

# Sister Nivedita

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Sister Nivedita, was among the chief disciples of Swami Vivekananda.

## Yoganandaji on Nivedita

Sw. Krishnananda (of YSS) once said:

"Daya ma told me [Sw. Krishnananda] that Guruji had asked her to hold two people as ideals before her:

1. Anandmoyi Ma
- and
2. Sr. Nivedita (disciple of Vivekananda)

Guruji wanted Daya Ma to follow these two examples."

[Find the complete talk here](#)

## Vivekananda on Sister Nivedita

Vivekananda wrote a poem for Sister Nivedita, A benediction to Sister Nivedita.

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 more

No ancient soul could dream before-  
Be thou to India's future son  
The mistress, servant, friend in one.

Oxford definition of the word 'mistress': a woman in a position of authority or control.

## Watch Movie

[Watch the excellent movie on Nivedita](#)

# Who was Nivedita?

The following text is derived from [this Wikipedia article](#) and a biography on [Nivedita](#).



[Image Source](#)

## Introduction

**Sister Nivedita** (In Bengali: Bhagini Nibedita), was **among the chief disciples** of Swami Vivekananda. She was Irish and her original name was Margaret Elizabeth Noble. She spent her childhood and early youth in Ireland. She worked as a teacher and did that work with great enthusiasm.

## Meeting Vivekananda

In November 1895, she met Swami Vivekananda for the first time, who had come from America to visit London and stayed there for three months. On a

cold afternoon, Swami Vivekananda was explaining Vedanta philosophy in the drawing room of an aristocratic family in London.

Many years later, she wrote to a friend about her decision to follow Swami Vivekananda as a result of her meeting him in England:

Suppose he had not come to London that time! Life would have been a headless dream, for I always knew that I was waiting for something. I always said that a call would come. And it did.

~

But if he had not come! If he had meditated, on the Himalayan peaks! ... I, for one, had never been here.

One day, Vivekananda thundered in a class, "What the world wants today, is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the area yonder, and say that they possess nothing but God. Who will go?"

That made her think deeply. She wrote to Vivekananda to know more.

Vivekananda had toured the Indian subcontinent extensively, acquiring first-hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing in British India. In his opinion, education was the panacea for all evils plaguing contemporary Indian society, especially that of Indian women. In his letter to Margaret, Vivekananda wrote, "Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman, a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women especially." Margaret was chosen for the role of educating Indian women.

## Moved to India

Margaret traveled to India, leaving behind her friends and family, including her mother. On 22 February, Margaret visited Dakshineshwar temple, the place

where Ramakrishna did his sadhana. Swami Vivekananda devoted the initial few days in teaching her about India and its people, and helping her develop the love for the people; he was broadening her character. He explained India's history, philosophy, literature, the life of the common mass, social traditions, and also the lives of great personalities, both ancient and modern, to her. A few weeks later, two of Swami Vivekananda's women disciples in America, Sara C. Bull, wife of famous Norwegian violinist and composer Ole Bull, and Josephine MacLeod arrived in India. The three became lifelong friends. On 11 March 1898, Swami Vivekananda organized a public meeting at Star Theatre to introduce Sister Nivedita to the people of Calcutta. In his speech, Swami Vivekananda said – "England has sent us another gift in Miss Margaret Noble." In this meeting, Margaret expressed her desire to serve India and its people. On 17 March she met Sarada Devi who greeted Margaret affectionately as Khooki (i.e. little girl).

## Initiation

25 March 1898, was the holiest and most unforgettable day of her life. That was the day on which her guru dedicated her to God and to the service of India by initiating her into the vow of Brahmacharya on 25 March 1898. Swami Vivekananda gave her the name Nivedita (meaning "Dedicated to God").

Swami Vivekananda wanted to mold Nivedita as a Hindu Brahmacharini and he was quite strict with her. He wanted her to be a Hindu in thoughts and actions. He encouraged her to visit Hindu ladies to observe their way of life. He told her: "You must give up all visiting, and live in strict seclusion. You have to set yourself to Hinduisce your thoughts, your needs, your conceptions, and your habits. Your life, internal and external, has to become all that an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharmi's ought to be. The method will come to you, if only you desire it sufficiently. But you have to forget your own past, and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory!"

## Her training

In the book “[Master as I saw Him](#)” which was written by Nivedita, she wrote these words about the training given to her by her Guru, Vivekananda:

He had himself suggested my joining his traveling party, for the purpose of receiving his personal training for the work he wished me to do in India.

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But at the beginning of these journeys, before this and other things became clear to me, my mind was wholly in bewilderment, and it was my great good fortune that I was given at this time, as my daily teacher, in Bengali and in Hindu religious literature, the young monk known as the Swami Swarupananda.

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**Under the influence of the Swami Swarupananda, I began seriously the attempt at meditation. And if it had not been for this help of his, one of the greatest hours of my life would have passed me by.**

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**My relation to our Master at this time can only be described as one of clash and conflict.** I can see now how much there was to learn, and how short was the time for learning to be, and the first of lessons doubtless is the destroying of self-sufficiency in the mind of the taught. **But I had been little prepared for that constant rebuke and attack upon all my most cherished prepossessions which was now my lot.** Suffering is often illogical, and I cannot attempt to justify by reason the degree of unhappiness which I experienced at this time, as **I saw the dream of a friendly and beloved leader falling away from me, and the picture of one who would be at least indifferent, and possibly, silently hostile, substituting itself instead.**

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Long, long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved "Noren" (Vivekananda) would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening at Almora, I proved the truth of his prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good, to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. I learnt, too, on the physical plane, the simple everyday reality of the experience related in the Hindu books on religious psychology. And I understood, for the first time, that **the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.**

Gurus often discipline their disciples like this. Just like, a block of marble needs to be chiseled to turn it into a beautiful statue, similarly, a Guru chisels the human ego to turn it into a purer one that can reflect the beauty and strength of the soul.

Also, she began to learn Bengali from Swarupananda so that she could speak with Holy Mother (Wife of Ramakrishna) directly. Later, she had learnt enough Bengali to be able to translate Tagore's 'Kabuliwala' into English – one of the first English translations of a Tagore short story.

## Vivekananda's Instructions

A book, Nivedita on India, mentioned:

It was March 1899. Nivedita had come to see Swamiji [Vivekananda].

While talking to her, Swamiji said, 'We are yet to know the real nature of man. When the real manhood shall emerge ... then everybody will be free to do great work. My mission is not Ramakrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything, but simply to bring manhood to my people.' Nivedita said: 'I will help you, Swami.' Swamiji replied: 'I know it.'

We also know that she kept her promise. In fact, she dedicated her life for the purpose.

I tried to find out what exactly did he mean by “manhood”? Does he mean Courage, inner strength, willpower, getting rid of the colonial rule, and doing great deeds? I am still not sure.

At another time, [in a letter](#), Vivekananda said to her:

My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

This world is in chain of superstition. I pity the oppressed, whether man or woman, and I pity more the oppressors.

One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else.

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Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt. It is no superstition with you, I am sure, you have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come.

## Girls' school in Bagbazar

Nivedita was planning to open a school for girls who were deprived of even basic education. She toured England and America on a lecture tour designed to raise money to establish a girls' school.

The main reason why Swamiji invited Nivedita to India was to spread education to the women of the country. This is why, when Nivedita informed Vivekananda about her planning, he felt very excited. He organized a meeting at Balaram

Bose's house on this issue. Many lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, including Mahendranath Gupta (popularly known as Master Mahasaya, the chronicler of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna), Suresh Dutta, Haramohan etc. attended this meeting. In this meeting, Nivedita explained her plan of the proposed school and requested everyone to send their girls to the school to study. During her speech, Vivekananda entered the room and took a seat behind everyone. Nivedita did not notice it. But, when Nivedita appealed to collect girl students for the school, she suddenly discovered Vivekananda in the room pushing others and prompting – "Ye, get up, get up! It's not good enough to just become girls' fathers. All of you must co-operate in the matter of their education as per national ideals. Stand up and commit. Reply to her appeal. Say, 'We all agree. We shall send our girls to you.' But no one stood up to support Nivedita's proposal. Finally, Vivekananda forced Haramohan to agree to the proposal and behalf of Haramohan, Vivekananda promised to send his girls to the school.

On 13 November 1898, on the day of Kali Puja, at 16 Bosepara Lane in the Bagbazar area of North Calcutta, she started the school. The school was inaugurated by Sarada Devi, in the presence of Swami Vivekananda and some of the other disciples of Ramakrishna. Sarada Devi blessed and prayed for the school saying – "I pray that the blessings of the Divine Mother may be upon the school and the girls; and the girls trained from the school may become ideal girls." Nivedita went from home to home in educating girls, many of whom were in pitiable conditions owing to the socio-economic condition of early 20th century India. In many cases, she encountered refusal from the male members of the girl's family. Nivedita had widows and adult women among her students. She taught sewing, elementary rules of hygiene, nursing, etc., apart from regular courses.

Collecting money for the school was not an easy task. She had to earn money from her writings and giving lectures, and later she spent all to meet the expenses of the school.

She took part in altruistic activities. She worked to improve the lives of Indian women of all castes.

## Work during a plague epidemic

During the outbreak of a plague epidemic in Calcutta in 1899, Nivedita nursed and took care of the patients, cleaned rubbish from the area, and inspired and motivated many youths to render voluntary service. She inserted appeals for help in the English newspapers and requested financial support for her plague relief activities. She also organized the day-to-day activities, inspected the work and personally handed over the written instructions for the preventive measures by moving around. She was a friend to many intellectuals and artists in the Bengali community, including Rabindranath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abala Bose, and Abanindranath Tagore. Later, she took up the cause of Indian independence. Sri Aurobindo was one of her friends as well.

## Was she a sanyasini?

Nivedita had close associations with the newly established Ramakrishna Mission but she never became a Sanyasini.

Abanindranath Tagore, nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, described her as a 'Mahasveta'. As per google search, the meaning of 'Mahasveta' is goddess saraswati, perfectly white.

She often used to refer to Swami Vivekananda as "The King" and considered herself as his spiritual daughter (Manaskanya in Bengali).

## Vivekananda's death

Sister Nivedita saw Swami Vivekananda for the last time on 2 July 1902 at Belur Math. Vivekananda was observing the Ekadashi fasting on that day. However,

when his disciples took their meal, he himself served them joyfully. After the meal, Vivekananda poured water over Nivedita's hands, and dried them with a towel. Nivedita recorded it in *The Master As I Saw Him* in the following words:

"It is I who should do these things for you, Swamiji! Not you, for me!" was the protest naturally offered. But his answer was startling in its solemnity – "Jesus washed the feet of His disciples!" Something checked the answer, "But that was the last time!" as it rose to the lips, and the words remained unuttered. This was well. For here also, the last time had come.

Swami Vivekananda died at 9:10 p.m. on 4 July 1902. On that night, Nivedita dreamed Sri Ramakrishna was leaving his body a second time.

## Cultivation of Indian culture

She took an active interest in promoting Indian history, culture, and science. She actively encouraged **Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose**, the Indian scientist and philosopher, to pursue original scientific research and helped him financially as well in getting due recognition when he was faced with an indifferent attitude from the colonial government. Bose, whom she called "khoka" or the "little one" in Bengali, and his wife Abala Bose, were in very close terms with her. Keeping in view Nivedita's contribution to the scientific research work of Jagadish Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore said: "In the day of his success, Jagadish gained an invaluable energizer and helper in Sister Nivedita, and in any record of his life's work her name must be given a place of honour." Sister Nivedita was one of the important influences on Jagadish Chandra Bose. She supported him by organizing the financial support and editing his manuscripts and made sure that Bose was able to continue with and share his work.

Her identity as both a westerner by birth and a disciple of Swami Vivekananda enabled her to do several things that might have been difficult for Indians. For example, she promoted pan-Indian nationalism.

## Contribution towards Indian nationalism

Nivedita became a prolific writer and toured India extensively to deliver lectures, especially on Indian culture and religions. She appealed to the youth of India to work selflessly for the cause of their country along the ideals of Swami Vivekananda. Before coming to India, Nivedita expressed a positive view towards continued colonial rule in India, a prevailing sentiment amongst her contemporaries in Europe. However, during the course of her time in India, Nivedita grew disillusioned with colonial rule and grew to support the nascent independence movement, concluding that it was necessary for India to gain independence to prosper. In February 1902, lawyer (and future leader of the independence movement) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi visited Nivedita in Calcutta.

She later started working on her own and maintained a direct relationship with many of the young revolutionaries of Bengal, including those of Anushilan Samity, a secret organization. She inspired many youths in taking up the cause of Indian independence through her lectures.

In 1905, the colonial government, under the direction of Lord Curzon, initiated the partition of Bengal which proved to be a major turning point in the Indian independence movement. Nivedita played a pioneering role in organizing the movement. She provided financial and logistical support and leveraged her contacts to get information from government agencies and forewarn independence activists. She met Indian artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and E. B. Havell and inspired them to develop a pure Indian school of art.

Nivedita had also designed a national flag for India with the thunderbolt as the emblem against a red background. Nivedita tried her utmost to inculcate the nationalist spirit in the minds of her students through all their daily activities. She introduced the singing of the song *Vande Mataram* in her school as a prayer. Nivedita provided guarded support to Annie Besant and was very close to Aurobindo Ghosh (later Sri Aurobindo), one of the major contributors towards the early nationalist movement. She edited *Karma Yogin*, the nationalist newspaper of Aurobindo.

## Dissociation from Ramakrishna Mission

Because of her active contribution in the field of Indian Nationalism, she had to publicly dissociate herself from the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission under the then president, Swami Brahmananda. This had to be done in order to avoid their persecution at the hands of British Authorities in India. She was very close to Sarada Devi, the wife of Ramakrishna and one of the major influences behind Ramakrishna Mission, and also with all the brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda.

Until then, Nivedita had signed her name as 'Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Order'. Henceforward she wrote 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna' only, later changing it 'of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda'. Even though she had left the Order, she felt sure she still belonged to them and that the Swami would not hold her less of his child than before.

## Death

She died on 13 October 1911 in Darjeeling at the age of 43. Her epitaph reads: **"Here lies Sister Nivedita who gave her all to India".**

## Her Writings

She wrote a few books, out of which, the prominent ones were:

- [Kali the Mother](#), 1900.
- [The Master as I Saw Him](#), 1910.

Here are 2 passages from 'Kali the Mother', in which it appears as if she is talking to a child—

Baby Darling, What is the very first thing you remember? Is it not lying on mother's lap and looking up into her eyes, and laughing? Did you ever play hide-and-seek with mother? Mother's eyes shut and baby was not. She opened them, and there was baby! Then baby's eyes shut, and where was mother? But they opened again, and—oh....

Baby, some people think God is just like that. A great great Mother—so great that all this big world is Her baby. God is playing with Her world, and She shuts Her eyes... And what do we call the Mother with Her eyes shut? We call her Kali... And so, wee one, will you remember that the Great Mother Kali is everywhere?

## Influence



Sister Nivedita on a 1968 stamp of India

Sister Nivedita remains one of the most influential female figures of India. Her book *Kali, the Mother*, influenced Abanindranath Tagore who painted *Bharat Mata*. In 2010, the office of the board of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education in Salt Lake City, Kolkata was named after Sister Nivedita. The Sister Nivedita Academy, an institution dedicated to her memory has been established in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Several schools and colleges have been named after her. In 1968, the Indian Government issued a postal stamp in her memory. The Nivedita bridge near Dakshineswar, Kolkata is named in her honour. In 2015, a new Government Degree College at Hastings House, Alipur, Kolkata was named after Sister Nivedita. In 2018, the higher secondary section school building of Baranagore Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama High School at Kolkata named after Sister Nivedita as "Nivedita Bhawan".

# Important: Interesting Short Stories

## from Nivedita's Life

Here are some stories from a book, [Nivedita of India](#):

### **Nivedita, the mother**

In 1899, the plague broke out in Calcutta for the second time. Swamiji entrusted the entire responsibility of fighting the disease to Nivedita. The Ramakrishna Mission formed a Committee of which Nivedita became the Secretary, and Swami Sadananda its Chief Executive. The services rendered by both Nivedita and Swami Sadananda in fighting the plague became memorable in the history of Calcutta. Swami Sadananda moved around with a group of sweeper-boys and took upon himself the responsibility of keeping clean the localities, including the slums of Baghbazar and Shyambazar. And endowed with some superhuman power as it were, Nivedita coordinated and supervised the entire range of activities. She inserted appeals for help in the English newspapers. At the auditorium of the 'Classic Theatre', she, along with Swamiji, gave lectures on 'Plague and the Duty of the Students.' Hearing their lectures, ten students immediately joined the work of plague service. On every Sunday evening they would gather near Nivedita to report their activities, and leave after taking further instructions. People were astonished to observe her leadership and her organizing capacity during those days. She would personally inspect every bit of work and followed up if necessary. Moving around each and every locality she used to distribute the printed handbills containing the preventive measures on how to fight the plague. One day she observed that a pile of rubbish was heaped in a locality at Baghbazar. Whereas none appeared to be concerned about it, Nivedita personally

arranged to secure a broomstick and basket and started to clean the rubbish. Seeing her, the young men of the locality felt ashamed and took away the broomstick from her hand and began to clean the rubbish and the pathway. A wonderful and touching picture of Nivedita's service to fight the plague was recorded by Dr R. G. Kar, one of the eminent physicians of those days : 'One day, when I returned home at noon-time in the month of Chaitra , after seeing the patients, I saw a European lady sitting on a dusty chair near the door. She was Sister Nivedita. She had been waiting for me for a long time in order to get some information.' That morning Dr Kar had been to see a plague-stricken child in a slum at Baghbazar. Nivedita enquired about the arrangements that had been made for the child. Dr Kar informed her that the child's condition was critical. Not only that, he informed her about the dangers of the disease and asked her to take precautions. When he went to visit the patient in the afternoon, he was astonished to find that ignoring all words of precaution, Nivedita was sitting with the child in her lap in the damp and weather-beaten hut in that unhealthy locality. The child's mother had already died. Nivedita temporarily left her home and moved to this hut to take care of the child. Day after day, night after night, Nivedita remained engaged in nursing the child ignoring its possible danger. When the hut was to be disinfected she took a small ladder and whitewashed the walls herself. After two days, the child died in the lap of Nivedita. Before breathing its last, the child called her 'Ma Ma' taking her for its own mother. Not only in the hut of that child, her merciful presence was a familiar sight in all the localities of Baghbazar, regardless of age, sex or creed. The services of Swami Sadananda and Nivedita in fighting the plague were so well organized that the then District Medical Officer and Chairman complimented them highly.

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## **Nivedita loved Vivekananda's India as her own**

About Swamiji, Nivedita said that she had observed ever since she reached India till the last day of her Guru's life, that he always suffered from an excruciating pain. That pain was for his motherland—India. This intense love of Swamiji for India, with all his pride, suffering and hope, was transmitted to his 'spiritual daughter' also. And to her, India became synonymous with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Her entire being became India, and she had no separate existence other than India. She considered India's pride and shame to be her personal pride and shame. Her Guru wanted her to become '...to India's son, the mistress, servant and friend in one.' She became all and much more. No other foreign lady could accept India's religion, culture, sufferings and dreams as her own as Nivedita did. No other foreign lady could realize the hopes and aspirations of the Indian people so truly, or recognize the eternal, unblemished image of India's soul so in-depth as she did. In fact, her sacrifice for the cause of India was so total, intense and sincere that we feel guilty to call her a foreign lady. Never did she utter 'India's need', 'India's women', she always said 'Our need' and 'Our women'. Any reference to India would overwhelm her with emotion. She called India Edesh (this land), and called England Odesh (that land). Therefore, Nivedita truly belongs to India. Indeed that was how the Holy Mother Sarada Devi used to feel. She said : 'Nivedita belongs to this land; she was born there in that country (West) only to propagate his (Sri Ramakrishna's) ideas and messages.'

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## **She became India's own**

While living at Bosepara Lane, Nivedita had very cordial relationship with her neighbours. She always stood by their side in their hours of happiness

and sorrow. The neighbours also accepted her as their own, convinced of her sincere love for them. But she duly accepted the social customs, including those of touching, etc. One night she was about to take her dinner. Suddenly she heard the sound of wailing from a nearby mud-house. Leaving her dinner she rushed to the spot. Before her eyes the small child of the house died. Nivedita felt as if one of her dear relations had died. The child's mother was piteously weeping. Nivedita took her head on her lap and sat silently. After a long while the child's mother stopped crying. She asked feebly: 'Where has my child gone?' Nivedita said, 'Hush, Mother. She is now with the Mother Kālā' Perhaps, the bereaved mother got a little bit of consolation. She heaved a long sigh but did not cry any more. Nivedita felt that she had no difference with these people; she had become very much one of them.

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### **Sri Sarada Devi consecrated a school**

13th November 1898. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi came to open the school of Nivedita. After worshipping Sri Ramakrishna she consecrated the school and blessed it, saying: 'I pray that the blessings of the Divine Mother may be upon the school and the girls; and the girls trained from the school may become ideal girls.' Nivedita became extremely delighted and recorded her feelings later as this : 'I cannot imagine a grander omen than her blessings, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future.'

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### **She was strong & bold**

It was during the summer days of 1903. Nivedita was coming to Medinipur. Many people assembled at the railway station to greet her. The moment she alighted from the train, the crowd shouted, 'Hip, Hip, Hooray'. They thought that the white-skinned English lady should better be greeted in that fashion. But Nivedita looked utterly shocked. Waving her hand she asked them to stop. Then she explained that 'Hip, Hip, Hooray' was the victory shout of the English people, and the Indians should by no means use that. She raised her hand and shouted three times: Wàh Guruki Fateh, Bol Bàbujiko Khàlsà. The entire crowd joined her in shouting. It was noon and so it was extremely hot, as it was the summer session. On reaching her room, she immediately opened all the doors and windows. Waves of hot air filled the room, but she didn't bother at all. She removed the mattress laid on the cot and unrolled her own small mat and a thin kànthà (bed spread) over that. As everybody was struck with wonder, she said, 'I am practising austerity. And I want you to practise it because of the nature of the task you're set upon to perform. No luxury befits those who want to free their country.' A huge crowd attended her lecture on the first day, but hearing her politically charged words, many people, out of fear, left the meeting before it came to an end. One retired Government employee informed her of the happening. He also expressed his apprehensions that in subsequent meetings not many people might attend. Nivedita replied: 'Don't try to frighten me. My veins still carry the blood of an independent nation. My lectures are not meant for those who feel scared.' Thereafter the attendance really became thin. But, undaunted, Nivedita gave her lectures on all the five days with equal zeal. She opened a gymnasium for the local youths to practise martial arts. She encouraged the youths by herself fencing with the sword, rounding the mace and club and in other exercises. She also taught a girl how to fire a gun.

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## **Nivedita, a foreigner teacher**

Many of Nivedita's students would not take food from her hand, because she was a foreigner. But, such an attitude shown by the very students who were to her dearer than her own life could not hurt Nivedita. Rather, she respected their firmness to abide by social norms. She never wanted to hurt people's sentiments or give injury to traditional social practices and rituals of Indians.

One day Nivedita took her students in a joyous outing to the Museum. The girls moved around for a long time and felt tired and thirsty. She quickly took out the glass she had brought with her, washed it under a water tap, filled it with water and held it out to one of the girls. The girl was acutely thirsty, nonetheless she could not take the glass touched by a foreigner. Another girl sharply took away the glass from her hand and drank the water herself lest Nivedita was hurt. But Nivedita was neither annoyed with the first girl nor felt hurt.

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## **Nivedita was not allowed to enter some temples**

One day Nivedita hired a boat and took her students to visit Dakshineshwar temple. Alighting from the boat she first reached Sri Ramakrishna's room and spent a long time in meditation with others. Then she took the girls to see Bhavatarini. All the girls entered the temple and saluted the Mother Kali. But Nivedita had no right of admission inside the temple. So she reached the end part of the nàtmandir, negotiating her way through the chàndni by the side of the river Ganga. Standing over there she saw the Mother Kàlã. The girls were very sorry that Nivedita had to take a look at the Mother Kàlã that way. But Nivedita was not

disturbed—she was overwhelmed with joy having had the vision of the Mother even from there.

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## Financial Hardships

To cap it all, there was financial hardship. She had to meet all the expenses of running the school and maintaining herself out of the earnings from her writings and the monetary help that Mrs Ole Bull used to provide. When she would face financial hardship even after so much of labour, she would first curtail her own personal expenses. Lady Abala Bose (wife of Jagadish Chandra Bose, and who was very intimate with Nivedita and closely observed her over a long period) said: 'Her neighbours knew how the lion share of her income was used to meet the sorrows of the poor, to provide food for the hungry. For this she would sacrifice even her basic needs.' Rabindranath Tagore while reminiscing said the same thing: 'It was not out of donations, not even from the surplus that Nivedita met the expenses of the school. It was out and out part of sharing her food. This is the truth.'

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## Feeding Children

Before beginning of the summer vacation or any other long vacation, Nivedita used to feed her students. The number of students was not small and she was poor. So it was not possible for her to arrange for good food. She would count the heads of her students well ahead and buy fruits and sweets according to her means. Then she would wrap them in small packets made of shàl-leaves and distribute them from a basket, approaching each of her beloved students. Thereafter she would stand in

a corner with an empty basket. After taking the food the girls would drop the empty packets in the basket, and with a smiling face Nivedita would watch the entire proceedings. In this way Nivedita would serve her small 'goddesses'.

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## **Her Motherly love for her children**

Nivedita was a mother to her students in the true sense of the term. Hindu widows were required to maintain many restrictions with regard to their food. So on many occasions they would reach school without taking any food. Nivedita could tell by seeing their faces who of them had not taken their meal and would be anxious to feed them. She had one young widow student, named Prafulla Devi, who was her neighbour. On every ekàdashā (the eleventh day after the full moon or new moon, which one spends in full or partial fasting, prayer and worship), she would make this student sit before her, then taking due care to avoid being touched, she would feed her sweets and syrup. On one ekadashi day she had to go to Jagadish Chandra Bose's house on an urgent piece of work. Suddenly she remembered that it was ekadashi and she had not fed Prafulla. She immediately rushed back to her house and called Prafulla and repeatedly apologised, saying: 'My child, I've forgot, what a wrong! I haven't fed you while I took my meal. What a wrong!'

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## **Fulfilling wishes of her Guru**

One day Nivedita asked her students: 'Who is the queen of India?' The girls replied: 'Her Majesty the Queen Victoria.' It naturally occurred to them that in the England-ruled India, their queen was Queen Victoria. Nivedita

was visibly upset to hear this reply. She was both angry and grieved. She cried out: 'You don't even appear to know who is the queen of India!' Then she explained: 'Look, the Empress of England, Queen Victoria, can never be the queen of India. Your queen is Queen Sita. Sita is the eternal queen of India.' Swamiji had advised Nivedita that in the matter of women's education one must not deviate from the traditional spiritual ideal of renunciation and service. The need for education of the Indian women was certainly important, but the spiritual ideal of renunciation and service must be given the top place above everything. Nivedita tried heart and soul to follow these instructions of Swamiji.

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## **Devotion towards Sri Ramakrishna**

In one of the class rooms of her school a picture of Sri Ramakrishna was hung up. On the opposite wall a world map was hanging. One day Nivedita took away the world map and fixed it under the picture of Sri Ramakrishna and smilingly said to the girls. 'Sri Ramakrishna is the Jagatguru (the Preceptor of the World), so the World map should remain at his feet.'

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## **Nivedita & Jagadish Chandra Bose**

Scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose was acquainted with Nivedita in the year 1898. Before that he had already earned the name of a scientist and secured D.Sc. degree from London. His research work was appreciated by eminent scientists like Lord Kelvin, and many others. But such a world-renowned genius had to suffer much indignities and harassment at every step because he was one from a dependent country! Nivedita was deeply pained to observe that. She thought it was a sacred national duty

to stand by his side. This science-eccentric personality became her friend and child. Though he was ten years senior in age to Nivedita, we find from many of her letters that Dr Bose was referred to as 'Khoka' (child). When Dr Bose would become mentally exhausted having had to fight with a thousand and one obstacles, Nivedita would inspire him with motherly affection. She exerted her influence in many quarters of the Government bureaucracy to remove difficulties standing in the way of his scientific research work. She openly advocated the case of Jagadish Chandra Bose before Miss MacLeod and Mrs Ole Bull and successfully brought them to his side. And she did all these things as Vivekananda's task. She knew how much importance Swamiji attached to science for the regeneration of India. In the year 1901, the Royal Society of London stopped publishing Jagadish Chandra's scientific research papers and dissertations. He then decided to publish the findings of his scientific research work in the form of books. From then till 1907, the famous three books that Jagadish Chandra published were not only edited by Nivedita, but also the language was mostly hers. The same is true for most of his other essays. After the publication of those books, Nivedita also contributed essays and articles about Jagadish Chandra to many magazines and periodicals in India and abroad. She also lectured on 'Jagadish Chandra' at many places. Nivedita used to regard Jagadish Chandra as a 'national asset'. Keeping in view Nivedita's contribution to the scientific research work of Jagadish Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore said: 'In the day of his success, Jagadish gained an invaluable energiser and helper in Sister Nivedita, and in any record of his life's work her name must be given a place of honour.'

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**Swami Brahmananda, the great Saint, on Nivedita**

In the Ramakrishna Order, he who occupied the position immediately after Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, was Swami Brahmananda. He was the first President of the Ramakrishna Order. Sri Ramakrishna called him his spiritual child. Sarada Devi said: 'Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) is Narayana himself.', while Swami Vivekananda said: 'In spirituality, Rakhal is superior to me.' In the Ramakrishna Order, as 'Swamiji' necessarily means Swami Vivekananda, 'Maharaj' or 'Raja Maharaj' stands for Swami Brahmananda. 'Raja Maharaj' was all praise for Nivedita. When Nivedita used to call on 'Maharaj', they would not talk much orally. Both of them would sit in meditation. Thus they would come to know each other's mind. 'Raja Maharaj' used to say that whenever he would come close to Nivedita, his mind would soar high up and dive deep inside.

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## **Nivedita's emphasis on Indian Culture & Languages**

Nivedita was very fond of the Bengali language. Whenever she found it convenient she would pick up small Bengali words. On occasion, she would learn Bengali words from her small girl students also and at that time she would behave like the most obedient student. One day a girl, while drawing a line on her slate, said: 'Drawing the line.' The word 'line' struck the ears of Nivedita who approached the girl and said to her: 'Line is an English word. Speak in your own language.' But none of the girls could say the Bengali word for 'line'. All of them kept saying: 'Sister, we always use the word "line".' Nivedita's face turned red out of disgust and sadness and she said: 'What a pity! You've forgotten even your own language!' Suddenly a girl remembered the word and shouted: 'The Bengali word for "line" is rekha.' Then Nivedita's joy knew no bounds. She

appeared to have found one of her dearest treasures which she had lost, and kept muttering: 'rekha, rekha, rekha.'

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## Thunderbolt as the National emblem

Nivedita, Christine, Rabindranath, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abala Bose and others once went to Bodh Gaya in a group. Every evening Nivedita would meditate sitting under the Bodhivriksha. A little away from the Bodhitree, there lay a stone-slab with an image of a thunderbolt engraved on it. Looking at that image of a thunderbolt, Nivedita said that this should be admitted as the national emblem. When everybody asked her the reasons for her saying this, she explained: 'When someone renounces all his possessions for the good of mankind, he becomes as powerful as a thunderbolt, and performs divinely ordained tasks. The supreme ideal of India is renunciation, so the thunderbolt should be the national emblem of India.' The thunderbolt reminded Nivedita of Dadhāchi's tale of self-sacrifice. Dadhāchi voluntarily cast off his body for the need of the gods. The gods killed their enemy—the demon Vṛitrāsura, using the thunderbolt made of his bone. Nivedita designed the national flag of India with the thunderbolt as the emblem. Later, to honour the desire of Nivedita, Jagadish Chandra Bose engraved the image of thunderbolt on the top of 'Basu Vijnan Mandir.'

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