement forwards and backwards in the themes dealt in each chapter that reflects the movement of the loom. The same consciously built unity cannot be seen in other works of Nivedita.

There is an amazing variety of prose forms in Nivedita’s writings, each having its own coherence. Kali the Mother, The Web of Indian Life, Studies from an Eastern Home and An Indian Study of Love and Death may be classified as interpretive narrations. The Master as I Saw Him comes under hagiography as
depicting the life, works and teachings of a saint, here her guru Swami Vivekananda. Religion and Dharma and Aggressive Hinduism contain didactic essays on moral themes with a clear accent on the individual as a member of the nation. Cradle Tales of Hinduism narrates stories from the epics, puranas, history and folk tales of India. They are stories especially retold for Western children to familiarize them with India. Hints on National Education and Civic and National Ideals are expositions of the theme of dynamic orthodoxy working in the fields of education and national reconstruction. The Northern Thirtha: A Pilgrim’s Diary and Notes of Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda are in the form of diaries and may also be described as travel writing. Footfalls of Indian History is clearly historical narrative. Art criticism is found in the articles collected under the title Indian Art.

In the interpretive writings, as in The Web of Indian Life, authorial comments often take the form of comparison between the East and the West. At each point of her discovery and description of India, Nivedita has some association of the West to draw from for a comparison or contrast. This enriches the narration and speaks of the narrator’s rich repertoire of knowledge and sensibility, besides enabling better comprehension. The comparison may be of a simple custom, a serious study of ideals, or of the effect of time and space on human institutions in the East and the West. In all these what is evident is her concern to lead the reader from the familiar to the unfamiliar. A few examples may be provided. Answering the charge that “the habit of being served spoils the Indian man and renders him careless of the comfort of the others” (CW 2: 38), Nivedita contrasts the etiquettes, Eastern and Western, in the matter of showing respect to womanhood:

Nor do they hasten to open the door through which she is about to pass.... their idea is that man should precede a woman, maintaining the tradition of the path-breaker in the jungle.... Thus, honour for the weaker is expressed in one way in England and
quite otherwise in Hindustan, but the heart of conduct is the same in both countries (38).

“The Present Position of Woman,” a paper presented at the Universal Races Congress, Paris in 1910, is unique as a comparison not between India and the West as is usually the case. The ideals of Eastern countries - China as well as India – and Eastern religions - Islam as well as Hinduism – are compared with those of the West. At the end of the comparison Nivedita arrives at the significant conclusion: “Perhaps the very foundation stone of sociological truth lies in that unity of humanity, which such considerations illustrate” (CW 4: 236).

An illustration of the third type of comparison is seen in the concluding paragraph of the chapter on “The Kashmir Shawl” in “Studies from an Eastern Home”:

But yesterday, the Tartars entered Srinagar, today the English are here, and tomorrow they will be gone, leaving an old race to dream once more the sweet dreams of labour and poetry and beauty, till – as they themselves would phrase their hope – the net of Maya shall be broken and they be lost in the ocean of the Beatific Vision (CW 2: 383).

*Kali the Mother* is a sustained study of the symbolism of Kali, the hideous-looking Goddess despised by the Westerners, to show them how She is beyond not only ‘kala’ or time but beyond any limiting understanding of Her as a Goddess of Hindus and how She symbolizes a universal truth – the truth that life has both the benign and the malevolent faces to show.

An interesting aspect of Nivedita’s serious engagement with right interpretation can be seen in the ingenious ways in which she translates Indian words beautifully and accurately. “Gopala,” a name of Lord Krishna, gets translated as
“Herdsman of the Souls” (CW 2: 330); “Vande Mataram” is “My Salutation to the Mother.” “Godhulivela” is a favourite of the Sister, which she translates, accurately of course, as “the Hour of the Cow Dust,” referring to the evening time when the cows return after grazing, and, coming in herds, raise up the dust in the already dusky evening. An apt name gets an apt translation. “Shanti Jal,” the holy water brought from the river wherein the image of the Mother after the two days’ puja had been immersed, marking the end of the festival, is translated as “the water of peace” (CW 2: 322). And there is the unforgettable translation of the chant “Jai Sri Sitapati Ramachandra Prabhu ki Jai!” as “To dear Sita’s bridegroom, great Rama, all hail!” Above all there is that translation of the Vedic prayer for the dead:

Om!

Take Thou this man from amongst us, O Agni!

By the pathway of blessed souls,

And enable him to reap the harvest of his deeds! (CW 2: 273)

Here it will be helpful to remember that the word ‘Agni’ refers not to fire but to the God of Fire. In a footnote Nivedita explains why she left it untranslated. It is because, “the devotional content of this name cannot be expressed as ‘O Fire!’ ‘O God, who dost manifest Thyself here, in the energy of fire!’ might be accepted perhaps” (CW 2: 272). It was the spirit that she sought to convey through translation and where it cannot be, she would rather refrain from translating at all. Almost all the Orientalists like Monier-Williams, H.H Wilson, R.T.H. Griffith, E.B. Cowell, and Max Muller not excepted, found the Vedic hymns prosaic and artificial (Danino 25). It was the uncomprehending brain that was making such comments, while Nivedita’s heart responded to the ‘devotional content’ of the mystical hymns.
Translation was not the only means of introducing new ideas into the text on hand. Nivedita varied the method by simply introducing a Western equivalent. The neem tree is the Indian ash; Goddess Saraswati is the Indian Athene or Minerva; and Bhishma of the Mahabharata is the Indian Arthur and Yudhishtira the eldest Pandava is the glorified Lancelot.

As her writing aroused interest in the East and the West, Nivedita continued to champion the cause of India. The significant success she achieved may be gauged from the fact that friendship with Nivedita had helped many a European to understand India better. Pravrajika Atmaprana mentions in her biography of Sr.Nivedita how Dr. T. K. Cheyne of Oxford was fascinated with her Web of Indian Life. For never before had he seen India described from the inside. Atmaprana quotes from the February 1912 issue of the Modern Review how

Prof Cheyne sought Nivedita’s help to know Hinduism better. She suggested the Bhagavad Gita and the lectures of Swami Vivekananda. ‘This produced,’ said Dr. Cheyne, ‘a revolution in my view of the capacity of Hindu religion for adapting itself progressively to the spiritual needs of Indians and for contributing elements of enormous value to the purification, enrichment and reinterpretation of Christianity.

.... Sister Nivedita was well aware that I looked for help to the Aryan East, and especially to her and her Master, and this may have been the chief reason why she paid back in the dazzling coin of affection, reverence, and gratitude for the sympathy which I delighted to express to her’ (258).

Nivedita was an interpreter between India and the West in more than one sense - a writer and a cultural ambassador for India, full of life and feeling and so unlike the official ambassadors.

The next variety of book is The Master As I Saw Him, which was acclaimed, soon after its publication, as a masterpiece of hagiography; and Prof. T.K. Chayne,
in his review of the book, wrote in the Hibbert Journal (January 1911): “It may be placed among the choicest religious classics, below the various Scriptures, but on the same shelf with the Confessions of Saint Augustine and Sabatier’s Life of Saint Francis” (CW 1: xv). Her own wish was that to be properly written, the Life should be all Swamiji. He should move through it, like Jesus through the Gospels, alone, unfettered, unshadowed. But she felt incapable of this and capable only of telling what she had seen in him. But what she had seen of him, not all have had the opportunity to see. Nivedita appreciated to the full the blessed opportunity she had of being the disciple of a great saint and prophet of modern India and it was her strong conviction that the opportunity was really a trust endowed with her, so that it was a sacred duty for Nivedita to record, for the sake of posterity, not only her veneration for her guru but also his actual teachings and her understanding of their national significance. And not only his words as he uttered them, but his look, his gestures, his voice, its tone, and their unuttered but unmistakable significance - in short everything that would render the saint real and living and human - these were also recorded by Nivedita. Western readers like her English biographer Barbara Foxe regret that “there is not one word either of criticism or even of purely human description” (Foxe 193). There may not be a description of the features or dress or such personal details. Yet one feels Swamiji’s presence in the book overwhelmingly real all the same. The very fact that she was aware of her lack of objectivity in regard to Swami Vivekananda made Nivedita more objective than ever. The book is all Swamiji, as she wished it to be and feared it might not.

The Master as I Saw Him produces the impression that one has been with a radiant child of God. But it is the message of the master that is faithfully conveyed. Though the saint is made real to the reader, there is no attempt to idealise him or create a cult around his name. Nivedita achieves objectivity in her masterpiece to a significant extent. The main factor that contributes to this objectivity is the absence
of the descriptions of purely personal details of appearance and the surroundings that Barbara Foxe so regrets and which may be found in plenty in The Web of Indian Life. Though this is a welcome feature in general, one cannot help agreeing with Foxe that there was not enough of it— for instance the anecdote of the Negro railway servant shaking hands with Swamiji. An earlier Nivedita would have made the most of it.

As it is, The Master as I Saw Him reminds one of M.’s Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the only difference being that M is completely absent there whereas in The Master Nivedita is unmistakable. This is not to say that there is any egoistic self-projection by the author. Far from that. In fact Nivedita consciously avoids any reference to herself even where the circumstance described is directly related to her. What it does mean is that she has a subtle way of talking to the reader, of taking him into her confidence, a way of saying as if we, the readers and the author, are co-sharers in a common treasure, spectators in a great drama that is unravelling itself before us both. The reader is really thankful to be guided in understanding a great personality, thankful for the proffered help of Nivedita’s “direct perception” (CW 1: 76).

Apart from The Master as I Saw Him, Nivedita gave several talks and wrote essays on Swami Vivekananda, expressing his significance to Indians as a saint and as a national leader. A classic piece in this respect is her Introduction to the first edition of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Its brevity and accuracy of expression is matched only by the depth of understanding and the reverential mood that inform it.

Though fiction was not her conscious domain as a writer, Nivedita has all the potentialities for a short story writer, if not a novelist. Her description of the plague
(CW 2: 332-34) in Studies from an Eastern Home, in its opening in the middle (by which the Sister manages to bring the past and the future into an eternity of the present), vivid descriptions, the almost lyrical nature of the emotional content of the piece, conversation mingled with narration, the catching of the inner mood, not only of the mother of the boy or of the Sister herself but even of the dying boy – all the elements of a short story are here. And the same ability to tell a story touchingly and vividly is seen in the narration of the village tale of how Sri Krishna himself carries the daily bread to his devotees (CW 2: 186-87). Or again there is the legend of the boar hunt (CW 2: 177-78) in which Arjuna’s encounter with the Hunter in the Himalayas is described. With this predilection for story telling, Nivedita chose to retell the cradle tales of Hinduism.

In every land children love stories and one finds Charles Lamb, who wrote essays for the grown up, retell tales from Shakespeare for children. Nivedita, as one who had experience in moving with children as an educator, knew their psychology and in her school, her history classes were loved for the innumerable stories she told. Hence she was eminently qualified to tell stories from Indian epics, puranas, lives of saints, legends, country tales and stories from Indian history to children, Indian and non-Indian.

In the stories included in The Cradle Tales of Hinduism the greatness of Indian men and women, the natural beauty of the land and the customs of the land, beautiful and meaningful, are unobtrusively brought in to give the non-Indian children an idea about India. These details have already been touched upon in the third chapter. Here only those features not discussed there will be dealt briefly.

Descriptive and narrative details that make the story interesting are found in plenty in these stories. One supreme example would be the description of Narada’s
gossip-loving way of informing the Great God Shiva about the sacrifice to be held by His father-in-law Daksha, to which Shiva has not been invited. The piece of news does not have the desired effect on the Great God, who is happy that He has been left free to continue His meditation. Sage Narada goes to Siva’s wife, Sati, and is at last happy to find someone who will give his gossip the importance it deserves! (CW 3: 164-65)

In the Cycle of Ramayana, scenes from the Great Story of Sita (that is another name for Valmiki’s “Ramayana” – “Sitayam Charitam Mahat”) are depicted mainly with the aim of bringing out the glory of Sita. The Cycle of Krishna has stories that are ever fascinating with the descriptions of the childhood sports of Sri Krishna. The more serious scenes from the Mahabharata like the great Vision of the Universal Form of the Lord at the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the grandeur of Bhishma the warrior-saint, on his bed of arrows, the curse of Gandhari, and the Doom of the Vrishnis are also depicted touchingly. Apart from the ideal Indian wife in Sita, there are other great women known for their chastity and Nivedita dedicates a separate section for their tales, in keeping with her conviction that the greatness of Indian civilization owes not a little to its women. The section on the Tales of the Devotees contains brief but interesting pieces on small episodes in the life of Sri Krishna. There is a cycle on great kings other than the protagonists in the two epics.

The Northern Thirtha: a Pilgrim’s Diary was written in 1910 after her return from pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badrinath, two sacred shrines in the Himalayas. It was not only an occasion to share her experiences during the pilgrimage but also to help future pilgrims plan their trip with a knowledge of what facilities to expect and where. Towards this purpose she listed, at the head of each chapter, the relative distances between the places concerned, and a few words on accommodation available for the interested prospective pilgrim. Notes on Some Wanderings also
gives accurate details of the places and dates of their stay. But this book is more personal in the sense that it is a record of her reminiscences about Swami Vivekananda. In what it has to say about her Master it is closely related to The Master as I Saw Him.

As S.K. Ratcliffe, the editor of “The Statesman” and friend of Nivedita wrote in the preface to the first edition of Religion and Dharma, the essays contained therein are “a series of notes and brief articles suggested chiefly by the ethical and religious aspects of the advancing national movement” (CW 3:484). In keeping with the themes the essays are aphoristic (as in “Sincerity”), or exhorting (as in “Co-operation”), sternly critical (as in “Religion and National Success”), or majestically encouraging (as in “Quit Ye like Men!”), startlingly fresh in reinterpreting Dharma (as in “The Crown of Hinduism”). But in all of them the identification of the Sister with the Indians is total, as is evidenced in her constant use of ‘we’ and ‘ours’.

In Aggressive Hinduism – which she described as her “last word to the Indian people” or again as “my last will and testament” (Letters 2:8364) – Nivedita tried to write Swami Vivekananda’s whole ideal in one message. Short and packed with power, the book seeks to present the message in four parts as “The Basis,” “The Task before Us,” “The Ideal,” and “On the Way to the Ideal.” Though the title may cause one to wonder what that message is, all the aggression of the Hindu is to be directed upon himself, in destroying ignorance and a lifeless adherence to the old. The Hindu is to understand the exigencies of the modern era (now the talk is about post-modernism, but to Nivedita, writing hundred years ago it was quite modern), and to intelligently place himself in the national and international contexts and proceed to prove himself on the strength of the past, creating the present with an eye to conquering the future. The Hindu is to “set out to find – thyself!” (CW 3:511) It is
his self-discovery that will empower him for self-mastery and contribution to the world. In its mood and tone Aggressive Hinduism is like Religion and Dharma.

Addison and Steele, the founding fathers of the English periodical essay, invested journalism with a moral concern. But it was confined to the domestic virtues of a rising middle class in an England of settled peace. Their appeal to the contemporary English readers was four-fold: “amusement, intellectual and social snobbery, a serious purpose of reform and the material rewards of virtue” (Smithers ix) The spirit of Nivedita’s journalistic writing is one of commitment; her tone is one of urgency and the sense conveyed, one of being part of a world-moving force. Nivedita is far from being light-hearted in these essays. The Web of Indian Life, Studies from an Eastern Home and some of the stories in the Cradle Tales show she is capable of pleasant humour. But in Religion and Dharma and Aggressive Hinduism, she is the matriarch buckling up her son for battle and it is not the time for good-humoured pleasantries. The high moral fervour of these essays distinguishes them from the Spectator pieces and lifts them from the level of the fine and the pleasant.

Mukundabihari Mitra, writing on “Nivedita as a Journalist” observes:

If journalistic works are taken to mean writings published in journals ... Nivedita’s journalism may broadly be divided into three main categories: political, aesthetic, and miscellaneous.... Everywhere her profound erudition, original thinking, unclouded vision, forceful style, and above all, a clear sense of purpose give her writings a distinctive stamp of individuality. (NCV 282)

To this one will only add moral fervour and then a complete picture of Nivedita’s Religion and Dharma as journalistic writing of an extra-ordinary kind will emerge.
Nivedita’s aesthetic journalism consists of her writings on Indian art, more particularly on the paintings of Indian artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Surendranath Ganguly, Asit Haldar and Nandalal Bose. She was one of the chief art connoisseurs who contributed to the Renaissance of Indian art. Besides appreciating the Indian artists’ artistic efforts, Nivedita also wrote art appreciations of some European masterpieces by way of demonstrating what great painters did the world over. For Nivedita was not chauvinistic and considered that for an artist grounded well in his own tradition, other traditions will lead to meaningful expansion of knowledge and practice.

Footfalls of Indian History occupies a unique position among Nivedita’s writings as showing Nivedita’s firm mastery of historical facts and her historical imagination at work. The book is not regular history in that it does not narrate who came to power and when in an unvarying chronology. It is rather a recreation of India’s past – early Indian history – up to the Gupta period. But as she spelt out her conception of writing history in her letter to Radhakumud Mookerjee, Nivedita’s Footfalls is the fruit of an organic amalgamation of several factors: her stern scholarship, her wanderings in various parts of India with her heart and senses ever open and alive to what Mother India was ready to offer, her moral purpose, which was living and the very antithesis of self-interest, above all her wonderful imagination which fuses poetic warmth with stern scholarship that finds the passage of centuries no barrier to transporting herself to the age she is describing, and which consequently does a similar service to the readers; what we have is, in her own words (uttered to Radhakumud Mookerjee): “An Upanishad of the National History [which] would make eternal foundations for the Indian Nationality, in the Indian heart, the only world in which the nationality can be built enduringly” (CW 4: 394). An illustration of her method and especially her historical imagination may be seen in her discovery of the gateway of the ancient city of Rajgir by which “Buddha
himself with the goats must have passed” (CW 4: 32). In fact the entire essay “Rajgir: An Ancient Babylon” is a vivid capturing of her visit to Rajgir in which she, along with her party, walked through the ruins of the ancient city to relive the days of the Buddha.

There have been eminent historians like Burke and Gibbon who have been recognized as literary writers. Nivedita’s Footfalls of Indian History may be studied profitably as much for its literary qualities as for its value as history.

Nivedita had a high sense of moral responsibility in passing on to posterity the great truths she was fortunate to receive from her guru. Through constant reflection and contemplation, she made them her own. And to befit this sense of vocation and the nature of the themes on which she wrote, Nivedita’s writings acquired a style all her own. It will not be difficult to demonstrate that though she wrote in the medium of prose, and though she did not employ the major literary forms like novel, poetry or drama, her writings have the power of all great literature to move and stir the reader.

The inner resources from which the distinctive quality of her writing springs may be traced to her gift of imaginative power, the objectivity that stands aside and takes note of things, and its opposite, the negative capability to suspend one’s own individuality temporarily and identify with a person or creature that one is describing, the reverence for life and the mystic’s delight in nature that she possessed, above all, the great wealth of emotion - of love for India, for Indians and for humanity in general and her great moral fervour - it is to these inner powers of the heart and mind that language did service in her writings.

One must also remember the influences that shaped her before she met Swami Vivekananda - the great power of a living brand of Protestant Christianity by
which her childhood was influenced before the agonizing doubts of the agnostic could drive away the faith in the Church's doctrines and rituals, the abiding love and reverence she felt all through her life for Jesus of Nazareth and Mary the Madonna, and her love of great literature, especially the Bible and Shakespeare.

Yet with all this Nivedita had a very practical mind that kept her eyes and ears ever open to what was happening around her. In short Nivedita possessed both the sensuous and the spiritual perceptions of great artists, which endow her writings with a power to move and hold the mind that one often finds in great literature. As was pointed out earlier, she wrote in the medium of prose. But that prose was poetical. She herself was aware of it and was praised for it in her own lifetime. From her letters it also seems that she preferred poetical prose to poetry proper as the proper medium for her self-expression.

Caroline Spurgeon talks of the power of great poetry to "move and stir us in a way impossible to account for rationally and logically." According to her the poet acquires the power to move and stir his readers by virtue of that other power he has, "greater than other men, of perceiving hidden likenesses, and by his words, as Shelley says, unveiling 'the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth.' " In other words the poet holds the key to the larger life of truth in which he participates and to which he invites his perceptive readers through the analogies he perceives in life and employs in his poetry. Spurgeon goes on to explain how the poet, like the seer and the prophet, knows that it is impossible to give expression to great truths without resorting to the means of analogies. It is these analogies that have the power to clothe truths in forms or shapes that render them capable of being grasped by the human mind, which would otherwise remain incomprehensible (Spurgeon 7). It is not the poet alone but the artist in the medium of prose also who can rise imaginatively to a level of perception that gives him the
power to see analogies hidden from ordinary eyes and purposefully employ these analogies in his works.

It will not be difficult to show that Nivedita’s use of language manifests this power, whether she writes for a Western readership or for Indians or just to her friends in her letters, whether for a journal or for a previously well-thought-out book. A few illustrations from her writings will be provided now to demonstrate the quality of her style.

Nivedita has at her command not only a wide range of themes but also equally variegated moods and modes of expression like the reverential, the reflective, the sarcastic, the exhorting, the factual—all suited to the theme on hand.

The reverential mood overtakes her whenever Nivedita writes about the glory of Sita or the renunciation of Bhishma:

As Mary, the Madonna, to the women of Christendom, so is Sita, queen of Ayodhya, to them of Hinduism. Hers is indeed a realm beyond the aspiration of merely earthly sovereigns. For she is the ideal of womanhood itself, and she wields undisputed sway, in millions of hearts, over the kingdoms of love and sorrow, and stainless womanly honour and pride. Though beautiful and a queen, she never chose ease. To her the simple lives of saints and scholars were more joyous than all the luxuries of courts. She knew every mood of the forests, joining in the early morning, when birds wake and blossoms open and the dew is fresh; and bowing her soul with theirs in the evening adoration. She shared a throne, yet never forgot that for their people’s good, and not for their own pleasure, do sovereigns reign. She knew the highest happiness, and was not blinded by happiness. She knew the deepest and bitterest sorrow, and lived serene amidst her sorrow. Such was Sita, Queen of Ayodhya, crowned of love, veiled in sorrow, and peerless among women. (CW 3: 206)
The reflective mood takes over in her description of Swami Vivekananda's reverence for Indian customs:

The plain white veil of the widow was to him the symbol of holiness as well as sorrow. The Gerrua rags of the Sanyasin, the mat on the floor for a bed, the green leaf instead of a plate, eating with the fingers, the use of the national costume, all these things he appeared to regard as a veritable consecration. Each of them whispered to him some secret of spiritual power or human tenderness. And he answered with a passion of loyalty that would achieve for them, if it could, the very conquest of the world; but failing, would think all heaven lay in sharing their defeat. (CW 1: 111-12)

Or again in this passage of general reflection:

The great rhythm of Time and Space on which the Indian mind so delights finds once more an illustration here. Not in the Good alone, but also in the Evil, in Death as well as life, in the West and in the East, in fact in diversity of all kinds, is to be read the revelation of Unity. From all points do the paths converge by which the One comes to the vision of man. (CW 2: 380)

A supreme example of her sarcastic mood is found in the following passage where she is answering charges by some who speak of the approaching death of Hinduism:

Let those who are disposed to wail by the riverside, shedding false tears over our approaching extinction, take heed lest it be not their own superstitions that are at the point of death instead of ours! Hinduism is not going to die because her sons have learnt to drink a cup of morning tea, forsooth! (CW 3: 388)
Or again these other telling examples:

The methods of Christ will not bring the victory of Christ to the man who is not Christ! In him the dumbness of the sheep is mere sheepishness, not Christ-likeness. (CW 3: 510) (emphasis in the original)

It may be quite true that the under-dog is not always in the right; still, no self-respecting under-dog will wag his tail over the upper dog's statement of his own ideals! (CW 5: 84)

One of her strongest exhortations is found in the following passage uttered as her last message for the Indians in Aggressive Hinduism:

All that we may take from the Pattern-Lives is the law that guided them, the aim for which they toiled. Renunciation! Renunciation! Renunciation! Accept the exigencies of thy time, the needs of thy place, as the material out of which the soul is to build its own boat for the great journey. Think not that it can copy exactly any that has gone before. To them look only for the promise that where they have succeeded thou shalt not utterly fail. Then build, and launch. Set out to find Thyself! And let thy going forth be as a blaze of encouragement to those who have yet to depart! (CW 3: 511)

With her journalist's instinct she can be simply factual without aiming at any rhetorical effect. This is Nivedita on the untouchable boys who helped her clean the streets of Calcutta during the plague:

One thing that has struck me daily, as I have gone about the Bustees [slums] to note progress and conditions, is the fine physique of these "untouchables," compared with higher caste boys of their own age. Though small-built, they are lithe, active, and well-knit. One never sees among them those physical deformities of bad feeding and ill-health that are so common among the children of the very poor. (CW 2: 336)
Without being sentimental, Nivedita notes here that the common expectation that the low-caste boys will be poor in physique due to malnutrition is thwarted in the case of the Indian poor.

The following is a passage that speaks for her descriptive powers and her love of nature:

The Indian night is in itself something never to be forgotten. Vast and deep and black it seems, lighted by large, soft stars that throb and gleam with an unknown brilliance, while the stillness is broken only by some night-beggar who chants the name of god in the distant streets, or by the long-drawn howl of the jackals crying the quarters of the night across the open plain. Even the moon-light itself, with the palm-trees whispering and throwing ink-black shadows, is not more beautiful than these solemn "dark nights", when the blindness and hush of things brood over the soul with their mighty motherhood. (CW 2: 7)

Here is an example of her communion with creatures of nature other than human that makes her a companion of mystics like St. Francis of Assisi:

This tree of healing is our perpetual joy. Constant breath and motion does it give. In, out, and about it play the sparrows, safe in its hiding from all their foes, while human creatures talk, or gravely sit and watch, below. Nor are the sparrows all its guests. On its outmost branches perch the crows – so full of humour though they cannot laugh! We take but little notice of these aggressive gentlemen, though we are well aware that our mode of life is to them a subject of perpetual curiosity and they frequently warn and advise us as to the ways of their own kind, with the friendliest intentions. A crow’s manner makes one feel that his information of that day would, if possible, be his instructions of tomorrow. And the pigeons come - the pigeons who live downstairs in the front courtyard and sometimes talk the whole night long. Or a single kingfisher will arrive, and for a couple of weeks together will give his loud clear call from the same spot at the same hour, every day, and then fly away. But what we love best are the little birds, and there are many – the tiny Tun-tun, so
much smaller than the sparrow, and an occasional Maina, and now and then a down-
swooping swallow, with other kinds whose names we do not even know. Yes, and
as in the early morning or late afternoon we watch the birds that fly in flocks away
and away to the north, with the sunlight shining on their white breasts and
underwings, we know that if to these our dwelling place offer any landmark we owe
it all to the Neem tree that lives by our side. By its graciousness and beauty alone
are won what place we may enjoy in the lives and counsels of the birds. (CW 2:
294)

Now follow a few striking examples of the power over words that Sr.
Nivedita has, either to invest non-human things with a humanity of her own or to
reverse the process by comparing human beings to their non-human companions.
Here is Nivedita’s remark about the young girl who comes back home as a child
widow and how she is protected by her parents’ sympathy:

And while she is supported by her father’s strong arm, the mother’s wings are open
wide, to fold closer than ever before the bird that has flown home with the arrow in
its heart. (CW 2: 50)

This is how she writes about caste as honour operating in all societies and
sometimes punishing the wrong man - the man with originality - for the sake of the
cohesion of the community:

And society is a vague and irresponsible magistrate, with so little illumination as to
his own purposes and tendencies that he frequently mistakes the pioneers of his
march for deserters and orders the stoning of prophets, whose sepulchres and
monuments will be erected by his children. (CW 2:107)

A description of a scenery:

the tall green-turbaned heads of a line of cocoanut palms. (CW 2: 294)
The picturesque nature of her lane elicits this comparison:

The irregular house-fronts that stand side by side as if treading on each other's toes in subdued and solemn eagerness - we could not have doubted that our lane was lively. Here a small verandah carries the front backwards; there a wall crowds forward, as if to see. (CW 2: 292)

In this description of the celebration of Dol Yatra, we find a compression of time and space, with scholarship pressed into service:

Here in India, where all ages persist, like geological strata piled one upon another, it is kept today as it may have been in Assyria or Egypt, in early Greece or in the empire of the Hittites. (CW 2: 308)

The sudden shifting of consciousness, in which the reader is forgotten for a moment and the author starts talking to the thing viewed, can be seen in her view about the broken staff of Nityananda:

We look in a dream at the simple broken piece of wood - only the head of the broken staff. But if we could see what you have seen, if we could touch what you have touched! (CW 2: 349)

A passage marked by constant shifting of person, vivid and expressive of her identification with Indians, a conversation that is not a conversation:

India is one, how much of India is one? Just so much, dear friend, as you can summon up strength to realize the fact! India is one. But she is so disunited! Is she? Look again! Look facts in the face. Break through all hypnotism. Fear not. Go down into the truth of things. It may be that you shall dare say that never was there a country or a people so united, so woven together in all their parts, so fundamentally one, as this India of ours. (CW 4: 291)
The following brief passages show how she twisted grammar to do service to her:

the cloud-veiled moon. (CW 2: 362)

Here scamper home the babies to find mother or aunt, grave elder sister, or twin-souled younger comrade. (CW 2: 42)

other-regarding purpose [ie. purpose that has regard for others] (CW 4: 390)

Some of her aphoristic sayings follow:

(i) All is in the mind. Nothing outside has any power save what we give it. (CW 3: 415)

(ii) Activity is eased and heightened if it is socialized. (CW 3: 391)

(iii) Mukti [spiritual freedom] lies in overcoming the thirst for mukti. (CW 3: 495)

(iv) The blessing of father or mother always creates destiny. (CW 3: 337)

(v) Nationalities were potential in Europe before he came. When he had gone, they were inevitable. [About Napoleon’s advent in and his contribution to European history] (CW 4: 221)

(vi) And war is no function of Humanity. It destroys the nation that wages it as assuredly as that which suffers. (CW 4: 221)

(vii) Cooks and blacksmiths may need the strength of youth, but statesmen and bishops are best made at sixty. (CW 4: 267)

(viii) Today aggression seems to Western peoples the one proper corporate activity. (CW 4: 221)
(ix) Family and party and ease can make no permanent stand against conscience.

It means that any man may be captured by the highest truth. It means that we are all alike one, in Dharma and in God. (CW 4: 288)

(x) Purpose, moral purpose, other-regarding purpose is the very antithesis of self-interest. (CW 4: 390)

Earnest and serious though she is often, she is capable of humour. Here is a humorous understatement

Apt to demand the polite attentions of the police … (CW 4: 289)

An interesting aspect of Nivedita’s importance for us lies in her letters. An inveterate letter writer that she was, Nivedita has written, in a period of about thirteen years, letters that run to more than 1200 pages of print. As Shankari Prasad Basu, the editor of Nivedita’s letters, points out in his Preface (Letters 1: 23), the letters have great significance for several reasons. Apart from the thematic importance of the topical questions that Nivedita frankly discusses in these letters, and apart from the fact that they give wonderful vignettes and word-pictures of important personalities of her times, the letters are documents remarkable for their self-revelation; Nivedita’s inner life and spiritual yearnings, her mystical love of nature, her spirit of oneness with the universe, her moral force and of course her inimitable love of India are all laid bare and thus they have a lyrical quality. In fact all the stylistic features one finds in her other writings may be found here in the letters also. A few illustrations follow.

About her experience before coming to India:

For the most part I think I should have to describe myself as exploring – or perhaps Swamiji would say creating – something new. But then I have gone through the
Christian discipline with infinite intensity, and then through the Agnostic discipline after that – so I suppose that in this matter, one is of a different generation. (Letters 2: 712)

Nivedita’s eye for detail, especially as one living in an environment different from that of her birth, may be seen in this little passage:

Fear and disaffection were in the air and even we on our green retreat up here [the terrace], with the palms waving overhead, and lizards playing about our feet, could see the general restlessness, in the attitude of our own servants. (Letters 1: 28)

Two examples of her ability for objectivity:

I could not help separating myself mentally for a moment and asking myself if the curled darlings of any other country would be found taking the same attitude in the same reverent and sympathetic way towards such a question. It was most beautiful. (Letters 1: 130)

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.” Love of country - Love of Fellows - Pride of birth - Hope for the Future - dauntless passion for India - and there will be such a tide of Art, of Science, of Religion, of Energy, as no man can keep back. Instead of dolts - heroes - instead of copyists - original geniuses. (Letters 1: 456-457)

Some of her mystical experiences find expression in her letters:

I feel so close to the secret of life nowadays – as if I must write to you and tell you what there is yet no chance to tell –as if I could talk poetry all the time. As I write I have been for the last hour conscious of two things, apple blossoms and flame – pure golden flame – and I feel as if one’s speech is really all like that – a line of
light running along the ground, or a flame playing about a bough – but what it means, where is the symbolism – that I do not know. (Letters 1: 136)

I had a beautiful thought last night. You know how Swami calls Kali-worship, the worship of Death. I was thinking of her like that, and there seemed to be a short red road up to her. But as one got nearer and nearer, she went back and back, till she became a lofty black door. It was the end of the path. Beyond lay the infinite Ocean. Kali was death. That image of a great black door comes to me all the time now, with her name. (Letters 1: 348)

How strange is this feeling of strength! For what is one but a little point between darkness and darkness – a dust-storm in Eternities of night – a feather lying curled in the infinite abyss of and yet in each human soul the strength of the All. And it is right so – it always was so. It could never have been otherwise. Only the strange thing is to know it. As someone said – “The weight of the whole Universe keeps one snowdrop in its place.” If only the snowdrop knew, and could enjoy! (Letters 2: 712 - 13)

To be for one moment the window through which the Divine Child looked at God is worth all birth and death and life and pain in between. But only the spiritual vision sees this. Commoner souls ask for definite relations. (Letters 2: 846)

Here follow some instances of her apt and beautiful employment of unthought-of imagery:

I daren’t write and tell S. Sara this episode …because I feel so ashamed – like a coachman who had been careless over the health of a horse. (Letters 1: 264)

Today I have before me the task of putting on paper what I know about Buddha! It’s like trying to put the rainbow under a tumbler. (Letters 1: 333)
And then one returns – as the servant from a holiday, as the soldier from leave of absence, one comes back to the work laid down. (Letters 2: 722)

One’s mistakes are one’s best lamps. (Letters 2: 770)

Her habit of humanising non-human things is also found in her letters:

Will you allow me to thank you for your beautiful translation of the Mundak-Upanishad? I find so many old friends here, which were often quoted by my Master, that the reading is full of delight to me. I did not know where they came from. (Letters 2: 754) (emphasis added)

Her reverence for life is seen in the following lines:

Let one always be reverent and hushed in the presence of one’s own life – that particular screen, upon which one has been allowed as it were to project one’s vision of god so as to make it actual and external. Nothing that Swamiji said is more true than His always pointing out that where we had to serve, we had really been allowed to worship ...

(Letters 2: 761)

Examples of the extent of her Indianisation expressing itself in unconscious imagery are numerous in her letters, as in her other writings. Here are a few:

That which is Indian for India I touch the feet of, however stupid. Anything else will do a little good and much harm... (Letters 1: 435) (emphasis added)

(The Indian custom of touching the feet of someone and placing the hand that touched the feet on one’s own head is a way of showing reverence to that person. The English expression ‘hats off’ expresses something of that spirit.)

Till the moment when my head is laid on the burning pyre. (Letters 2: 1271) (emphasis added)
(The expression refers to the Hindu rite of cremation, according to which only she wishes that her last rites should be done.)

Brief as this analysis is, it is sufficient to prove that from a literary point of view Sr. Nivedita deserves attention and appreciation as a significant writer of English prose.

II

The faculty of seeing and apprehending is common to all beings, while the human being enjoys a greater advantage in the possession of the sixth sense or mind. But there is infinite variety in the capacity of that mind and equally varied manifestations of that capability. Swami Vivekananda accounts for this difference as a consequence of the degree of concentration (CW-SV 4: 219). Among those who have attained to an extraordinary level of perception through concentration, India recognizes a special group of individuals who are revered as ‘rishis’, both for their vision and for their austerity.

Monier-Williams’ definition of a rishi takes into account only three aspects namely, the sacredness and the rhythmic nature of the song and the element of inspiration in the seer.

In his scholarly introduction to a book giving biographical descriptions of rishis in Tamil, Prof. Ramanathan writes that according to

...the definition given in the lexicon Vacaspatya, a rishi is one who crosses the wheel of worldly life through wisdom. Yaska defines the word as ‘rsir darsanat’ ‘A rishi is so called as he is possessed of vision.’ Gonda, in his Vision of the Vedic Poets, writes that vision can be defined as ‘the exceptional and supranormal faculty, proper to seers or seeing in the mind things, causes, connections as they really are,
the faculty of acquiring a sudden knowledge of the truth, of the functions and influence of the divine powers, of man’s relation to them.’ (Maharishihal Charitam viii)

Vettam Mani, a noted Sanskrit scholar, writes in his *Puranic Encyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Work with special reference to the Epic and Puranic Literature* that the Vedas are the outcome of the inspiration, introspection, and the spiritual vision of the rishis. There is a Sanskrit stanza defining a rishi:

Urdhvaretas tapas tyaga: niyatasi cha samyami
Sapanugrahayosakta: satya sandho bhavedrsi:

“A rishi is one who possesses the power of brahmacharya or full sense control, performs tapas or austerities, has renounced desires, is controlled in his food habits, has his mind under control, has the power to bless or curse, and is established in truth” (translation mine)

*Sarvalakshana Sngrahah* gives three aspects as constituting ‘rishitvam’ or rishihood (1)’Mantradrashtrtvam’ or the vision of sacred mantras (2) ‘Atindriyadarsitvam’ or the ability to see that which is beyond comprehension by the senses or that which can be comprehended through sense-control 3 ‘Jnana samsaraparagamitvam’ or the state of having crossed the ocean of worldly life through wisdom.

In the numerous references to rishis and rishihood in his speeches and writings, Swami Vivekananda emphasizes the nature of the power of vision for perceiving spiritual truths. (1)“The person in whom … super-sensuous power is manifested is called a rishi” (CW-SV 1: 181); (2) “the discoverers of … [spiritual] laws are called rishis” (CW-SV 1: 7); (3) “… truth came to the rishis of India…
seers of thought – and will come to all rishis in the future, not to talkers but to seers of thought” (CW-SV 3: 282); (4) “the rishis were ... the discoverers of the ‘mantras’ or Eternal Laws; they ... came face to face with the Vedas, the infinite mine of knowledge” (CW-SV 3: 456).

From the above definitions and interpretations it is clear that a rishi is one who possesses, as a result of sense control, austerities and wisdom, the extraordinary power of vision, that comprehends those subtle truths which are beyond normal perception, seeing in the mind things, causes, connections as they really are through inspiration, introspection, and the spiritual vision that does not depend on the senses. The seer is able to perceive the inner truth while the ordinary mind will perceive, in the same circumstances, only the external details.

Sr. Nivedita took great pride in the fact that the children of Mother India were all descendents of rishis and as such all had to discharge the ‘rishirina’ or ‘the debt to the rishis’. The debt is one of having inherited the highest ideals for human life as shown by the rishis and the way to repay the debt is by ourselves becoming rishis. For Nivedita was firmly convinced that the truths of rishis will not elevate one if one has not attained to the moral greatness of a rishi.

The power of the rishi Nivedita understands rightly to lie in “the power of seeing transcendent oneness, where the senses tell only of diversity. The man who can do this in any great degree is called a rishi.” Nivedita has caught the main idea of rishihood as the power to see beyond what the senses will tell. Thus the rishi is a “soul of perfected insight” (CW 4: 510).

Nivedita believed that a true seer spurned ease and was ready to undergo severe tapasya for his spiritual ideal in preference to ease and he never chose to run away from the battlefield of life. The rishis of yore knew that spirituality was not
ignoble ease and safety. “Strong as thunderbolt, austere as Brahmacharya, great-hearted and selfless, such should be the Sanyasin who has taken the service of others as his Sanyasa, and not less than this should be the son of the militant Hinduism” (CW 3: 508). Those who know her life – how it was all sacrifice and selflessness - will have no hesitation in endorsing the fact that she herself was strong as thunderbolt and fulfilled every word of this definition. And the knowledge of her writings will certainly convince one of the fact that in every respect, by any definition of rishihood, old or modern, Sr. Nivedita was a rishi – in the austerity of her life, in its burning selflessness, in the reverence she showed to the memory of rishis of yore or the rishi she knew, namely, her guru Swami Vivekananda, above all in the great love it bore for Mother India. All that she spoke and wrote had the stamp of the utterance of a rishi.

In her own time, those who were perceptive enough saw the extra-ordinary power of her words. Surendranath Bannerjee, a well-known nationalist leader of her times, wrote about her thus:

It seemed as if the liberated spirit of some Rishi of the olden times had been reincarnated in her so that, vitalized by the life of the West, she must once again, amid familiar environments, serve the people of her ancient love. No matter what complexion incompatible with an Indian sun was hers, her mind and soul were Indian – she spoke the thoughts of India – she dreamt the dreams of India – she passed her days and nights in an atmosphere surcharged with all that was best and noblest in the life of India, ancient and modern. (CS 66)

F.J. Alexander, a contemporary journalist and a friend of hers, attests to the fact that her words had extraordinary power:

Those whose fortune it was to know her, found themselves, when she spoke on those subjects she had nearest her [heart], transported into a world where ideals are realities and thought, a living power. Hers was an illumined intellect. Her
penetration in the world of ideas and intentions was such that what was previously in the mind only an intellectual consciousness of some truth became, under the radiance of her thought, an illumination and actual insight. (Grover and Arora 387)

Ancient India thought of Dharma in its universal, social, and individual aspects as that moral force which upholds all the worlds. It is upon Dharma that the entire universe rests, says the Mahanarayanopanishad\(^1\) (‘Dharmo visvasya jagadaha pratista’). In the opening verse of his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, Shankaracharya defines Dharma as expounded in the Vedas as twofold: the Dharma that governs the householder’s life and the Dharma that characterises the monk’s life and says that it is Dharma in these two aspects – the social and the super-social – that sustains life in the universe.

The Grihastha Dharma or the Duty of the Householder is explained in the Vedas and sutras. Of the three types of sutras, the Grihya sutras depict in detail all the sacred and mundane duties of the householders. A modern Sanskrit scholar of the Benares Hindu University, Dr. Naresh Jha, puts forth in brief the nature of the Grihya Sutras as follows: "grihochita karmanam samskaranam cha suvihata varnamam" (39). That is, “grihya sutras are those texts which describe in detail all the duties and samskaras\(^1\) that pertain to the household.” The Sutras, like all ancient scriptures, contain brief injunctions for leading a householder’s life according to the Vedic Vision.

It may be said with justification that Nivedita is a rishi who describes the characteristics of an ideal household in the Indian context. But her descriptions are not in the form of sutras or brief formulas but narrations that contain illuminating descriptions. If the sutras of the rishis are like the mathematical formulas, Nivedita’s vision of India is like worked-out sums. Nivedita’s record of the major features as
well as the minute details of the domestic life of the orthodox Hindu household at
the end of the nineteenth century in *The Web of Indian Life* and *Studies from an
Eastern Home* is a beautiful running commentary on the sutras. Going through them
one feels one has been to the world of the Vedic Dharma, of peace and contentment,
of noble selflessness, faithful devotion to duty and tireless commitment to the
maintenance of customs held as a sacred trust.

The Vedas as revealed texts, their subject matter, their antiquity, the
influence they have had on the Indian mind over the long centuries and the
customary reverence accorded to them by the Hindu society - these have rendered
the Vedas sacred and have put them on a high pedestal; it is true that ordinary
mortals cannot hope to imitate or repeat their achievement. Still it seems not
impossible, as Swami Vivekananda assures in the foregoing remarks, to participate
in the vision of the seers, provided objective conditions like purity and concentration
of mind are fulfilled. The rishis communicated their visions to the world through
hymns. Again the form of the communication of the rishis of yore cannot be
repeated now.

With these important qualifications, in all veneration for the ancient masters,
and on the strength of the unmistakable quality of truth that speaks in every page of
her writings, it is submitted that in Sr. Nivedita we find a modern-day seer, whose
vision was of Arsha Bharata, the India that remembered and followed the rishis and
bore the stamp of greatness as created by the venerable ancestors, even amidst the
process of Westernisation that was going on in the nineteenth century. That there is
no exaggeration in this can be seen directly in the writings of the Sister. If the rishis
of yore discovered eternal spiritual laws, Nivedita discovered the Sanatana Dharma
in its domestic and national aspects.
This extra-ordinary vision did not come to the Sister as a matter of course. The severity with which her guru changed the centre of gravity of her mind and released it from prejudices and half views, thus rendering it capable of seeing the truth, has been discussed in detail in the first chapter. But unless there already existed perceptive power worth the name, Nivedita could not have had the deep intuitive insight into things Indian in the way she had and as reflected in her writings.

This power of vision that speaks through Nivedita's writings has been rightly appreciated by another visionary, Rabindranath Tagore. In his Introduction to the second edition of The Web of Indian Life Tagore writes:

Nivedita saw more than is usually seen by foreigners who can only see things, but not truths. She had won her access to the inmost heart of our society by her supreme gift of sympathy. ... The mental sense by the help of which we feel the spirit of a people ... finds its objects not by analysis but by direct apprehension. Those who have not this vision merely see events and facts, and not their inner association, ... The vision of truth does not depend upon its dimension, but upon its vitality. And Sr. Nivedita has uttered vital truths about Indian life. (CW 2: 246)

In view of her humanitarian concerns, her moral fervour, her discovery of the soul of India, her understanding of the greatness of Indian civilisation in its basic ideals and its potentialities for continued renewal, her original and invigorating reinterpretation of Dharma as national righteousness, her reverence for life and human conscience, and her utterance of her perception of these basic truths and reinterpretations in words that are characterized by power, intensity, brevity and depth, Sr. Nivedita may rightly be recognized to be a modern-day rishi – with a message for Indians and for the world at large. The views of Tagore and Surendranath Bannerjee show that India, which, till a century back, kept the
foreigner out as a ‘mleccha’ or an untouchable, has now come to recognize a woman
and a foreigner in her true merit and accord her due honour as a seer and a sage –
with a deep intuitive perception into the ultimate principles of cosmic existence – if
not in the realm of Satya or Brahman, then in that of Dharma or the Moral Principle.

But India’s duty does not end with recognizing Sr. Nivedita to be a rishi and
forgetting her afterwards. Sastras tell us what true rishi yagna – honouring of the
seers – is. It is to read, ponder over and absorb their teachings, with not a single day
passing without renewing that contact – not as a ritual, but as a real, quickening
communion of an earnest soul with a great soul of an already attained perfection.
Sr. Nivedita’s is such a spiritual voice in the early twentieth century India, listening
to whom one would benefit by gaining a vision of Arsha Bharata or the India of the
rishis.