CHAPTER - I

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I

A daughter of Ireland, the brilliantly gifted disciple of Swami Vivekananda, Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble, later known as Sister Nivedita, came to India in 1898, and, having adopted it as her own country, breathed her last on its sacred soil in 1911. She dedicated her life for the service of India, and worked ceaselessly to mitigate the sufferings of Indians. The life of Sister Nivedita is a profile of courage, and devotion -- a tribute to humanity. Her Master, Swami Vivekananda once said to Nivedita, "............ you have the making in you of a world-mover ............ ." ¹ And Nivedita turned her world-moving power to moving the dormant life of India, Bengal in particular. She made this unlucky country her own, and gave her life-blood. She was one of the greatest interpreters of the ideals, culture, religions, and, customs and manners in India, and played an extra-ordinary role in reawakening of Bengal, and India in general at a crucial juncture of history. In India, Nivedita nurtured all the cultural and political movements of the time.

Swami Vivekananda was the mighty flood that carried Nivedita from a far distant land to the Indian shores. Vivekananda was not Nivedita’s ‘guru’ in the traditional way, it was he who for all time made Nivedita “the Dedicated”. In his scheme for the regeneration of the country, Vivekananda attached great attention to the uplift of women in India. When Vivekananda failed to find any woman in India who could shoulder this responsibility, his choice fell upon Nivedita. And the response from Nivedita was immediate, and absolute. She dedicated her life, all her heart and soul to the service of India. To a Calcutta audience Vivekananda aptly described her as a ‘gift of England to India’. Quite a few talented and noble ladies from the West responded to the call of Vivekananda, and the names of Miss Muller, Mrs. Ole Bull, & Miss Josephine Macleod deserve special mention. But none, perhaps, offered herself at the feet of her Master with such a degree of complete self-dedication as Nivedita. That an English intellectual giant discarded the
prejudices of English character, entered so deeply and intimately into the spirit and soul of Indian culture and civilisation, shed her instinctive national loyalty, made India her home and the service of the Indian people the consecrated mission of her life, is indeed a testimony to the genius, dynamic personality and spiritual stature of Swami Vivekananda.

In Vivekananda the patriotic and spiritual impulses combined in a supreme desire to uplift the manhood in India, with a view to restoring her, to her proper place among the nations of the world. Swamiji believed that the present warring world might be saved by spiritual teachings which India could impart, but before she would do this, she must enjoy the respect of other nations by raising her own status. It was Vivekananda who, for the first time in the modern age, boldly proclaimed before the world the superiority of Hindu culture and civilisation, the greatness of her past and the hope for the future. This mingled with his patriotic zeal, made him an embodiment of the highest ideals of the renascent Indian nation.

Nivedita took it as a mission to carry the banner of Vivekananda to every corner of India. She became the Prophet's messenger to the cultural and political life of India. In Swamiji, Margaret Noble found a combination of hostility and opposition to imperialism and capitalism. She was not merely a follower but some one who was inspired by Vivekananda's ideals and ideas to explore original new avenues of thought and knowledge. So, when she came to India in 1898 at the suggestion of Swamiji, she was not merely seeking her personal salvation. She wanted to help, and take part in regeneration of a rich cultural tradition that was anti-British and anti-western. Nivedita felt that it was necessary to decolonise the mind long before the theory of Decolonisation was propounded. She dedicated the remaining fourteen years of her life for the 'jana-desha-dharma', the people, the land, and the religion of the country she adopted. It was not a case of so called adoption only, but one of complete identification with India. She did not try to strike root from the surface to the soil, she had her re-birth or new birth in India. There was complete self-effacement and transformation in Nivedita. She became the embodiment of Indian culture.

In contemporary India, there were many distinguished personalities,
but none could perhaps outweigh the totality of contributions made by Nivedita. To her, the term India was not a mere geographical or ethnic entity, not a clan, caste or blood group, not a subject country, not a black show. Nivedita was not an English woman in search of a black God. India, to her, was an idea, an ideal, a legend, a symbol, a movement, a thought, a summation without the tyranny of geography. With meticulous care, she studied Indian ways of life, thoughts, legends, arts and architecture so that she might be absolutely equipped to play the role her Master wanted her to play -- the role of ‘the mistress, servant, friend in one’ to India. She had become thoroughly ‘Indianised’ in outlook, and loved and understood India better than a progressive Indian. In fact, Nivedita, with her perceptivity, read into many details of Indian life a meaning and a purpose that sophisticated Westernised Indians would fail to recognise. She also saw clear before her eyes the path that must be followed to instil into India fresh life and vigour so that she might be the dynamic nation that every Indian’s cherished dream was to see.

In her writings, we Indians can see ourselves in the sympathetic searchlight of her keen intellectual analysis. Her analysis shows our strong points without failing to point out our weakness. But the foreigners, Westerners in particular, will have remarkable advantage of understanding India and her ideals as seen and perceived by a Western master-mind. Nivedita emphasised that the future of India depends largely on education of women as well as education of men, and wanted us to recognise the greater urgency of giving knowledge. She felt that if all are trained and equipped to respond in the same way to the same forces, then India’s unity will stand self-demonstrated, unflinching. She helped immensely to define Indian culture and tradition, and promoted certain ideas about National Education as against the Western-type education. And yet it must also be said that without a profound cultivation of spiritual life, Sister Nivedita could not have been able to find strength, courage, and energy to develop such practical ideas and interest.

Sister Nivedita’s vision was all-embracing and her conception of national movement of India, which was to her not merely a political
movement, included industrial development, literature, science, history, sociology, education and folk culture. She called it nationalism, not simply national movement, and she conceptualised this nationalism as national Renaissance. Swami Vivekananda’s concept of building a resurgent India on the foundation of Indian tradition and informed by progressive ideas and sensibilities was her basic inspiration and she tried to give it a workable shape during her period of activity spreading over a decade. Her intellectual leadership in the sphere was not less important than the success she actually achieved within the short span of time. For even only this, she may, without any apprehension of controversy, be considered one of the greatest propounders of the philosophy of Indian nationalism.

In Nivedita’s work, we find a simple life-story of a humanitarian who deeply understood India and swore that “humanity is mind, not body; soul not flesh.” She tried to restore India’s lost glory and prestige through her activities, utterances and writings, and “has uttered the vital truth about Indian life”, as Rabindranath Tagore said.

Tagore called her “mother of the people” (LOKHMATA), Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose compared her with “Lady of the Lamp”, and Shri Aurobinda thought she was ‘Fire’ (SIKHAMOYEE). She was philosopher and guide to Gokhale and Tilak, and ‘Mahashweta’ to Abanindranath Tagore, and Nandalal Bosu. Young men of the Dawn Society swore by her name. Nivedita lived upto Swamiji’s expectations. No son or daughter of India loved her more than Nivedita. Not a problem arose in the country in those years -- whether social, political, or educational; whether affecting man, woman, or youth -- about which she did not feel concerned. S.K. Ratcliffe, the famous editor of the Statesman, once wrote “The influences that have gone to the shaping of New India are still obscure, but this may be said with complete assurance that among them all, there has been no single factor that has surpassed, or equalled, the character and life and words of Sister Nivedita.”

The available literature of the studies carried out on Indian Philosophy of Education reveals that hardly any study has been carried out on the nationalist discourse and education in India, the views of Sister Nivedita in particular. She also helped to define the conceptual basis and the scope of
education for nation building in India. Nivedita did much but much of what she did is not widely known. The extent and nature of her selfless services is yet to be appreciated by the present Indian society. In our study, we have endeavoured to give some idea of the many-sided magnitude of her life, and their impact on Indian life and society. Therefore the present study entitled ‘Nationalist Discourse and Education in India : Views of Sister Nivedita’ is designed with the following objectives.

To study various formative influences behind Nivedita’s transformation; to study Swami Vivekananda’s world view and Sister Nivedita; to study Sister Nivedita’s contribution to reawakening of India; to study Sister Nivedita’s theory of education and Indian Nationalist Discourse. In this connection, it shall be discussed how Sister Nivedita made an in-depth study of the colonial system of education in India, and its inadequacy. This discussion is necessary to show that she developed a personal view of National Education. This is bound to have a bearing upon analysis of her role in the social and political reawakening of India; and to discuss Sister Nivedita’s view on Indian Nationality and Culture. This would help to show her complete identification with Indian Nationality and Culture and the place of her Theory of Education within this culture.

II

More than one hundred sixty studies on Philosophy of Education have been reported in the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth survey of research in education. The said studies have been reviewed by the researcher with a view to reach to the rationale of the present study. Since the study will be a philosophical one, so no hypothesis is formulated. And for the proposed research work, Philosophical Method of study will be adopted, and Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation will be made.
Qualitative Research emphasises the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found, and importance is given to the interaction between variables. A qualitative approach is a general way of thinking about conducting qualitative research. It describes, either explicitly or implicitly, the purpose of the qualitative research, the role of the researcher, the stages of research, and the method of data analysis.

The present study has adopted the qualitative approach of research. Here qualitative approach refers a speculative, normative, and critical approach. A speculative method is applied because of the fact that the whole of research is of historical and philosophical in nature, and the researcher had no scope to participate in the process. Thus he had to depend upon mostly on the documents such as primary documents and secondary documents. Further, the researcher has accepted the norm as it was propagated and preached by the educationists as well as nationalists on whom the researcher has carried out his research. It is a historical research as well as a philosophical study which demands critical approach. Thus the researcher has followed the external criticism and internal criticism for bringing out the facts, and new interpretation has been made on those facts.

III

The name of Sister Nivedita is well known in the socio-cultural and political history of modern India. Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble was her original name. She was born on October 28, 1867, at Dungannon, Tyrone, in the far of Ireland, and passed away in India at Darjeeling on October 13, 1911 at an early age of 44.

Though born in Northern Ireland, Margaret Elizabeth Noble appears to have been born to her mission in India. Both her grand parents, and maternal grand father were actually involved in their country's struggle for freedom from British rule. In the fourteenth century, the Nobles migrated to
Ireland from Scotland. Margaret’s father Samuel Richmond was engaged in business pursuits in his early life. Samuel married Mary Isabel Hamilton, a neighbouring girl, and Margaret was their first child. “Even at the moment of her birth, it is authoritatively known, her mother dedicated her to the service of God.”

Samuel and Mary decided a year later to change the course of their lives into one of study and service. They placed their child in charge of her grandmother, and left for Manchester. There he studied theology. When he was ordained, he chose Great Torrington in Devonshire as his field of work. Little Margaret, who had been left with her grandmother all these years, now joined her parents. By this time Margaret had a sister, Mary, and a brother, Richmond.

Margaret was her father’s favourite. So, wherever he conducted services or visited the poor, she used to accompany her father. The strain of a hard and simple life told upon Samuel’s health, and he died at an early age of thirty-four. Along with her three children, Mary Noble then returned to her father, Hamilton, in Ireland. Margaret had imbibed the spirit of service from her father. And her grandfather Hamilton, who was an active participant in his country’s struggle for independence, inspired her with love for the country.

For their education, Margaret and Mary were then sent to Halifax College. With great energy, enthusiasm, and commitment, Margaret devoted herself to studies. It was here that she developed an interest in music, art, and natural sciences. In 1884, at the age of seventeen, she passed the final examination. Then she took up teaching at Keswick and soon after at Wrexham. Wrexham was a mining centre. And, here, besides being a teacher, Margaret loved to do social work among the poor of mining community. She met here a young engineer from Wales, and they decided to get married. But the young man died of a fatal disease. The destiny made Margaret alone and friendless. With a very heavy heart, she left for Chester in 1889.

Now, Margaret’s mind naturally turned towards her family. Mary, her sister, was a teacher at Liverpool, and Richmond, her brother was at college
there. Their mother came from Ireland to live with them. In this way, after years of separation a fresh home was set up. And Margaret occasionally came from Chester to stay with them. Having happily resettled, Margaret began to study new methods of education. The methods she studied had been advised by the Swiss educational reformer Pestalozzi, and the German, Froebel. The methods laid stress on the pre-school education of children through play, exercise, observation, imitation, and constructive activity. Quite a good number of teachers took up these methods, and the methods appealed very much to Margaret. 4

Margaret became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Logemann, and Mrs. de Leeuw. They were enthusiastic supporters of the New Educational Movement, then in vogue in London. Margaret was introduced to 'Sunday Club' through them, and her talks and writings were highly appreciated by the Club. Mrs. de Leeuw then invited Margaret to help her to start a new school in London. She accepted the invitation and settled with her mother at Wimbledon in 1890. In this new school she followed no dry methods of teaching. No formal learning was followed. The children were taught to do things -- it was all play. But, as they played, they learned. Margaret, thus, made her occupation a pleasure.

Margaret continued her own cultural pursuits also. She studied and discussed Shakespeare with her brother Richmond, and held discourses with the Betty brothers -- one a poet, and other a journalist. She wrote articles in the Wimbledon News, and also political articles in the Daily News, and in the Review of Reviews. She came in contact with William Stead, the renowned editor of the Review of Reviews. She also contributed in the Research, a scientific journal. Soon after her arrival in London, she joined "Free Ireland", an Irish revolutionary organisation, spoke at its meetings, and organised cells in South England. The famous Russian revolutionary and ideologist of social revolution, Prince Kropotkin was then in London, and came to meet the organisation. Margaret started keeping regular contact with Kropotkin, and obtained guidance on revolutionary work from him.

Margaret parted company with Mrs. de Leeuw by the end of 1895, and started her own school, which she called "Ruskin School". This school was not
merely for children but also for research minded educators. Mr. Ebenezer Cook was among the later ones who painted for children, and whose experiments in the line had won for him a name. Margaret took lessons from him in art, and the knowledge she acquired from him stood in good stead in the promotion of Art, and Art-criticism in subsequent years in India.  

As a result of sustained application, and commitment, Margaret grew into a mature educator. She expanded her activities in literary direction, and became acquainted in London with some of the most learned and influential people of the time. Lady Ripon, and Lady Isabel Margesson were among them. They had formed a small literary group, which later on came to be known as the Sesame Club. Margaret soon became an active, and enthusiastic member of this club. It soon became a rendezvous of leading art and literary figures of the day. George Bernard Shaw, and Thomas Huxley were among them. Margaret soon came to be recognised as a “woman ......... well established in a brilliant career as journalist, educationist, lecturer and figure for every kind of emancipation.”

In this way, it continued with Margaret until 1895. Then happened the most remarkable event which proved to be the turning point in her life, and carried her in due course to India. With her many fold intellectual interests, Margaret had one deep rooted trouble, namely, the growing consciousness of uncertainly, and despair with regard to religion. Since her childhood, though she had come under various religious influences, none of them could satisfy her. It was at this time that Swami Vivekananda, the great Hindu Yogi, went to London to preach Vedanta, and the words of Vivekananda ‘came as living water to men perishing of thirst’. She met him first in November, 1895. The teachings of Swamiji aroused her dormant religious aspirations, and desire to serve humanity selflessly, and she finally decided to take the plunge. Thus, within a few months, Margaret’s life unexpectedly changed its course, and purpose.
Notes and References


4. Ibid, p. 3.

5. Ibid, p. 4.
