

The Role of Sister Nivedita (Margaret E. Noble) In Women's Education in India

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Abstract

Sister Nivedita was a famous British-Irish woman who was a staunch follower of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts. She was also a social worker, writer, and teacher. Sister Nivedita was not of Indian origin, but she made significant contributions to women's education in India. Swami Vivekananda introduced Sister Nivedita to Indian philosophy, culture, civilization, and history, after which she dedicated her entire life to the service of humanity. Sister Nivedita had immense affection for India and its people, which is evident from her ideological support in the struggle for India's independence. The influence of Swami Vivekananda's lecture in Chicago religious conference had colored her in Indian hues, and Sister Nivedita later made India her land of work. It was the influence of Indian culture and Indian philosophy that a British Irish woman chose India as her land of work. By living in India and doing work for the people of India, she was able to create her own identity in India and is known as Sister Nivedita. This research paper attempts to explore those important works of her life.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Influence, Contributions, Chicago conference, Margaret E. Noble.

Introduction of the paper

Margaret E. Noble, who is known in India as Sister Nivedita. She was a British Irish woman who became a follower of Swami Vivekananda, influenced by his thoughts. Sister Nivedita regarded India as her land of action and worked for India throughout her life. The introduction concerning Sister Nivedita's birth and life is also significant. According to her own book, **Studies From an Eastern Home**, "Sister Nivedita, was of Irish parentage and birth, and was born at Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, in 1867. Very soon afterwards her father, Samuel Richmond Noble, entered the Lancashire Independent College, in preparation for the Congregational ministry, but did not live to fulfil his early promise. Margaret, his elder daughter, passed from school in the north of England to a teacher's training, and was fortunate enough to become acquainted in London with some of the most enthusiastic apostles of the New Education. Her practical experience was gained as teacher in various girls' schools, and more especially in association with a Dutch lady who had established in a suburb

of South London a school of a thoroughly modern type." (Sister Nivedita, 1913)

Review of the literature:

Sister Nivedita (Margaret E. Noble)'s own book, **Studies From an Eastern Home**, is significant for understanding her life and work. Besides information related to her birth and life, the book describes her efforts for women's education from the age of 25, as well as her active participation in various social works. The influence of Swami Vivekananda's lecture on her at the Chicago Religious Conference and the changes that occurred in her life afterward are also described in her book (**Studies From an Eastern Home**). This book is important for understanding the life of Sister Nivedita.

The book **Sister Nivedita the Fighter Extraordinary for India** by **Sukanya Ray and Anil Baran Ray** is important for understanding Sister Nivedita's adoption of Hinduism and her interest in social service; this book raises questions about that, "why did Margaret E Noble take to Hinduism? She

was born in a protestant Christian family. Both her grandfather John Noble and father Samuel Noble were congregational ministers, grandfather in Ireland and father in England. Neither of them was orthodox in preaching Christianity, while both believed that service to the poor and needy was a salient mark of Christianity. The description of Sister Nivedita's familial background that forms the foundation of her inclination towards social service is also found in this book, revealing that when Sister Nivedita, or 'Margaret', was only ten, her father died at the age of thirty-four. But even at that tender age she believed, like her father, that unselfish service to people, undeterred by narrow considerations of church, sect or parish, and that a spirit of free inquiry rather than unquestioning obedience to a set of dogmas and doctrines represented Christianity better than what the orthodoxy of the Church or such-like people preached.

The book **'The Complete Work of Sister Nivedita - Volume-I'** by **Sister Nivedita and Pravrajika Atmaprana**, discusses several important concepts related to Swami Vivekananda such as Swami Vivekananda's presence in London in 1895, his speeches on reaching the soul, Hinduism, the Past, and the Future of India.

Research Methodology - Research methodology holds special importance in a research study. This research study is qualitative in study. In this research study, interpretative, descriptive and analytical methods have been used.

Objective of the paper : Sister Nivedita was not an ordinary woman. She was a woman who chose the enslaved India of that time as her field of action when India was a colony of the British government. Therefore, knowing about Sister Nivedita holds significance in itself. This study has two main objectives -

1. To know about the life and works of Sister Nivedita and the influence of Indian culture and ethical values.
2. To understand Sister Nivedita's contributions in the field of women's education in India.

The journey from Margaret E. Noble to Sister Nivedita:

To know Sister Nivedita, it is necessary to know Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda was formerly known as Narendra Nath. When Narendra Nath (Swami Vivekananda) was struggling with hardships and problems in his personal life, he experienced that there is nothing but pain all around in the world. At that time, Narendra Nath decided that he would alleviate the sufferings of his countrymen. His country was under colonial rule, and his countrymen were bound by shackles of slavery. During that time, Narendra Nath's faith in the Ramakrishna Mission grew strong. Here, Narendra Nath studied Vedanta. In 1885, when Ramakrishna left this world, he entrusted the task of fulfilling the mission of humanity's welfare and spirituality to his disciples.

At that time, Narendra Nath traveled to Varanasi, Ayodhya, Lucknow, Vrindavan, and Hathras. "At that time, living in Khandwa, Narendra Nath heard that in 1883, a Parliament of Religions was being called in Chicago, United States. He contemplated attending this parliament because he wanted to spread his ideas throughout the world. Before going to America, he went to Khertri where the Maharaja was his disciple. It was this Maharaja who suggested him adopt the name Swami Vivekananda, which resonated with him, and thereafter he became famous all over the world by this name." (Ram Nath Sharma, 2004, p. 43)

In the year 1893, Swami Vivekananda arrived in the city of Chicago, America. A conference of all the world's religions was organized here. At this conference, all the religious leaders had placed their religious texts in one place, and there was a small book meant to describe the religion of our country, "Shreemad Bhagavad Gita," which some people were mocking. However, as soon as it was Swami Vivekananda's turn to speak, the whole hall resonated with applause because the words he began his speech with were: "My American brothers and sisters." After that, everyone was moved by his description of religion, and all acknowledged the significance of our religious book, Shreemad Bhagavad Gita. The press there labeled Swami

Vivekananda as the "Cyclonic Monk from India." He gave lectures in many places, homes, and colleges, focusing on themes such as Indianness, Buddhism, and harmony. Swami Vivekananda spent almost 2 years giving lectures in the eastern and central United States, primarily including Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Boston. In 1894, he established the 'Vedanta Society' in New York. (Dr Ashish Vashishth, 2022, p.16-17)

"Inspired by the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, his disciple Sister Nivedita, who was a resident of Ireland and a participant in the World Parliament of Religions, expressed her response to Vivekananda's speech in this way. When he began his speech, the topic was the religious thoughts of Hindus, but by the time he concluded, the creation of Hinduism had been established. The large audience present before the Swami supported the Western ideology and represented it, but after this speech, their perspective underwent a change. The West realized that there is another river, apart from Western thought, whose pure and clear water has the power to attract others. Influenced by the thoughts of the Swami, Margaret Elizabeth Noble left her country for India and began to help the poor and orphans while living in Calcutta. She continued to serve in India even after the death of the Swami. Margaret Noble was given the name Sister Nivedita by Vivekananda." (Dr Neeraj ruwali Mohit kumar sharma, 2024, p.181)

Margaret E Nobale was so influenced by the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda that she regarded him as her Guru and remained his follower for life. The thoughts of Swami Vivekananda "touched Margaret deeply, overwhelming her. Margaret was so influenced by Swamiji's character, his wealth of knowledge, and teachings that she considered him a 'Guru' even before his departure from England. She believed that Swamiji took no pride in rescuing small and fallen individuals without flaunting his knowledge." (Vimala Rastogi, 1993, p.5)

Sister Nivedita's Contribution to Indian society and women education in India:

In world history, there are rarely examples where a woman sacrifices everything to go to another country, influenced by that country's culture. Then

she becomes a part of that country, living there and considers that country as her land of work and motherland. Sister Nivedita was that exceptional woman who regarded India as her homeland and place of work.

Sister Nivedita contributed to various areas of Indian social life. It was the time of the Indian freedom struggle and she wholeheartedly supported the freedom fighters. In 1899, when Calcutta was afflicted by a terrible plague, Sister Nivedita cared for the patients without worrying about her own life. She considered India and its people as her family. Through her social service and work, she emphasized the importance of education and health for the people here.

Sister Nivedita's contribution to women's education is remarkable. An foreign woman who ignited the flame of women's education in a traditional Indian society, where women needed permission not only for education but even to step outside their homes. In this small research study, a complete study of Sister Nivedita's contribution to Indian society is not possible. Therefore, it is a small attempt to study her contribution to women's education in India as a female educator.

After understanding Indian society and history, she said about women's education, "Keeping the ideals in mind, an education system must be established that is useful for the present situation. It is impossible to achieve the true result of education by merely imitating foreign educational systems. Therefore, there is a need for an education for Indian women whose aim will be to develop mutual cooperation in mental and spiritual tendencies. In the discharge of this ideal, perhaps India's fortune is greater than that of other countries in the world. Compared to all other countries, Bharat Mata is especially the mother of illustrious women. Regardless of the viewpoint taken from history or literature, her glorious image is prominent everywhere. The national ideal of femininity resides in the history and literature of India. Any education that does not consistently provide a high seat to that ideal cannot ever be counted as the true education of Indian women." (Umesh kumar chourasiya, 2021, p.27)

Shanti Kumar Sayal wrote in his book 'Naritva' that, "Miss Margaret E. Noble of America was so influenced by the intellectual grandeur of Swami Vivekananda that she left her country and came to India. She molded herself in the framework of Indianness and dedicated her entire being to the service of the poor and downtrodden. In India, she turned her attention to women's education. She was greatly saddened to see that, due to the lack of education, superstitions, evils, and distortions had taken root in the hearts of Indian women. Sister Nivedita became engrossed in the work of women's education. She rented a small house on New Pada Lane in Kolkata and established a girls' school. Initially, she faced many obstacles in this endeavor. The contractor of society considered her their enemy. However, seeing her spirit of service, love for her began to grow in the hearts of the people. Gradually, the school began to function. Sister Nivedita tried to eradicate the leprosy of our society by promoting knowledge and education, while also teaching the society to remain clean through her practical education in the external world. She was aware of the weaknesses of Indian society. To guide society, she began to clean the dirty drains with her own hands. As a result, those who wanted to enjoy cleanliness by leaving the burden of cleanliness on others were always left disappointed. Sister Nivedita was an embodiment of service. She would become distressed upon seeing the sufferings of others. (Shanti kumar sayal, 1998, p.57-58)

The vision of Sister Nivedita to establish a women's school:

In the vision of Sister Nivedita to open a women's school, the objective and contribution of Swami Vivekananda in this regard cannot be forgotten; this dream of women's education was also Swami Vivekananda's. Sister Nivedita was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda and gave special importance to her Guru's guidance throughout her life. The first meeting for the establishment of the Nivedita School, the initiation of the school, the affection of Sister Nivedita towards the students after the initiation, the inauguration of the school, the students' trust in Nivedita, Nivedita's understanding of the students' problems, her efforts to solve these

problems, as well as social awareness and efforts for the education of girls are significant from the perspective of study.

From this perspective, if we study the work of Sister Nivedita related to women's education, Umesh Kumar Chaurasia's book is significant. Umesh Kumar Chaurasia writes that, 'Swamiji had brought Nivedita to spread education among the women of India. When Nivedita was eager to open a girls' school in 16 No. Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar (Calcutta), Swamiji's enthusiasm for her was immense. A meeting was organized at Balram Basu's house regarding the opening of the school by Nivedita. In her speech, Nivedita informed everyone about her school's plans and requested them to send their daughters to Nivedita School. Nobody noticed when Swamiji had come and sat behind everyone. Suddenly, he was seen pushing everyone while laughing and saying, 'Get up, get up. Being the father of girls alone won't suffice. You all have to cooperate in making arrangements for their education with a national spirit. Stand up and respond to the application. Say yes, we are ready.' (Umesh Kumar Chaurasia, 2021, p.21)

In this sequence, the inauguration of Sister Nivedita's women's school takes place, and the inauguration of 'Nivedita School' was done by Maa Sharada, the life partner of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Maa Sharada always showered affection on Sister Nivedita as if she were her daughter and consistently encouraged her efforts in girls' education. She (Sister Nivedita) experimented for a few months to adapt Western ideas to Indian traditions in a school located in a small house in Kolkata. In 1899, she closed the school and went on a journey to Western countries to gather funds. Upon returning in 1902, she reopened the school. In 1903, Nivedita also opened a women's section to provide training in arts and crafts along with basic education. Her school continued to teach and provide training. (Rajeev mani Asha dinkar, 2019, p.70)

Sister Nivedita had great affection for her students. Umesh Kumar Chaurasia writes that, 'One of her students was Prafulmukhi, who lived near the school. She was a child widow. Nivedita was very fond of this intelligent and enthusiastic girl. On the

day of Ekadashi fasting, she would always send fruits and sweets for this girl. Once, after being busy with school work all day with Dr. Bose, Nivedita suddenly remembered that today was the day of Ekadashi fasting and she hadn't sent anything for Prafulmukhi to eat. At that moment, it became impossible for Nivedita to stay there for even a moment longer. She immediately ran home and as soon as she arrived, she sent for Prafulmukhi. Sitting her nearby and expressing her regrets, Nivedita kept saying repeatedly, 'My child, how could I forget to send you fruits and sweets? How unjust I have been to you. I ate myself but forgot to send for you? What a big mistake I have made.'

Sister Nivedita was like a mother to the students of her school, who was always ready for their bright future. 'For girls, Nivedita School was like a maternal home, where they received abundant love and nurturing care from their motherly teacher. Every day, the girls eagerly awaited the time when they would go to school and meet their beloved sister. Nivedita would also be standing at the school entrance every day, looking at the arriving girls and affectionately saying, 'My dear, dear girls have arrived.' When, due to family issues, some girls could not come to Nivedita's girls' school, or parents could not send them regularly to school, Nivedita would personally go to those girls' homes and try to resolve their issues in a timely manner, making arrangements to ensure the girls could attend school regularly. (Umesh Kumar Chaurasia, 2021, p.21-22) Sister Nivedita's loving nature and selfless service made Indian society consider her its daughter, and Sister Nivedita herself considered Indians her own family. Sister Nivedita made every effort to protect and respect the interests of the women and daughters of her family. A girl, "Giribala Ghosh was 22 years old when she started school. She was a widow with a son. She lived with her uncle in Baghbazar. She was very keen to attend school, but due to harsh criticism from her neighbors, she had stopped going. One day, her grandmother was going to take a bath in the Ganges. While passing by the school, she heard the school prayer being sung by the girls in melodious voices. She was deeply moved by it. Impressed by it, she developed a favorable opinion of education and

allowed Giribala to attend school and made arrangements for it.(Umesh Kumar Chorasaya, 2021, p.22)

Sister Nivedita greatly valued the values, devotion to tradition, and tolerance inherent in Indian women. This is evident from her speech in Madras. In one of her Madras speeches, Nivedita said, "The accusation that Indian women are uneducated and overly oppressed is not true at all. The atrocities against women here are less severe than in other countries. The noble character of Indian women is one of the greatest assets of their national life. From a modern perspective, they are certainly ignorant, meaning most of them cannot write. Very few women even know how to write. But is that the reason they are uneducated? If that were the case, then the mothers and grandmothers who recite the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, and various anecdotes to their children would all be considered uneducated. If they could read European novels and some useless English magazines, they would not be considered uneducated. Doesn't this seem contradictory?"(Umesh Kumar Chorasaya, 2021, p.22)

It is an inherent quality of Indian women that they have been playing their role as the finest teachers of cultural education for centuries, which Sister Nivedita also recognized and understood.

Evaluation:

From the perspective of literacy, undoubtedly, Indian women have faced injustice from centuries, but there is another aspect to this as well. Therefore, in the Indian education system, Sister Nivedita also valued an approach that emphasized India's tradition, culture, and knowledge. From the perspective of literacy, Sister Nivedita considered women's education important because when women are educated and empowered, they can not only instill values in society but also play a role in bringing about change. From the perspective of values education, Sister Nivedita also regarded Indian women as prosperous.

Along with serving the family, the qualities of serving humanity and high morality are inherent in the DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) of Indian

women. Educating women will also make them capable of making decisions for themselves and contribute to social reform. Sister Nivedita advocated for the active role of Indian women in Indian society. She wanted to see women gaining the ability to make independent decisions and become self-reliant. Therefore, along with literacy, she also provided women with education in skills and arts.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is clear that even when India was a colony under foreign rule India, existed as a nation. Even at that time, when India was under colonial rule, Swami Vivekananda, a son of India, showcased India's knowledge and self-respect to the world at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions. The influence of Swami Vivekananda's brilliance and wisdom was so profound that a foreign woman became his follower and came to India. She studied the Vedas and Puranas in India and then devoted herself to awakening India's self-respect. She chose her work in the field of women's education and also contributed to the country's freedom struggle. She took on the great responsibility of connecting Indians with India, and the Indians considered her their daughter, the daughter of India.

Margaret E. Noble, which was her real name, was called Sister Nivedita by India. Sister Nivedita spent her entire life as a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, following the path he taught. She became a symbol of hope for women's education in India and became a sister and daughter to Indian women. India has never forgotten the service and dedication of Sister Nivedita. Even today, she lives in the hearts of Indians. On October 13, 1911, at the age of 43, she took her last breath in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India.

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