WOMEN OF MODERN INDIA



III · SISTER NIVEDITA

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WOMEN OF MODERN INDIA SERIES

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No: 147 7 III

WOMEN OF MODERN INDIA

Sister Nivedita

GRADE III

BY

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SISTER NIVEDITA

1. A TRUE FRIEND OF INDIA

It is true that Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble (afterwards known as Sister Nivedita) was not an Indian. She was not even born in India. Still, one cannot name the leaders of Indian women in modern times without mentioning her name. She played a very important part in the history of modern India, and did much to help Indian women. She was an Irishwoman by birth, but she left her home when she was still young and came to live in India. She came to this country to serve it, and she did serve it with all her heart. She came to look upon India as her own country, and the Indians as her brothers and sisters. She did everything that she could for them all her life. It is, therefore, only right to say that she felt as

much for India as any Indian born. Every Indian who knew her felt that she was truly Indian in spirit. They even thought that she loved India more than many real Indians. Nothing gave her greater joy than to be of service to Indians. This she believed to be her chief duty, her very religion.

Sister Nivedita brought splendid gifts to the service of India. She was a great orator, and her speeches used to move people very strongly. Someone once said that her voice was like a trumpet with a silver sound. She was a very fine writer and her noble prose is still read with great interest. She was a godly woman and felt that God is present everywhere. She was a patriot and told Indians to work for their country's good. She preached love of India in the same spirit in which some people preach their religion. She loved beauty, and admired it much when she found it in Indian art, Indian literature or Indian life.

She tried to make the West understand the East. So she wrote books about Indian life. She even told the people of the West that there was much that they could learn from India. All this gave Indians a new faith in themselves. Sister Nivedita believed that the East was better than the West in many ways. Above all, Sister Nivedita is to be remembered as a great friend of Indian women. At a time when they were ignorant, she opened schools for them. She was herself one of the noblest women that ever lived, and so every Indian woman honours her.

2. EARLY LIFE

Sister Nivedita was born on 28 October 1867. Both her parents were Irish. Her father, the Rev. S. R. Noble, was said to be a very fine preacher, and it was from him that Sister Nivedita inherited her eloquence. He was also a man to whom religion meant service. He devoted the

best years of his life to the service of the poor in Manchester. This love of service also his daughter learnt from him. It is said that the father was extremely fond of his daughter, and always felt that she would do something great. Once a friend of his who was a preacher in India came to see him. Mr Noble showed his child to him. His friend liked the child very much for he found her intelligent and beautiful. He said that he hoped she would go to India when she grew up, and work for the people of that country. This, as will be seen later on, came to be true.

After the visit of the preacher from India, Mr Noble began to take a great interest in India. His wife was also interested. In fact the whole family began to love India and the Indians. As a result of this their house was always open to any Indian who was on a visit to England. Indeed anyone who had ever visited India was sure of a

welcome there. Thus India did not remain a strange country for the family. Miss Noble, too, came to know a great deal about India and the Indian people. She admired India in many ways, but she also felt sad when she learnt that the people were backward in education and many other things.

As Miss Noble grew older, her father felt that she was meant to do something really great. Therefore he told his wife that she should not stand in her daughter's way, if she wanted to devote her life to some good cause. His wife promised. Before his daughter was grown-up Mr Noble died. Years passed by, and then one day Miss Noble told her mother that she was going to India to serve the people there. Mrs Noble felt very sad and even thought of discouraging her daughter. But then she remembered what her husband had told her. So she made up her mind to let her

daughter go. All the same, she felt very sad when they parted.

Miss Noble was very clever. Everyone who knew her felt that she had a fine mind. Her parents knew that she had unusual powers and had given her the best possible education. She did not like to do things as others did. She wanted to do things in her own way. She thought out things for herself, and did not like to follow anyone blindly. All these things made her different from other people. Even men like Thomas Huxley, the great scientist, felt that she had a remarkable brain. People were equally impressed with the nobility of her soul. They felt that she cared more about other people than about herself.

After completing her education, she made up her mind to devote her life to the service of others. But where was she to start her work? She found that there was much poverty and misery in London. From this

she realized that as poverty and misery existed in London so did they exist all over the world. She knew that it was impossible for her to remove all evil from the world. She therefore made up her mind to do as much as she could for the poor people of London. She also came to realize at this time that religion does not mean belief in this doctrine or that; religion, she felt, meant service. She believed that only those who devoted their lives to the service of others could call themselves truly religious. She made up her mind to open a school. But in her school she resolved not to give education in the usual manner. It was not enough, she felt, to teach people a few things. She studied all the latest methods of education and followed them in her school. Thus through her school she hoped to produce better men and women. She soon found that women did not have as many opportunities as men. She made up

her mind therefore to tell women what they could do. She wanted to make them feel that they could do much for the good of the world.

These were the ideas that Miss Noble had at that time. We know that she had a purpose in life and that was to serve others. We also know that she had a very clever mind. She was familiar with the latest thought. She had read almost everything written by the thinkers of the day. She not only read about new ideas, but she also put them into practice.

3. SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

While she was running her school, Swami Vivekananda arrived in London. Swami Vivekananda was a *sanyasi*. He spent his life searching for truth and serving mankind. He had been to America to attend the Parliament of Religions. At this Parliament the representatives of the

different religions from the different countries of the world had met. There his address had given the Americans some new ideas about Hinduism. After finishing his tour in America, Swami Vivekananda went to London at the invitation of some friends. There Miss Noble met him many times. She listened to all the lectures that the Swami gave. But though she liked the lectures, she did not find anything new in them. In fact, after listening to him for the first time she said: 'It was not new.' But when she went home and thought over what he had said, she felt that her words were not kind.

Though she did not agree with the Swami's views, she admired the man. She felt that he was a hero. He was a great preacher who wanted people to be good and noble. He was a man of great intellect and wide sympathies, and he had a fine and noble soul.

Swami Vivekananda then left England, but he went back there again after a year. There he stayed with his English friends and lectured for several months. He also held classes for persons who were interested in the Hindu religion. Miss Noble attended these classes. She learnt much from him. The more she knew him the more she felt how noble was his soul. She was impressed with his dignity and calm bearing, his deep spiritual power and his desire to serve others. He left England again and travelled for a time in France, Germany and Switzerland with some of his English friends. Then he went back to England, and on his return Miss Noble met him again at the house of a friend and there they had a long talk. In the course of that talk Swami Vivekananda said to Miss Noble: 'I want to do something for the women of India, and I think you could help me a great deal in that work. I am sure you will make up

your mind to go to India and work there.' These words had a strange effect on Miss Noble. She felt that she was being called to India for some noble purpose, and that she should accept the call. She left the house however without making up her mind about it. But a few days later her mind was made up. She would go to India. She met the Swami again at the house of the same friend. There she told him that she would go to India to help him in his work. This was a very important decision. It changed her life, and gave India one of the greatest friends that the country has ever had. At this time the Swami wrote to her: 'I will stand by you unto death, whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. The tusks of the elephant come out, but they never go back. Even so are the words of a man.'

4. IN INDIA

She left England in the early part of 1898, and arrived in India some months later. She went to stay at Belur, a few miles from Calcutta, at the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. She lived in a cottage on the banks of the Ganges. The Swami came to this cottage every morning and talked about what he wanted to be and to do. From these talks Miss Noble gathered some idea of the greatness of Swami Vivekananda. Other members of the Mission also told her all about his life and work. In the mission they followed a very simple routine. Every one got up early in the morning. Then they devoted some time to meditation. After this they talked or sang hymns. Sometimes they discussed history, especially the stories of heroic and saintly persons. At two o'clock they had their meal. After the meal they again talked and sang together. In the evening they

worshipped for about two hours. Then they meditated again. They very often studied the *Bhagwat Gita* and other religious books.

They travelled about a great deal and in this way Miss Noble prepared herself for future work and saw quite a large part of India. In the summer of that year, Swami Vivekananda along with Miss Noble and others left for Mayavati in the Himalayas. On the journey and during their stay there the Swami continued to instruct the members of his party. On many occasions crowds of people assembled just to get a sight of the Swami, so Miss Noble was able to see what a great influence he had in India. They stopped at Patna, and Miss Noble was delighted with this city, which was once the capital of a great Hindu kingdom. The sight of Benares, as it lies on the banks of the Ganges, affected her a great deal. She said that she would never be able to forget

it. The historic city of Lucknow likewise impressed her very much. She admired its industries and thought sadly of the luxuries which the citizens had once enjoyed. The Swami would point out to her every now and then the fields and farms. He would tell her of the hard life of the villagers and of their kindness to the *sadhus*. She visited the Terai near Nepal and this reminded her of Buddha, for Buddha was born in that very region.

After a month's stay at Almora the party left for Kashmir. They passed through the Punjab, a province which the Swami liked very much. 'We passed through the Punjab next day', Miss Noble recorded, 'and great was the Swami's excitement at the fact. It almost seemed as if he had been born there, so close and special was his love for this province.' Miss Noble was delighted to see Punjabi maidens at their spinning-wheels and the villages of the Punjab surrounded



By courtesy of the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND SOME DISCIPLES (SISTER NIVEDITA IS ON THE SWAMI'S LEFT)

by green fields. Then they drove from Rawalpindi to Murree in a tonga and from Murree on to Baramula. At Baramula Miss Noble drank Kashmiri tea and ate the jam made there, which she enjoyed very much. Then they set out for Srinagar in boats or dungas. In two days they reached Srinagar. The valley of Kashmir she found very beautiful. She felt happy when she saw the great variety of beautiful flowers there. The people of Kashmir, in spite of their poverty, interested her. She once saw them making merry after they had gathered the harvest. This scene she could never forget.

In Kashmir she visited many places. She went to Kshir Bhavani, or *The Milk of the Mother*, a spring near Gandhar Bal. 'It was said to be the first time that Christian or Mohammedan had ever landed there', she wrote afterwards. She greatly enjoyed this visit. She saw the temple of Shankaracharya

also, which is built on the top of a hill about three thousand feet high. She rowed in the Dal Lake very often and visited the Shalimar Bagh and the Nishat Bagh near Srinagar. It was a great delight for her to watch the sunset in these gardens. The grandeur of the ancient buildings of India was impressed upon her when she saw the temple of Pandrenthan. It seemed to her like a cathedral. She saw the ruins of Martanda—'a wonderful old building'.

Then she went to the Cave of Amarnath, a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus. She found the route to the cave to be very beautiful. 'How lovely were the flowers! The night before, or was it this night, large blue and white anemones grew in my tent, beneath my head,' she wrote. Most of these places she visited in the company of Swami Vivekananda.

5. DISCIPLESHIP AND EARLY WORK

After staying in Kashmir for some months she went back to Calcutta. She visited Lahore, Delhi, Agra and several other places on her way back. But she did not spend all her time in seeing sights. All the time she was training herself for the life she was going to lead. The Swami told her all about India in his talks. In this manner, she came to know the history of India, its great kings, warriors, saints and builders. He also told her about religion and the discipline she would have to undergo in order to lead a spiritual life. She wrote about these days: 'Some of these days have been beautiful. I have had spiritual experiences that can never be forgotten. I have sometimes listened to words that I will always remember. I have at least once seen also the supreme beauty of God.' But there were also days when she wanted to break away from the influence of her Master.

During this time she learnt to meditate—that is to say, to fix her mind on holy and sacred subjects in the desire to become pure and godly. Meditation sometimes brought her peace of mind. But at other times she felt that perhaps she was doing wrong. In the end, however, she came to see that her doubts were false. Then she told herself that she had too much pride. It seemed to her that pride stood in her way. Therefore she made up her mind to cast off pride and become humble. The Swami was aware of what was passing through her mind. One day he went up to her and said: 'I am going into the forest. There I will be alone, and when I come back I will bring peace for you and for myself.' These words touched Miss Noble's heart. From that moment onwards her sense of pride disappeared and she became a true disciple. At the end of the year she wrote: 'Beautiful have been the days of this year. In them

the Ideal has become the Real. First in our riverside cottage at Belur; then in the Himalayas, at Naini Tal and Almora; afterwards wandering here and there through Kashmir;—everywhere have come hours never to be forgotten.'

Then Miss Noble accepted Hinduism. It was at that time that her name was changed from Margaret Elizabeth Noble to Sister Nivedita. Nivedita means one who is offered to God—that is to say one dedicated to the service of God. She also felt called upon to join the order of Ramakrishna, which Swami Vivekananda had founded. Thus she became a member of that earnest group which was determined to do something for the uplift of India. But the watchword of her life was neither uplift nor teaching. She wanted only to serve, and to serve in a very quiet and helpful manner. She never let people think that she had more knowledge than they. She never let people feel that

she was more spiritual than they themselves. She thought of herself as a humble servant of the people, and wanted to work for them in the most humble manner. She especially felt for the poor. She knew how miserable their lives are. Many a time she herself felt the anguish and despair from which they suffer. She therefore made up her mind to lighten their burden as much as she could. She wanted to give them hope, and she wanted them to find the meaning of life. She found that for all these things the message of Vivekananda was helpful.

Shortly after Sister Nivedita became a Hindu, the party returned to Calcutta. There they found bubonic plague raging. All the people who could possibly do so were leaving the city as fast as they could, and the rest were too frightened to act calmly. The Ramakrishna Mission at once set to work to form a plague service and Sister Nivedita was placed in complete

charge. She organized a band of young men to care for the sick, and to help clean the city of the filth and rubbish in which infection breeds. She also gave a public address on 'The Plague and the Duty of the Students' with the result that more young men offered their help. It is said that one day a little boy suffering from the dread disease was brought to her. The child came of poor parents who had died in the plague and there was no one to look after him. Sister Nivedita nursed him herself with great devotion, but all her efforts to save him were in vain and he died in her arms. Before he died he took her for his mother, and everyone felt that this was her reward for the unselfish motherly love which she had given the child. All will agree that few could deserve that reward more than Sister Nivedita.

After the plague Sister Nivedita began to work on a plan for opening an Indian school

in North Calcutta, but there were many difficulties and she was obliged to return to England to raise funds. About this time Swami Vivekananda's health began to break down. He was not an old man, but he became very ill and weak and it was thought that a sea voyage might help him to recover his strength. And so the two travelled together. On the voyage Sister Nivedita began the work of recording all the Swami's sayings, and his followers will always be grateful to her for this. After a short stay in London the Sister set out for America. She gave a series of lectures in New York which were very successful. American women were interested to hear Sister Nivedita's most sympathetic account of their Indian sisters. She talked about the gentle nature and purity of heart of the Indian woman and meant every word she said. She had a great admiration for all Eastern women and felt that every province of India

was remarkable for some special virtue in its women. The Bengal woman, she thought, should be admired for her saintlike devotion to her husband. As a saint loves and worships God, so does the woman of Bengal regard her husband and children. The women of Maharashtra she admired for their strong and practical minds. The Rajput women she praised for their courage, the women of Madras for keeping up their ancient customs, and the women of Gujrat for their beauty.

6. NOBLE WORK

From America Sister Nivedita returned to Europe and joined the Swami and some of his disciples in France. After a holiday in Brittany the Swami left for India, and Sister Nivedita returned to London to continue the work of finding money for her school. She left for India about a year later, and when she arrived she found the

Swami very ill indeed. Soon afterwards he died. The death of her Master strengthened Sister Nivedita's resolve to follow in his footsteps, and she threw herself heart and soul into her work for India.

In order to do the best work for the people of India she realized that she must live in their midst. She must live the sort of life that they lived. Therefore she went to Calcutta and rented a house in a part of the city where the majority of orthodox Hindus lived. Though she dressed like a Hindu woman and lived like a Hindu, at first her orthodox neighbours refused to look upon her as one of themselves. They were suspicious of whatever she did or said. They would not go near her. She was thought so much of a stranger that no Hindu servant was willing to cook for her. For some time she suffered a great deal of discomfort. She had to do without meals and live only upon fruit. But she was not discouraged.

She began by winning over the children, who soon came to love her for her kindness. Then slowly, one by one, their parents became convinced of the goodness and sincerity of this stranger in their midst. They, too, began to love and respect her. They were proud of knowing such a woman, and many of them looked upon her as a saint. The Hindu women then began to think that it was a great honour to meet her, to talk to her and to share a meal with her. Then she opened a school for the little children who lived near. There they went to play games as well as to learn how to read and write. They were very happy there. This led their mothers to attend the classes Sister Nivedita started for married women. She taught them to read and write, to look after their homes, to nurse the sick, and to work for their unhappy sisters. But she felt that this was not enough. She knew of the

plight of widows and orphans and tried to help them too. She gave them shelter in her home and taught them useful things. Her house became known as the House of the Sisters. This was because she gathered round her some other women to share her work. In this way she was able to help a great many children, their mothers and also widows and orphans. The house was perfectly run. To set an example of hard work and cleanliness she used to sweep it herself. On one occasion she even swept the street, for she hated dirt and always remembered that it breeds disease.

It will be interesting to know how she found money for this noble work. She did not go about begging for money, but took whatever help people sent her themselves. She earned some money by writing books, and all this was used to run the school. A friend in England also sent her some money. This friend looked upon Sister Nivedita as



By courtesy of the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta

SISTER NIVEDITA

her daughter, and felt very proud of the noble work she was doing. She therefore sent her as much money as possible for that noble work. In a short time the fame of the school spread far and wide. Many English people and many Americans who visited India made a special point of seeing the school. Everyone who went there felt impressed with her noble work.

There were many visitors to the House of the Sisters—Indian artists, writers, speakers, students, religious leaders and world travellers. Anyone who had the welfare of India at heart was sure of a welcome. Her house was thus the centre of much useful work at that time.

Teaching was not her only work, for she also wrote books and gave public lectures. At these lectures she always spoke what was in her mind and soon she came to be a great influence in Bengal. She told Indians to be good patriots and citizens.

And so Sister Nivedita continued to work for India, as she had always wished to do. She might have gone on for a great deal longer had it not been for the terrible floods which occurred in Bengal in 1906. These floods also brought about famine. The people suffered terribly, and there were very few persons who thought of helping them. Of the few who did, Sister Nivedita was the most active. As soon as she heard of the distress of the people, she left Calcutta and went to Barisal. There she visited almost every village in the distressed area. She went about from one village to another on foot. Often she had to pass through water for miles at a time. But nothing could prevent her from doing this good work. It was during these days that she came to know something of the terrible poverty of Indians, and of their capacity for calm and patient suffering. This made her admire Indians all the more. But the work she

did and the way in which she lived told upon her health. She had an attack of malaria of a very severe kind. But she bore her illness patiently. When her friends came to her and showed their sympathy, she said: 'My sufferings are nothing when compared with the sufferings of the people in the famine-stricken areas. You should not think of me, but should try to help those poor people who are in greater need.' She recovered from this attack in time, but her health was never the same again. For the rest of her life she suffered from attacks of malaria. She was not ill all the time, but after a few months of health she would fall sick again. Her friends and doctors advised her to rest, but she would not do so. 'How can I rest', she said, 'when there is so much to be done?' One doctor told her to leave her house and move into a more healthy part of the town. She refused to do this. 'How can I leave this lane which has given

me shelter for so many years?' she said. 'If I am to live in Calcutta, it must be here and nowhere else. It would give me much distress to leave these people among whom I have lived so long. I love the children who live in this lane. They are to me like my own children. All the people living here are my friends and it would not be right for me to leave them.' So in spite of all that the doctors and her friends could say she kept her house. She felt that God wanted her to make her home there and work for the people.

She did, however, remember what the Swami had said to her very often. 'You cannot understand India', had been his words, 'unless you visit every part of it.' And so she began to travel about India. She visited most of the chief cities and gave lectures. But she did not visit only the big cities. She also went to holy places. Most of these sacred places she visited on foot,

as pilgrims used to do in the past. Her love for India grew, and with it her understanding of the people of the different provinces.

7. HER WRITINGS

All that Sister Nivedita saw and did in India bore fruit in many ways. She did not serve India only by educating the women and children or by helping the people suffering from plague and famine, but also by explaining the greatness of India in her books. She is remembered not only as the servant of the people, but also as a writer. Her books are still read, and are thought well of both by Indians and foreigners. It is said that to really understand India one must read Sister Nivedita's books. In these books she gives fine descriptions of persons and places and buildings and customs. She writes about all these things with a great deal of sympathy and understanding. She sees good in everything and

wishes the reader to understand India as she does.

She wrote many books, but *The Web of Indian Life* is the most famous. This book should fill any Indian reader with feelings of pride in his country. It is a great book indeed—a book which is still read and will continue to be read for many years to come. It is read not only by Indians, but also by the people of other countries. Every one who wants to know something about the real India should read it. It shows the soul of the people. It gives a new meaning to the old Hindu customs. It also contains very fine descriptions of places.

Who does not know the river Ganges? It is a sacred river for the Hindus, and they believe that its waters purify them. But if we want to understand what the Ganges really is, we should look at it through the eyes of Sister Nivedita. She says that the Hindus worship the Ganges because its

water is so cool, and it is such a joy to look at it. The peasant feels happy to see it, because even when rains fail its water can be used for the crops. But these things alone cannot explain the greatness of the Ganges. To the simple Hindu the Ganges is a mother, for she gives life and food. To the religious-minded Hindu, she is the giver of purity. It is for this reason that every Hindu likes to bathe there as often as possible. As he steps into the stream, he feels that he is going into it to wash off his sins. Even a traveller cannot but feel happy when he looks at the Ganges. It reminds him of the many cities which are situated on its banks and of the mountains from which it comes. He thinks of Benares and other great cities and of the snows of the Himalayas. Even a historian finds pleasure when he looks at the river, for he knows that as the river has continued to flow through the ages, so has the Aryan civilization continued to exist all

those years. It is no wonder that the Hindus look upon the Ganges as a person. To them it is not merely a river, but a mother to be loved and respected. This is the kind of thing that Sister Nivedita said about the Ganges.

No one admired Indian women more than Sister Nivedita. She specially liked what the Hindus thought about women. She felt that the Hindus love their mothers most devotedly. She said that Hindus think of their mother in the same way as they think of God. As God loves us always, so a mother's love is always with us. As we cannot forget the love of God, so is it impossible for us to forget our mother. The affection that exists between a mother and her children is the most beautiful thing in the world. The rest of the world may grow cold and indifferent, but our mothers always love us. We never feel so safe and happy as when we are with our mothers. A mother's love is beautiful, because it never

asks anything in return. It gives, but does not want anything back.

Sister Nivedita thought highly of the Hindu woman as a wife as well as a mother. According to her a Hindu wife has only one ideal, and that is love for her husband. She devotes her whole life to serving him. He may be cold and indifferent, cruel or poor, but still she loves him. Sister Nivedita had a great respect for Indian women. But at the same time she felt that Indian women should be educated. She thought that every Indian woman should be able to read and write. She also wanted every Indian woman to work for her country. In other words, she thought that women had duties not only towards their husbands and children but also towards their country. Sister Nivedita thought that women should learn to be true patriots.

Of all the sacred books of India, Sister Nivedita admired the *Gita* most. As we

know, the *Gita* contains the advice which Krishna gave to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, when Arjuna hesitated to fight because all around him were his friends and kinsmen. Krishna told him not to worry about them. He told Arjuna what his duty was. So noble were the words of Krishna that Arjuna made up his mind to fight. But many people think that no one who lives in this world can put into practice the lessons of the *Gita*. Sister Nivedita thought differently. She said: 'The *Gita* does not ask us to leave the world. On the contrary, it asks us to do our duty, however humble it might be. A man should do his own duty, however hard it may be, and not the duty of another, though that may be easier. The *Gita* tells us to fight the battle of life without caring for victory or defeat. If a person does not take part in this battle, he is not a hero but a weak and lazy man.'

8. LOVE FOR INDIA

Remembering India's great deeds of the past, Sister Nivedita was very hopeful about the future. She felt that India would soon be truly united. She did not see anything to prevent this. 'It is true', she said, 'that in India we have many races, many religions and many kinds of social conditions, but that does not mean that all cannot be united into one.' She had faith that India would be one and united. The people of the North, she thought rightly, are the arms of India. The Mahrattas, the Musulmans and the Sikhs are great fighters and can fight their country's battles. The people of the South are the brain of India. Bengal she looked upon as the heart of India, and the Bengalis she regarded as the true sons of India.

Sister Nivedita thought that the history of India should be written again. Till then the history of India had dealt only with persons. The new history, she thought, should deal

with places also. The people should not only know about Ramachandra and Yudhishthira, Krishna and Ashoka, Vikramaditya and Akbar, Shivaji and Haidar Ali, but they should also know something about Ayodhya and Hastinapura, Indraprastha and Patali-putra, Ujjain and Delhi, Conjeeveram and Amaravati, with which the names of the great men are connected.

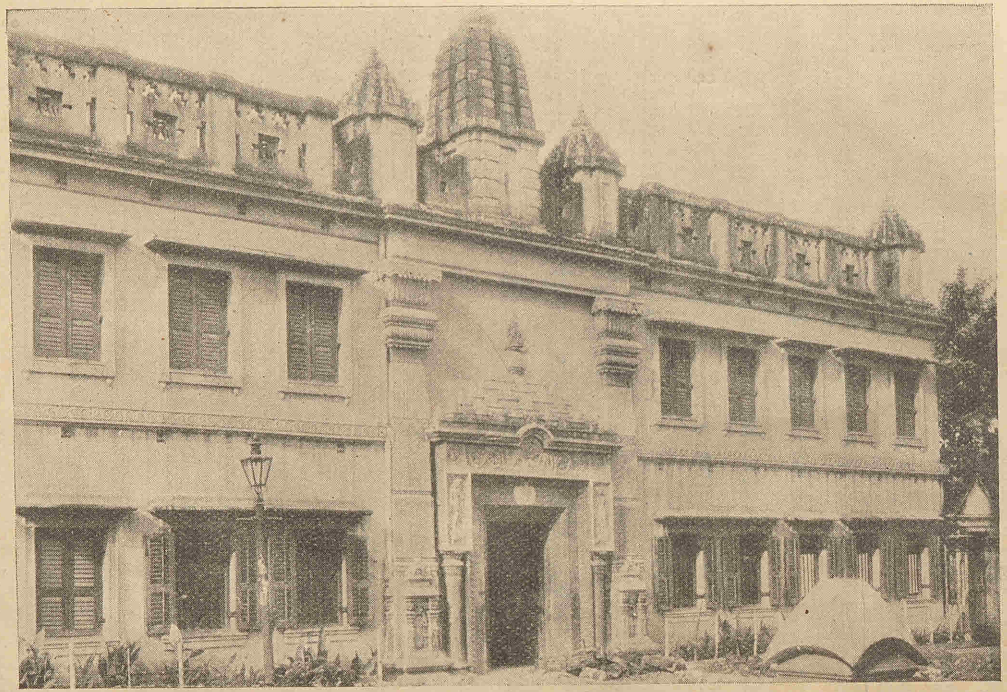
She wanted Indians to improve their vernaculars. She thought that great books should be written in all the languages of India : books that would tell of the past and present conditions of India, and also of the India of the future. She warned Indians against following other nations, though she did not think they should be ignorant of what was happening in other countries. Indians should learn the lessons of Science from the West, and should read the great books of the West. But these things should not be meant only for highly educated

persons. They should be brought within the reach of every man and woman in India.

Sister Nivedita was always sorry when she saw the influence of the West in the work of Indian artists. She was interested in all kinds of art and believed in introducing as much beauty into daily life as possible. She told Indian artists that if they wanted to reach the masses, they should give them beautiful songs and pictures dealing with Indian life. There are so many beautiful subjects in India that there is no reason why they should look elsewhere. Why should not an Indian artist, she asked, paint the picture of a Southern pariah, almost naked, walking along the Beach Road at Madras, or of a woman offering her prayers to God in the morning on the sea-shore? She thought that some artist should show the beauty of the Indian *sari* to the people. Nor should artists forget the great men and women of the past. They should show the people Bhishma and

Yudhishthira, Akbar and Sher Shah, Rana Pratap and Chand Bibi as they really were. These pictures would stir the soul of India. Only through beautiful pictures and other works of art, Sister Nivedita felt, could India reveal herself to Indians as well as to the other peoples of the world.

She wrote a book called *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* which makes very interesting reading. In this book Sister Nivedita appears as a story teller, and she writes the stories in a very pleasing manner. To read her story about Nala and Damayanti is to understand the spirit of the ancient Aryans. She describes Damayanti very clearly, with all her beauty and devotion. She describes Nala also very well, with his weakness for gambling. To read her story about Sanyukta is to understand the Rajputs. She makes Sanyukta a beautiful and bold princess, and she tells us all about her love for Prithvi Raj. It is, indeed, very interesting to read



By courtesy of the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta

THE SISTER NIVEDITA SCHOOL, CALCUTTA, PHOTOGRAPHED JUST AFTER COMPLETION IN 1928

how Prithvi Raj took Sanyukta with him in spite of the wishes of her father. She ends the story with a very touching description of the sad death of Prithvi Raj and Sanyukta's great grief. There are other stories in this book which are also very interesting. All these stories are old, but Sister Nivedita tells them in such a manner that they seem fresh.

Besides these books and many articles about India which appeared in various journals, Sister Nivedita also wrote a book about Swami Vivekananda called *The Master as I Saw Him*. In this book she has given a very fine account of Swami Vivekananda. She tells about the great influence he had on people. If one wants to understand the noble character of the Swami, one should read this book.

9. DEATH

Sister Nivedita served India not only with her pen, but also in many other ways. She

was a great speaker in public and a fine talker in private. It was a joy to listen to her. She did not, however, speak merely for the sake of speaking. She wanted everything she said to be put into practice. 'I do not want words and words,' she used to say, 'I want deeds and deeds.' Her conversation was always worth listening to and showed her wide knowledge. She could talk about books and pictures and science with equal ease. She was always sincere in whatever she said.

In the course of her work Sister Nivedita aroused a love for India in the hearts of many. By listening to her speeches and reading her books many people were inspired to work for India.

All her life Sister Nivedita worked very hard. When she was advised to rest she went on working. She thought there was so much to be done and so little time to do it in. As a result of all this hard work she

often fell ill. At last she was persuaded to go to Darjeeling for a rest after one of these illnesses. There she was attacked with hill dysentery. She was nursed devotedly by a woman for whom she had once done the same service. But in spite of all the efforts of her friends and doctors she died on 13 October 1911. After her death her body was cremated in the burning ghat at Darjeeling. Many Hindus followed the funeral procession and mourned the death of this great woman.

LEADERS OF MODERN INDIA SERIES

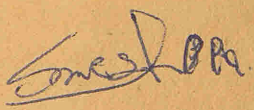
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AND
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The End
Shree Ramdas
Siddhi Vinayak
Siddhi Vinayak
Siddhi Vinayak