CHAPTER - 7

Conclusion
Chapter – 7

Conclusion

It is now time to gather the strands of arguments made in the foregoing chapters and assess the significance of Sr. Nivedita as a writer in English on India.

The drive for discovery in the Western psyche, inextricably linked with the desire to dominate, and leading to empire-building, had led in the nineteenth century, not to a true knowledge of the colonized but to a conscious assertion of superiority on the part of the colonial master and the attribution of inferiority to the colonized subject. But, in the context of the biggest of Britain's empire, India, the so-called subject race defended itself from the attacks of the West through the appearance of Swami Vivekananda in the West as a Hindu monk, who not only championed the cause of the maligned East but had a message of universalism and harmony through the philosophy of Vedanta. Margaret Elizabeth Noble, product of European enlightenment and skepticism in the nineteenth century, felt drawn to the message of the East as expounded by Swami Vivekananda, became his disciple and achieved a true understanding of India, not as one with a potential for domination but as one who loved, learnt from, served and also taught India. Nivedita’s life has the distinction of being that of a saint of values and her writings, the reflections of those values. The inner transformation in Margaret that led to a genuine revolution in her mind in the matter of understanding India was not just the Indianisation of a Western disciple but the freeing of her mind from preconceived notions about India. The significance of this transformation may be called national rather than merely personal, as Nivedita defended India and her customs to the ununderstanding West. From work exclusively for women Nivedita plunged into spiritualised politics, inspiring India to be united against the foreign ruler and win freedom for herself.
As a writer in English on India Nivedita is to be grouped along with Indians writing in English during the period 1857-1920, where she belongs thematically and chronologically. Her writings can be considered as good literature on India, written by one who was not born in India but lived, worked for and died in India. Nivedita was an Indian not by birth but by choice; for the entire orientation of her thought is unmistakably Indian and her writings show such close familiarity and deep understanding of Indian social life.

As an intrinsic part of her discovery of India, this occidental daughter of Mother India analyses the relation between India and the West, all the implications of which the Indian mind in general has not fully apprehended. A study of Nivedita’s writings is justified by the fact that it will make Indians aware of those aspects in the process of Western domination. A proper understanding of Orientalistic thought in the West, at once source and consequence of this domination, whose characteristic features postcolonial theorists like Edward Said have revealed, will be helpful to an understanding of her writings.

Nivedita’s discovery of the characteristic features of Indian civilization covers all aspects of Indian life: the domestic life of Indians as seen in the Hindu homes of Bengal in the beginning of the twentieth century (among whom Nivedita lived), and their customs, rituals, temple worship and festivals; the life of Indian villagers and their worship of trees and feminine deities and their other customs. This experience of living and moving among all classes of Hindus enables her to gain profound insights about the ideals that inform Indian life and leads her to the realization that, high or low, citizen or villager, the life of all Indians was permeated by the same ideals. Nivedita’s close observation of pilgrimage as expressive of the nation’s unity in diversity offers a valuable insight into the culture’s vitality. The author’s appreciation and representation of the nation’s literature that embody the
social laws and customs is seen in her assessment of the Laws of Manu and the national epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Here and in her beautiful account of the educational system that prevailed in India from ancient times till the introduction of the Macaulayan system of Western education, Nivedita displays rare acumen in understanding a culture which she did not inherit by birth.

The basic philosophical tenets of Hinduism such as the theories of karma, rebirth and maya and the scientific temperament that characterizes Indian philosophy do not pose any difficulty to Nivedita. She represents them accurately and incisively. The fact that philosophy is not divorced from life is illustrated in the lives of the saints of India, and Nivedita’s account of the two great saints she knew personally, namely, Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, her master, shows how she understood that religion is not theory or ritualism but realisation.

To Nivedita each Hindu custom and institution was a socialized expression of the ideals of the race. Ultimately what Nivedita discovers is the Indian character and the ideals that sustain Indian civilization. She finds a hope for humanity in the remarkable continuity of that civilisation. There is a tendency in Nivedita for constant comparison of the Indian civilization with the Western. She is eminently qualified to do so as she knew the West from the inside; this first-hand knowledge of both the East and the West is coupled with scholarship, so that her comparisons are a delight to read for the light they throw on both the civilisations.

Nivedita’s ideas on Indian women, though criticised by the Marxist feminist critics as romanticising or idealising patriarchal practices of Indians, are really indicative of the fact that she has avoided the error of assessing an alien culture by the standards and ideals of one’s own. Her exposition of the concept of Dharma and
of the theocratic nature of Indian civilization - by which she means the truly secular
nature of Hindu life and not what is today understood by the term, namely, a state
devoted to the promotion of one religion - are instances of her ability to enter
cynpathetically into the soul of an alien nation.

Nivedita's love of India did not make her partisan, nor did it vitiate her
attitude towards Britain, because overpowering the two was her love of truth. The
comprehensive nature of Nivedita's defence of India is such that she recognised the
various types of attack on India and the types of people who made that attack and
answered them all. This defence of India took the form of a) exposing the deep-
rooted misconceptions of the West regarding the social customs and religious
practices of the Hindus, b) setting right scholars' opinions on Indian art, literature
etc., c) bringing about self-awareness among the Westerners by exposing the weak
spots in their religion and civilization, d) giving a true picture of India to Western
children, e) taking the truth to the sympathetic among the Westerners and finally, f)
defending India to Westernized Indians.

Nivedita exposed the missionaries' methods of misrepresenting India. How
she did it may be seen in the following instances. Nivedita found that it was believed
by everyone in England and America that Hindu mothers gave their babies regularly
to crocodiles in the Ganges. As one who had lived among the Hindus and known
them in close quarters, Nivedita showed emphatically how this was a wild
exaggeration of the problem of infanticide in India. Nobody believed in it as a
religious practice or practised it as such. If poverty drove a few to infanticide, the
problem was more serious in England, where infanticide took place due to the
mother's intemperance or because the child was insured for five pounds while the
funeral expenses came to two shillings only. Here while admitting that the problem
of infanticide existed in India, she points out that accusations such as the baby
luncheons served out to the crocodiles only expose the self-righteous attitude of the Europeans who need to set their own house in order. She also showed that the mischief the missionaries worked in India was graver in other instances. By denigrating the Hindu gods they not only corroded the people’s faith in what they had all along believed to be right but did incalculable social mischief by making them believe that what they had considered wrong so far was right. Nivedita suggests that the missionaries should accept the Hindu gods if not as divinities, at least as national ideals worthy of respect by all who live in the nation.

Nivedita’s defence of the much maligned caste system may not be acceptable to many readers today. What was an unmitigated abuse in the missionary eyes turns out to be a wonderful social system with many things to its credit when Nivedita is the interpreter. These advantages of caste according to Nivedita are its trades guild characteristic, by which it allocates duty, social status and security to its members; its race protection nature, which gave the people strength to defend themselves without aggression in the face of foreign invasion; the charity and large-heartedness to uplift its less fortunate members that it engendered in its more fortunate ones; the sense of destiny and historical continuity it inculcated in its members by being the inner force that enabled them to preserve customs and ideals. But Nivedita did not fail to notice its ugly side, namely, untouchability. She sternly upbraids Indians for having fallen a victim to the base instinct for social persecution of one’s fellow human beings, while they managed to avoid religious persecution. For one who shows such perspicacity in general, it is surprising to note that Nivedita subscribes to the Oriental scholars’ view that Aryans were invaders from central Asia and not native inhabitants of India.

In the field of art, she effectively repudiated Prof. Grunwedel’s theory that Indian art was derivative of Greek art, with arguments that are uncommon in their
technical details, and proved conclusively that Gandhara was a disciple and not a guru in the matter of religious symbolism in art. Nivedita also showed up some of the skeletons in the West's cupboards: imperialism, the dangers of a mercenary science, absence of freedom of thought, and the failure of Christianity as a formulated religion. As her own childhood had been embittered by gross misrepresentations about India, she thought it was imperative to give Western children the right idea about India even when they were young. This she did through The Cradle Tales of Hinduism, where, in numerous ways she provides unobtrusively descriptions of the beauty of the Indian landscape and explanations of the customs, ideals and the character of Indians so that Western children would know that Indians are also human beings like them. Before sympathetic Westerners Nivedita made known her credo of what England should do to build an everlasting empire: it is to fall in love with the land and work for its welfare as one would love one's own children and seek their good. Hopelessly idealistic though it seems, this is what she herself did in India and consequently won a permanent place for herself in the hearts of Indians. Finally, defending India to Indians was necessitated by the reformist spirit of Westernized Indians, whose objections regarding idolatry, animal sacrifice and the so-called corrupt practices associated with Kali worship Nivedita answered forcefully.

Moving on from defence of India to redefining of India, Nivedita realized early India's need for political independence. In this Nivedita was far ahead of her times. Her idea that the true programme for India was to turn the British out, and work for her own regeneration in her own way was expressed by her for the first time in the middle of 1901 itself, while some of the national leaders in India mention it only after the partition of Bengal in October 1905. Acting upon this conviction Nivedita toured all parts of India and spoke so as to rouse the national consciousness of the people. In this she acted like a mother who sends her sons out to battle, acting
as their inspiration rather than their leader, rousing their sense of national pride and shaking them out of their apathy.

But Nivedita did not instill in Indians any narrow unrealistic pride in the past. Her discovery, interpretation and defence of Indian ideals and their social expressions in the form of customs led her relentless logic to the realization that a great readjustment was needed at the national level. For while it was true that India was not the benighted land that the Europeans believed it to be but the mother of a civilization of which Indians could rightly be proud of and from which the West could learn much, it was equally clear to her that India also needed to come to terms with the reality of the modern epoch ushered in by the West. This was not to be modernization in imitation of the West but a vital application of the time-tested ideals of the Indian past to what the West had to offer. For India to achieve this Nivedita proposed concepts like nationality, dynamic orthodoxy, Dharma as national righteousness, the need for rewriting India’s history by the Indians, swadeshi and national education.

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.’ She offers a vital re-interpretation of dharma as national righteousness: it is the union of traditions, common customs, loyalty and understanding, diligence and application of a virtuous and industrious people in the service of the motherland; it welds society into an organic unity, producing a race of the saints of the market-place and the field, and heroes of the civic and the national life.

National righteousness when applied to Indians, will, in the opinion of Nivedita, take the form of aggressive Hinduism. It is no virtue to be mild when the
nation is in the grip of organized exploitation by an imperial country. What is needed is the energy and the drive of a conqueror. The aggressive Hindu has to wage a war against the deep-seated apathy in him and learn to come to terms with the true significance of the modern era. With her deeply perceptive vision, Nivedita points out the features of the modern era to be physical and geographical unification of the entire earth through empires, advance of science, mechanization, accuracy and efficiency overtaking human consideration. The spirit of modernism is directly opposed to the centuries-long theocratic consciousness of Indians. Hence the importance of acquiring this coming to terms with the present at the world level.

To the pure theory of national righteousness and its application called aggressive Hinduism, Nivedita adds the action plan of dynamic orthodoxy. This 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. She exhorts Indians not to abandon their original cultural values or imitate the West but to translate ancient knowledge into modern equivalents and clothe the old strength in a new form. She suggests a few such applications: it would be dynamic orthodoxy if all Indians, by a willing and concerted effort, decided to use only that which the Indian people can make. This is swadeshi; it is orthodoxy as well as economy suited to the modern needs, as it is a refusal to participate in that conspiracy of modern trade by which our own country and our own people are being impoverished in an accumulating ratio. Needless to say, in the context of globalization, this is as relevant today as when it was uttered first. Another application of dynamic orthodoxy would be making available to the people the direct and simple knowledge behind the rituals and sacraments of Hindu customs.
Nivedita’s ideas on nationality show a remarkable resemblance to those of postcolonial theorists like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. Of course Nivedita was no postcolonial theorist but what that theory points to, namely, a true humanist.

Nivedita’s concept of national righteousness and dynamic orthodoxy hold the answers to criticism on her like, for instance, the charge that she overlooks some of the very real problems of Indian women of her times and romanticizes the ones she takes note of. She recognizes that women are honoured in India in the reverence shown to the mother and in the general respect shown by men to women. The fundamental difference between feminism and Nivedita’s ideas about women is that the former is an outcome of a consciousness of victimization and its voice is that of protest, while Nivedita saw the point in the argument behind the traditional view of marriage as social obligation, according to which, man and wife are united in marriage to aid each other in the discharge of the common duties of caring for the five types of beings: forefathers, family deities, monks, kith and kin and of course oneself. Here there is no room or need for equality but companionship and cooperation in discharging different duties. Nivedita was keenly alive to the spiritual strength of Indian women. Hence she hailed the Hindu household as an instance of love and cooperation. But she was also aware of the need for modern education for Indian women. She was clear that this new education should aim at training the women to contemplate the holiness, simplicity and sincerity of the great women of India of the past, their great deeds and the constructive ideals they stand for. She was emphatic that the education of the Indian woman will not be sound if it does not begin and end in the exaltation of the national ideals of womanhood as embodied in her own history and heroic literature. The other aspects of women’s education - intellectual knowledge of history, geography and science and the acquisition of efficiency or the ability to face any situation in life, personally and at the national and civic levels - are the same as those that she proposes for men.
Nivedita’s views on education in general furnish another instance of dynamic orthodoxy at work. Indians ought to develop their intellectual powers if they attach any serious importance to fulfilling their obligation to the Rishis. This is rishi yagna. Nivedita translates this ancient concept of India as “obligation to jana-desha-dharma” or one’s duty to the people, the land and the values of one’s country. Nivedita’s educational policy is free from parochialism and chauvinism for, it insists on the development of world-sense in the educated. Nivedita recognizes that there is a place for foreign culture in an ideal scheme of education; but she takes care to warn that it is never at the beginning. 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. A severe standard of self-respect and self-restraint must first be created before contact with foreign culture could be thought of.

Considered from the literary point of view, it is obvious that, though the author did not attempt major literary forms like poetry, novel or drama, her writings display a variety of prose forms such as interpretive narrative, hagiography, didactic essays, tales retold, travel writing, historical narrative and art criticism.

Nivedita is also able to command a variety of styles suited to these varying forms of writing. Special mention must be made of features of her writings like comparison and contrast and translation of Indian terms. With regard to the former, it is shown that this habit of comparison, between the East and the West, while leading the reader from the familiar to the unfamiliar, results in the recognition of the sense of unity of humanity on the part of the author. Nivedita’s translation of Indian terms is shown to be characterized by beauty and accuracy; and, in contrast to the Oriental scholars, who sometimes betray an uncomprehending brain attempting the translation of the mystical vedic hymns, it is her heart that responded to the
devotional content of the text in question. As a variation of translation, Nivedita often introduces Western equivalents.

Nivedita's journalistic writings fall under three categories, namely, the didactic, the aesthetic and miscellaneous. While considering the didactic essays in Religion and Dharma and Aggressive Hinduism, comparison with the practice of Addison and Steele in their Spectator essays is inevitable. In the place of the light-hearted pleasantries of the pioneers of English essays, we find high moral fervour in Nivedita, who is, as pointed out in a different context, like a matriarch buckling up her son for battle. Her aesthetic journalism comprises of art appreciations of the paintings of contemporary Indian artists and European masters of the past.

Coming to the historical narrative, her Footfalls of Indian History is notable for its fusion of historical facts and historical imagination. She did not simply reproduce history but recreated it. 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's letters possess the same stylistic features of her other works. As personal records, they are important for their discussion of the topical questions of her day, for the vignettes and word-pictures of her contemporaries and, lastly, for their intense self-revelation – from them the reader would come to know her inner life, her spiritual yearnings, her mystical love for nature, her spirit of oneness with the universe, her moral force and of course her inimitable love of India.

Nivedita's writings possess the power of great literature to move and stir the reader; she commands the sensuous and spiritual perception of genuine artists. Her ability to perceive subtle truths and ideals at work in any given situation, her high
ethical standard and the brevity and poetry of utterances make her a modern rishi – she is a rishi not in the sense of a discoverer of the eternal spiritual laws that govern the universe, but a discoverer of the laws that govern social and national life. In her own lifetime, her Indian contemporaries like Surendranath Banerjee and Rabindranath Tagore, and her European friends like A.J.F. Alexander have attested to her vision of vital truths about a situation and her ability to give powerful expression to those truths and hailed her as a modern-day rishi.

Now in the light of the findings of earlier chapters summed up above, our focus may be turned on Nivedita’s significance as a humanist and as a writer.

Nivedita was a great humanist who transcended the cultural limitations of her birth and upbringing in the West and achieved a profound insight into the unique features of Indian life and thought and gave powerful expression to that vision in her writings. The uniqueness of this achievement will be realized when it is remembered that many a non-native observer was simply incapable of piercing the apparent poverty, ignorance and what seemed to be lack of culture of the Indians to discover the inner nobility of the civilization.

In the face of prejudiced misrepresentation of India by the West, Nivedita dared to defend India, especially in those aspects which appalled the West. She showed Western domination of India for what it is. Her writings exhibit a rare perceptiveness regarding the empire and its ways and are marked by characteristic features of post-colonial discourse. 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. 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 emphasised the need for a revisionist history by Indians. And she was truly international and humanitarian. The concept National Righteousness is her significant contribution to Indian and world thought.

The justification for coming out in defence of India that Nivedita provides as the introduction to her answers to Prof. Grunwedel’s arguments is well worth the attention of Indians even though a century has passed since she made it: attacks on India are too numerous and too frequent to be ignored light-heartedly; what is more, India has a great need of the vision of herself as she is. The formidable nature of the consensus of opinion of others and their apparent objectivity does not dismiss the need for examining that opinion, warns Nivedita, but rather challenges us to examine it. With some qualifications to accommodate the changes that have taken place in the world scene in the hundred years since she wrote these words, it is still true that India needs to have a vision of herself as she is. Nivedita’s writings will help one arrive at such a self-perception.

From a literary point of view Sr. Nivedita deserves attention and appreciation as a significant writer of English prose. Her writings have a refreshing variety of forms and style. Her ability to perceive truths and ideals behind the apparent actuality, and the poetical prose in which this ability found expression are all her own.

This study has mainly been a textual one, focusing on Nivedita’s perceptions of India. Though postcolonial theory and criticism has been called in to aid a proper understanding of the author, there is scope for a much more detailed application of the theory to Nivedita’s works.
It will be interesting and fruitful to study in greater detail Nivedita’s views on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity and on the position of dalits in India, social aspects which attract much attention today not only in India but overseas too.

Thematically, Sr.Nivedita merits comparison with Indians like Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu on the one hand, and with Jawaharlal Nehru on the other. In her own time, there were other Western sympathizers of India like Dr. Annie Besant. The line of persons of such sympathetic understanding from the West continues today in writers like David Frawley of the United States of America, Michel Danino of France and the Belgian scholar Koenraad Elst, to cite a few names. Sr.Nivedita may be profitably studied in comparison with them as one of their pioneers.

Hundred years after they have been written, and in the context of globalization, Sr.Nivedita’s writings still ring fresh with their message of dedication to national righteousness and international understanding. If this valuable message is not given the attention it deserves, the reason is perhaps to be sought in the trend of Westernization running strong in India and elsewhere in the world. And that makes Sr.Nivedita all the more relevant.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1This rapid survey of centuries-long historical processes is based on the famous Indian historian K.M. Panikkar’s views as expressed in his classic Asia and Western Dominance (21-32).

2Gauri Viswanathan’s Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India traces this process of cultural dominance (1-22).

3The first Englishman definitely known to have visited India did so in 1579. He was a Jesuit called Thomas Stevens who served as a missionary in India for forty years. Stevens’s description of the Indians he met in Goa uses bases of comparison:

The people be tawny, but not disfigured in their lips and noses, as the Moors and Cafirs of Ethiopia. They that be not of reputation – or, at least, the more part – go naked, saving an apron of a span long and as much in breadth before them, and a lace two fingers broad before them girded above with a string, and no more. And thus they think themselves as well as we with all our trimming.

Four years after Stevens, Ralph Fitch, a London merchant, described his encounters in terms that were to characterize the kinds of fascination the English were to have with Indians for the next three centuries:

They have a strange order among them – they worship a cow and esteem much of the cow’s dung to paint the walls of their houses. They will kill nothing, not so much as a louse, for they hold it a sin to kill anything. They eat no flesh, but live by roots and rice and milk. And when the husband dieth his wife is burned with him, if she be alive; if she will not, her head is shaven.

He goes on:

Here be many beggars in these countries which go naked, and the people make great account of them; they call them Schesche[sic]. Here I saw one which was a monster among the rest. He would have nothing upon him, his beard was very long, and with the hair of his head he covered his privities. The nails of some of his fingers were two inches long, for he would cut nothing upon him, neither would he speak. He was accompanied with eight or ten and they speak for him. When any man speaks to him he would lay his hand upon his breast and bow himself, but would not speak.
Indians’ elevation and denigration in the English imagination as a spiritual and at the same
time hypocritical and lazy people starts here:

In Patenaw I saw a dissembling prophet, which sat upon a horse in the marketplace
and made as though he slept; and many of the people came and touched his feet with
their hands and then kissed their hands. They took him for a great man, but sure he
was a lazy lubber. I left him there sleeping. The peoples of these countries be much
given to such prating and dissembling hypocrites.

Such merchants’ and travellers’ tales were all the informed reports and
representations until after 1615, when James I sent out St. Thomas Roe, funded by the East
India Company, to mitigate official Anglo-Indian diplomatic relations (Childs 8).

4 For Burke this was not just a decision about India, however. “It is not only the interest of
India, now the most considerable part of the British Empire, which is concerned, but the credit
and honour of the British nation itself will be decided by this decision” (Childs 9).

5 A pioneer among Indian reformers, Raja Rammohan Roy worked for the abolition of Sati,
(the practice of, of self-immolation by widows on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands,
which was common in some parts of India), and founded Brahma Samaj, a reform movement
in Bengal.

6 Another reformist leader from Bengal who led the Brahmo Samaj

7 Kumari Jayawardena writes that Mary Carpenter (1807-1877), an English Unitarian radical,
was inspired by Raja Rammohan Roy and later by Keshab Chandra Sen, visited India several
times to study the condition of Indian women and tried to influence the British government in
bringing about reforms in those conditions. (70-71)

8 Charles E. Trevelyan published a tract “On the Education of the People of India” in 1838
(Shourie 66-80) and “On Christianity and Other Religions” in 1884 (Shourie 82-90); and on
“The Political Tendency of the Different Systems of Education in Use in India” Sir Richard
Temple spoke to the Baptist Missionary Society in London in 1883 (Shourie 92-106). These
are representative pieces only. It is needless to say there were many more of this type. Both
Trevelyan and Temple were highly placed officials in the Indian Government either during
the Company’s rule or in the Crown’s. Both emphasised the need for Christianising India.
The myth of the Aryan invasion of India by the original Aryans from central Asia was invented by scholars, including Max Muller, "to cut down the Indians' pride in their past and nation ... and to legitimize Britain's conquest of India as merely one more 'Aryan wave' which... would bring the true light to the sub-continent." (Danino 27)

Apart from the (in)famous Minute of 1835, Macaulay has to his credit "Gladstone on Church and State" and "The Gates of Somnath," in both of which his condemnation of Hinduism continues unabated, while in a letter to his father he revels at the effects of the new education introduced in India on his recommendation: "Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully ... It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes ... thirty years hence" (qtd. in Shourie 64-65).

"India cannot yet produce great women; she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted" (Letters of Swami Vivekananda 408).

Period of training of a celibate or a novice in a monastery

The name means "the Dedicated"

A hill station in the Himalayas where two of Swami Vivekananda's English disciples, Captain and Mrs. Sevier, had built an Ashrama (building for monks) for the Ramakrishna Order. It was in Almora that the clash and conflict between guru and disciple surfaced and found its final resolution.

Swami Vivekananda's childhood name was Narendranath. 'Noren' was a colloquial abbreviation of this name, by which Sri Ramakrishna used to call him.

Monastery

Anil Baran Ray, in his article "Swami Vivekananda and the Indianisation of a Western Disciple", traces the changes that a me over Nivedita's loyalty to Britain excellently. But throughout the article the aspect of making her Indian is emphasized as if that was the only motive (SV-HYC 620-34).

About Nivedita's living in the Hindu quarter of Calcutta, there is an interesting piece of information as to what other Europeans thought of her. A.J.F. Blair, a European friend of
Nivedita, writes: “of all the eccentricities for which she stood blamable in European eyes the most outstanding was the perverseness with which she eschewed European society, and lived ‘al Indienne’ in Bosepara Lane Bagh Bazar.” Among the European circles she was known by reputation as a gifted crank (Grover and Arora 389).

Barbara Foxe writes in her biography of Sr. Nivedita, Long Journey Home, about Nivedita’s first days in Bosepara Lane in Calcutta thus:

She had come home. And not only to her house, but to the entire lane, and her neighbours in it. ‘They felt a curious sense of responsibility, as if I were the guest of the whole of our lane. They were constantly sending food… if I expected guests, they would provide the repast, and I rarely knew even the name of the giver.’ This sense of responsibility may have been not unconnected with the warmth and sympathy they found in their new neighbour…. Nivedita and Bosepara Lane became very much at home with each other, one way and another. (70)

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), a high caste Hindu widow from Maharashtra, rebelled against the customs of the day and converted to Christianity. She wrote and worked in protest against the condition of widows in India. She had the crusader’s zeal and was a missionary and reformer in one. (Jayawardena 54-62). With aid from America, she started “Sharada Sadan,” a home for upper caste widows in Bombay. She engaged in conversion actively, even against the wishes of her American funders. The inauguration of the widows’ home was much publicized. A well-known woman novelist was invited to inaugurate the house (Jayawardena 56-57). The Purastree Vibhag or the Women’s Section was started by Nivedita sometime after the school was started in November 1898. There was no fanfare and no conversion. Hence the event did not make sensational news.

Plague relief work by the Ramakrishna Mission, with Nivedita as the Secretary and the monks of the Order as members, was carried out so well that the District Medical Officer and Chairman were greatly pleased. A government grant of 58 rupees was also given for carrying out the work.

At the time of writing this letter, Nivedita was convalescing in her American friend Mrs. Ole Bull’s house in Norway after a serious illness.

In the Hindu religious system, a devotee is given the freedom to choose his or her favourite form of God, which is called Ishta or Chosen Ideal.
These words form part of the epitaph on the memorial of Sister Nivedita which proclaims: “Here repose Sister Nivedita who gave her all to India.”

Chapter – 2: India Discovered – Her People and Their Way of Life

1 See The Web of Indian Life and Studies from an Eastern Home for Nivedita’s books on Indian life; “India Has No Apology to Make,” “Indian Women As they Strike An English Woman” for lectures delivered in India; “New Interpretations of Life in India” Family Life and Nationality in India” “The Ideals of Hindu Women” “Hindu Social Life” for lectures delivered in England and America, to cite a few examples.

2 Refers to the custom of Indian women who open and set the door wide in the morning with prayers for the welfare of the members of the household. The pavement in front of the house is cleaned with water and a design is drawn in powdered rice or other material.

3 Daily devotion consisting of a ritual offering of food, drink, and ritual actions and prayers, most commonly to an image of a deity.

4 Unmarried woman devoted to God.

5 A master mathematician and astronomer of twelfth century India. It was he who declared, much earlier than western experts, that the earth is round in shape (Mani 127).

6 See Note 20 of Chapter 1

7 An Indian Parsi Christian (1866-1954), was the first Indian woman to become a lawyer. She wrote Between the Twilights (1908) describing cases of child widows that came to her for counsel. The book was severely criticised by nationalists and appreciated and much quoted by missionaries and Western critics of Indian society (Jayawardena 93-94).

8 It was obvious to everybody that “for Christians in India and their supporters abroad, the crucial question of social reform was linked to British rule. It was not merely that “enlightenment” and progress was thought of as part of the blessings the British had conferred upon India, but also that the end of British rule was seen as reversion to conflict, ignorance and superstition” (Jayawardena 58).
That Ms Mayo was one such is seen from the following:
The practice of burning the widow upon the husband’s funeral pyre is to-day unlawful. But it must be noted that this change represents an exceptional episode; it represents not a natural advance of public opinion, but one of the rare incursions of the British strong hand into the field of native religions. Suttee was forbidden by British Governors some twenty-nine years before the actual taking over by the Crown of direct government. That advanced Indian, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, supported the Act. But other influential Bengali gentlemen, vigorously opposing, did not hesitate to push their fight for the preservation of the practice even to the court of last resort—the Privy Council in London (Mayo 83).

9 The use of veil by high caste Indian women in certain parts of India like Bengal who led secluded life in the inner apartments of the houses.

10 See Tagore’s Introduction to the 1918 edition of The Web of Indian life.

11 A Vaishnava Saint of Bengal who preached the message of love of Sri Krishna. He brought many Buddhists into the mainstream of Hinduism.

12 One of the eighteen puranas, devoted to the exploits of the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu, especially to that of Sri Krishna, and hence very sacred to the devotees of Sri Krishna.

13 One who has renounced the world, usually a wandering mendicant, the sanyasi carried a wooden staff in hand as a symbol of his vocation.

14 Sacramental food offered to the Lord in puja and distributed to the devotees at the end of the puja.

15 “Nothing is commoner than for these old attendants to attach themselves to a family as grandmother, claiming the privilege of scolding their employers and spoiling those employers’ children to the end of their days. In such cases a stranger would not easily perceive the social inferiority of this member of the family group. The mistress prepares her servant’s food and gives it with her own hand (a curious inversion of our notions), and when the servant dies, in the fullness of time, she is mourned by these kindred of her adoption as one of their own blood.” (CW 2:287)

16 Maha Deva, a name of Lord Shiva, means literally the great god, is also called ‘Bhikshatana’ meaning a wandering mendicant.
Nivedita describes with humour how she was taken to task by “a young avenging angel,” for not adhering to such an inviolable rule! On her first morning in an Indian home, Nivedita, after days of railway travel, and with hardly sufficient sleep during the night, got up at 8 o’clock and proceeded immediately to open her tea basket, when a little boy, with much pain and surprise, asked her in slow deliberate words, “Have you said your prayers?” (CW 2:7)

The inner apartments of a high-caste Hindu household, occupied by the women, who live confined to these rooms; if they come out for any purpose, they will do so veiling their heads with the upper part of their sari, a long piece of cloth worn round the body. The zenana system is not observed these days in many parts of India.

The great Birthday Festival of Sri Krishna, celebrated on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravan, corresponding to August.

The last month of the year according to the Indian calendar, corresponding to the period between 15th of March and 15th of April.

Place associated with the childhood sports of Sri Krishna.

Savitri and Gayatri are the feminine deities of the Sun God in Hindu Mythology. Gayatri also refers to a very popular prayer, repeated chanting of which will bestow clarity of understanding.

A ghat is usually a row of steps on the bank of a river leading to the water. In Benares, there are several ghats of which the Manikarnika ghat is also a burning ghat; that is, it serves as a place of cremation also; it is believed that death in Kashi, followed by cremation in the Manikarnika ghat, will bestow final freedom on the soul.

Bharata was the son of Dushyanta born of Sakuntala. He is said to have ruled the land for a long time and hence the land is called Bhārata.

Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Sindhu, Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri; of these Saraswati is believed to be a subterranean river. The land where Sindhu flows is now in Pakistan.

Literally, ‘symbol’. It is a symbol that represents the formless god.

Palanquins.
Chapter 3: India – Her Literature and Philosophy

1 An eleventh century saint from Tamil Nadu. He was a great social reformer too. Against the injunctions of his guru to the contrary, he pronounced the great mantra of Lord Vishnu from the temple tower so that even the outcastes could hear it and attain salvation.

2 Queen of Mewar, Rajaputana and a great woman saint. Devotee of Sri Krishna; her songs expressive of her ecstatic devotion to Sri Krishna are popular even today.

3 Seventeenth century Mahratta saint and guru of the great Hindu emperor Samrat Shivaji, who spread the love of Sri Rama and of the Dharma.

4 A great Mahratta saint and devotee of Lord Panduranga at Pandharpur.

5 A Muslim by birth, Kabir was a great saint of North India, and a devotee of Sri Rama; his hymns are also very popular.

6 The great eighth century founder of Advaita philosophy or monism. Born in South India, he travelled all over India and founded ten orders of Sanyasa sampradaya or monastic traditions, of which four are living to this day.

7 Refers to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1880) who lived and preached in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. He was the founder of the Ramakrishna Movement and guru of Swami Vivekananda. His characteristic teaching was the validity of all religions, a realisation of which truth will lead to universal brotherhood of humanity.

8 Christina Greenstidel (1866–1924), known as Sr. Christine, was an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda. She joined Sr. Nivedita in the work for Indian women.

9 The earliest known Indian mathematician and astronomer of the fifth century AD. He is famous for his treatise on arithmetic and astronomy. Indian almanacs follow his principles.

10 According to Hindu philosophy, the final emancipation of the soul from all bondage is known as mukti. Advaita Vedanta says that this is not a state to be obtained after death but can be realized while alive. This freedom in life is known as jeevan mukti.

11 In Vedantic parlance, duality or pairs of opposites like good–bad; pleasure – pain; success–failure; praise-blame; etc.
Previously known as Cape Comerin, it is the southernmost tip of India, where three oceans meet. There is a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mother of the Universe kanyakumari.

Chapter – 4: In Defence of India

“White men are saving brown women from brown men” said Spivak, referring to the interference of the British authority in social reforms in India like the abolition of sati. (Wedge 296)

2 When The Web of Indian Life was published, it was criticised bitterly by some, while others received it well. Two samples of unfavourable criticism follow.

Atheneum (1904):
If Sister Nivedita is an unsafe guide in social questions, she is still less to be trusted when she undertakes to deal with matters of Indian History or literature, and it is much to be regretted that no scholarly friend was at hand to prevent the publication of such chapters as those on “The Indian Sages” and “The synthesis of Indian Thought.” It would be as easy as it would be distasteful to multiply instances of misunderstanding and misstatement (CW 2 xi).

The Church Times (August 19, 1904).
In ‘The Web of Indian Life’ the authoress lets herself go, so to say, with entire abandon, to give us a couleur de rose picture of Indian life and thought ... It is all pure undiluted optimism ... It is the suppression of the other side of the picture that we deprecate in the interest, not only of the truth, but of the cause of Indian women themselves, whose lot will never be improved if this sort of sentimental idealism about them is allowed to obtain credence. Potentially, we are fully prepared to believe the Indian woman is what she is here described as being. Actually, the ideas, the sanctions, the customs of the men of India must undergo radical transformation before the ideal can be realized. And only Christianity can effect that transformation (CW 2 xi).

A military array

In her letter to Ms MacLeod, Nivedita declares:
My task is to see and make others see. The rest does itself. The vision is the great crisis. Now do you see what I feel and why? To me now a missionary is as a snake to be crushed with my heel. The better he is doing, the worse he is – as far as I am
concerned at least. ... The English official is a fool, playing amidst smoking ruins and crying on the highway that he builds well. The Native Christian is a traitor in his own land. For these and for all other bought men, paid spies, mercenaries, India has no use and no time. Very different work must they be at, who would save her, or show her, rather, how to save herself (Letters 1: 436).

1 Phenomenon of thugs, who were believed to be members of secret organizations of robbers in India and worshippers of Goddess Kali; they were feared to strangle their victims.

6 The ancient science of health and medicine of India, still popular in Kerala and other parts of India.

7 A traditional medicinal system belonging to Tamil Nadu. The exponents of this system, who were yogis or men with powers of meditation, discovered the medicinal value of herbs and roots.

8 Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India traces modern English studies to their colonial origin.

9 This was what Monier-Williams wrote in his Modern India and the Indians, published in 1878.

10 An Englishman, who was the Principal of the Calcutta Art School; a great art critic of his times and an admirer of Indian art. He was a close friend of Nivedita and learnt about the greatness of native Indian art from her.

11 Another art critic and prolific writer on culture. Especially, a lover of Indian art and culture, he was an associate of Nivedita and co-authored with her a book entitled Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists.

12 Founder of Sikhism, a sect that arose in North India during the sixteenth century.

13 Refers to the strict caste rules regarding the company in which one eats. Such rules are expressive not of exclusiveness but of self-denial, renunciation and strength of character.

14 One of the constant companions of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.
It may be said that European historians, anthropologists, art historians, linguists and Orientalists formed a sort of guild among themselves in the common consensus they showed in employing the results of their studies (which had the appearance of objectivity) to denigrate the Indians.

Chapter – 5: Inspiring India

1In this connection it will be worthwhile to quote what one of her European friends in India observed about her. S.K. Ratcliffe, in his Preface to the first edition of Religion and Dharma, published in 1915, describes how the essays came to be written; and in that context, he observes as follows: “When The Web of Indian Life was published, in 1904, the enthusiasm of the national movement was rising in Young India. Sister Nivedita was among the most forceful and devoted of its spiritual leaders, and the service of her voice and pen were in demand from every side.” (CW 3: 484)

2Mrs. Annie Besant has many points in common with Sr. Nivedita and merits detailed comparison or even individual consideration.

3Born of ignorance and inertia

4See note 10 in Ch.3

5The first National War of Independence in British India, variously referred to as “The Revolt of 1857”, “The Great Rebellion of 1857” and “The Sepoy Mutiny”.

6Swamini Pramananda shows in her Talks on Vedic Dharma and Culture how universal values can be expressed differently in different cultures and how a true understanding and assessment of other cultures is necessary for one to understand and observe the customs of one’s own culture. For values may be universal, while their cultural expressions need not (12).

7Literally, ‘I salute the Mother.’ Ever since Bannkim Chandra Chatterjee, a Bengali writer of the nineteenth century, popularized the Sanskrit salutation, all India took it up spontaneously and the slogan soon became anathema to the British government as an expression of civil disobedience. Sr. Nivedita literally worshipped the motherland by uttering this mantra.

8Austerity or the controlling of mind, senses and the body for a high purpose. Nivedita terms swadeshi as tapasya because it involves sacrifice and self-control for the sake of the nation.
These groups are voluntary associations of mutual aid in the Indian village communities, which promote income-generating activities through small loans. They are homogeneous groups of rural poor, especially women, which pool in the resources of members to meet their needs. Members make regular contributions, from which loans are extended to needy members at a low rate of interest. These groups are linked to banks and are helped by Non-Government Organizations in their organization. But the main feature of this scheme for micro-finance is the self-reliance of the group members. (Meenambigai, 17-18 & Ganesamurthy et al. 12)

It is interesting to note that the origin of this micro-finance scheme for Indian rural poor is to be traced to similar groups started in Bangladesh three decades back, from whom the Indian rural poor took inspiration. Bangladesh was originally East Bengal, where the swadeshi movement started.

A copper coin formerly used in the Indian sub-continent worth one sixteenth of a rupee.

arulukku nivedanamai, anbinukkor
koilai adiyen nenjil
irulukku jnayirai emaduyar
nadam payirukku mazhai, ingu
porulukku vazhiyariya varijnarkup
perum porulaip punmaittatak
curulukku neruppai vilangiya
thai niveditaiait tozhudu nirpen.

I worship Mother Nivedita, who to me is
As an offering to Divine Grace,
As a Temple of Love
As the Sun that dispels the darkness of my heart
As rain to the crop that our great land is
As great wealth to those who know no way of earning here and
As fire to falsehood.
The mother's heart, the hero's will,
The sweetness of the southern breeze
The sacred charm and strength that dwell
On Aryan Altars, flaming free;
All these be yours and many
No ancient soul could dream before -
Be thou to India's future son
The mistress, servant, friend in one.

Nivedita was well-versed in sociological and political writings of acknowledged European masters like Prince Kropotkin and Patrick Geddes and Indian masters like Swami Vivekananda (NCV 52). Dr. Santwana Dasgupta credits her with the introduction of the sociological method of studying history in India (NCV 103). She knew well the theological views of the free thinkers of nineteenth century Europe like Frederic Denison Maurice (CW 1: 20); scientific works of Darwin, Huxley and Tyndall (CW 2: 397-8), and later Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose of India so well that it was she who “gave Dr. Bose's scientific inventions and the results of his researches the form of articles or treatises” (NCV 297); works on economics by European experts and Indian like Romesh Chandra Dutt (Atmaprana 255-56); English literature, contemporary and of earlier times, especially, Shakespeare and the Bible and works of educationists like Pestalozzi and Froebel. And though the source of her artistic principles is not known, her works bear ample evidence to the fact that she had acquired thorough knowledge of Renaissance and later European masters and knew Christian religious music.

Barbara Foxe narrates humorously how Swami Vivekananda was fully aware of her feminist attitude. In one of his letters to Mrs. Frances Legget from Paris, where he was attending a “Congress of Religions”, he humorously commented:

We had a congress of cranks, here in the house.

We had great difficulty in electing the president ... I proposed Joe but she refused on the ground of non-arrival of her new gown – and went to a corner to watch the scene, from a coign of advantage . . .
‘Chutney is the thing’ said a voice near the door. We all looked back, and saw Margot. ‘It is chutney’ she said, ‘chutney and Kali, that will remove all difficulties in life, and make it easy for us to swallow all evils and relish what is good.’ But she stopped all of a sudden, and vehemently asserted that she was not going to speak any further, as she had been obstructed by a certain male animal in the audience. She was sure one man in the audience had his head turned towards the window and was not paying the attention proper to a lady, and though as to herself she believed in the equality of the sexes, yet she wanted to know the reason of that disgusting man’s want of due respect for women. Then one and all declared that they had been giving her the most undivided attention, and all above the equal right, her due, but to no purpose. Margot would have nothing to do with that horrible crowd and sat down.”(87)

15 Knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Reality.

16 See note 15 to Chapter 2. In this description of the mistress of the house cooking the food and giving it to the servant with her own hand Nivedita points out another instance of the humanity of custom in the Hindu household.

17 According to Hindu philosophy, the four goals of human life are Dharma or moral obligations, Artha or wealth, Kama or the sense pleasures that wealth brings and finally Moksha or liberation from bondage to the senses and the mind.

18 “The chastity of women is the central virtue of Hindu life.” (CW 4: 524)

19 “Competition, co-operation and self-dedication are the three ways in which beings make life a fulfillment. The lowest order of creation exists by sheer competition. In this stage struggle for existence is an endless warfare. ... The law of survival of the fittest inexorably prevails in life at the physical level.... In the life at the mental plane, cruel competition gets minimized. Intelligent co-operation gains ground here. This process is also known as social life. ... Self-dedication is the highest law of life. It prevails at the ethical and spiritual planes. ... The act of offering the best and the most useful in one for the welfare of the others is self-dedication.” (Chidbhavananda BG 222-23)

20 An ideal householder is expected to discharge daily five sacred duties, called Panchamahayagna: Deva Yagna or worship of Gods; Pitru Yagna or Service to living parents and offering of worship for dead ancestors; Rishi Yagna or homage to the self-realised souls
called rishis, who, out of compassion for ignorant humanity, have recorded their spiritual experiences; it consists in daily reading of the sacred texts and sincere efforts to put the injunctions contained therein into practice; Nara Yagna or service to human beings and Bhuta Yagna or reverent regard for all creatures.

21 "They [the husband and the wife] know well that they are the strongest influence, each in the other’s life. ... Their first duty is to see that the claims of others are met.... It is not equality. No. But who talks of a vulgar equality, asks the Hindu wife, when she may have instead the unspeakable blessedness of offering worship?"(CW 2: 37)

22 This scholar was told this in a private conversation with a non-resident Indian who came to India on a visit.

23 See note 20 above

24 G.S.Ghurye observes in his book Caste and Race in India that “under the old regime of caste certain sections of Hindu society regarded as untouchable were devoid of many of the civil rights” (275), education being one such important right, and that “the schools maintained on public contribution are practically closed to such impure castes as the Chamars and Mahars” (12). The same author writes about the vigorous movement against the segregation of untouchables started by Jotirao Phooley of Poona. Phooley “perceived the necessity of education ... and started in 1851 a primary school for the so-called untouchables in Poona, the very centre of orthodoxy, where, only fifty years before that, persons of these castes could not even move about during the best part of the day” (287). Isolated cases of Brahmins who were sympathetic to the untouchables and unapproachables one may come across in different parts of the country; in this regard, Ghurye mentions the work of the Bengali Brahmin Shasipada Bandyopadhyaya and R.G.Bhandarkar, the Maharashtrian Brahmin scholar (325-26). Dr. Ambhekar, the noted constitutionalist from an untouchable background, was himself the recipient of the kind treatment of his Brahmin school teacher who patronized him and gave him his own name Ambhekar, as if to assert that, at least in his eyes, the Brahmin teacher and the Mahar student were on an equal footing. V.R.Shinde, the twentieth century torchbearer of Phooley spirit, worked for the uplift of untouchables socially and educationally. “From 1924, and perhaps also earlier, Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause and made it a plank in his political platform. The great endeavour of eradicating this feature of the social life of India which the national government has embarked upon ... stems from his teaching.” But Ghurye points out how, before Gandhi’s advent, “something was being done by the then government of the country” (326). As late as 1935, the steps taken by the
government “for the educational progress of the untouchables had to begin with the primary education, at which stage alone a fair number of pupils of these castes could be met with” (327)

25“...The chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole of education ... among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it by spreading education among the masses.”(CW-SV 4: 482)

26In this traditional Indian story-telling method, narrative is interspersed with song; the theme will usually be the Ramayana the Mahabharata and the lives of saints. The nature of the subject is such that frequent expositions of philosophical principles will naturally figure in the course of the story-telling. It is also known as ‘kathaka.’

27 See note above. Nivedita suggests that geography, history and science may be fruitfully made to form the themes of this mode of education.

Chapter – 6: A Spiritual Voice in the Indian Literary Scenario

1“Max Muller asked: ‘What can be more tedious than the Vedas?’ and found many of its hymns to ‘yield no sense whatever.’ ‘The verses of the Veda appear singularly prosaic,’ echoed H.H.Wilson, ‘and at any rate their chief value lies not in their fancy (sic) but in their facts, social and religious.’ M. Monier-Williams found the Vedic hymns ‘to abound more in puerile ideas than in striking thoughts and lofty conceptions.’ R.T.H.Griffith was struck by the ‘intolerable monotony of a great number of the hymns,’ whose language and style, according to E.B.Cowell, ‘is singularly artificial.’ This last, however, was so generous as to concede that ‘far wider and deeper study is needed to pierce to the real meaning of these old hymns.’ Unanimity was almost complete” (Danino 25).

2“I listened [to the Swami] with an anxious mind, striving to treasure up each word that he let fall. For I knew that here I was but the transmitter, but the bridge, between him and that countless host of his own people, who would yet arise, and seek to make good his dreams.” (CW 1: 138)

3All the conversations of the saint with the devotees and disciples were recorded by Mahendranth Gupta, a close disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was so self-effacing that he did not like to disclose his identity when he published those conversations and preferred to refer to himself as simply ‘M.’
Nivedita recounts how she came to write *Aggressive Hinduism* in her letter to Miss MacLeod:

I sat down one evening thinking, 'If this were my last word to the Indian people, let me try to write Swami's whole ideal for them in one message.' I finished it in three evenings, and had copied it out and perhaps sent it off by the Friday that week. Two days later, I was down with brain-fever, and no one knew whether I would live or die! So it might really have been my last will and testament" (Letters 2: 836).

A young Bengali who had ambitions to write Indian History and was inspired by her. In answer to his request Nivedita wrote a long letter spelling out her conception of how a historian should work. It is a monumental credo for historians.

This is what Sr. Nivedita writes in her letter to Mr. Mohit Chandra Sen:

I understand that the translation is absolutely accurate. And I think the beauty and smoothness of the English language and metre are extraordinary. But if I have a wish, it is that you should now render it into incomparable prose. I fear that I am an incorrigible advocate of the lyrical qualities of prose-song of the type of the psalms in our own English Prayer Book. I always felt that it has a vastness, together with a music, that makes its possibilities beside verse, more of a Cathedral Organ beside a piano! Do try and let me read your translation! (Letters 2: 775)

"A singer of sacred hymns; an inspired poet or sage, any person who invokes the deities in rhythmic speech or song of a sacred character. According to orthodox Hindu ideas they are the inspired personages to whom [the Vedic] hymns were revealed".

A famous Sanskrit grammarian of ancient times, who, along with Sayana, saved the Vedas from becoming unintelligible by composing "Nirukta" (etymology).

An etymological dictionary by Gowri Shankar Bhikshu.

One of the 108 Upanishads.

A sacred, purificatory rite or ceremony. According to the Vedic tradition, there are sixteen Samskaras to be performed for a man from birth to death, or rather from conception to death.