

Sister Nivedita: Vajra Shakti

SISTER NIVEDITA was offered to India. Her offering was in all respects. No human being can be more completely offered to any cause than what Swami Vivekananda offered through Sister Nivedita. It was an offering in all dimensions. All the manifestations of human power including maternal love were offered to the cause of the building, rather rebuilding, of a nation. Swamiji never did anything in any manner that was less than thorough. He wanted a 'root and branch reform' and he made a 'root and branch' offering. Today, the amount of attention given to Sister Nivedita in the country of her birth is not even a minute fraction of the reverence she is accorded in India. Nivedita is synonymous with India as was her guru, Swamiji.

Any attempt to describe or remember Nivedita is an attempt to remember Swamiji and it is also an attempt to remember the centuries-old cultural, social, political, philosophical, and spiritual history of India. Any such attempt can only be an attempt merely scratching at the outermost covering of the shell that contains gems of invaluable wisdom. At best, one can only draw pointers to this timeless treasure. Sister Nivedita was being prepared to be offered to India since her birth. Just as the first fruit of a tree is traditionally offered to a deity in India, similarly the best fruit of Ireland was chosen to be offered to India. Offerings to the almighty have to be necessarily the best and Nivedita possessed a keen insight and sharp intellect. She touched the centre of all social problems at a very young age: education. Her experiments with education had their natural

continuance in India. She pioneered non-formal education. She literally begged from door to door to send girl students to her school in Calcutta.

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She was enthralled when she got her first girl student and thus sowed the humble beginnings of a great work, a work of inspiration that would lead to numerous such efforts to educate the girl-child.

Nivedita plunged to treat the sick. She clothed the distressed. She fought for innovation in Indian education. She fought for higher education in science in India. She strived to bring the Indian traditional thought in a harmonious synthesis with the Western thought in philosophy, humanities, sociology, and many other subjects that are taught in Indian universities. She sought to bring a unique way of representing Indian motifs in visual arts and influenced the pioneers of the reawakening of Indian art. She inspired numerous freedom fighters to give up concessionary politics and fight for complete freedom. This also was a natural continuance from her experiences at fighting for Home Rule in Ireland. She stood for women rights at a time when such attempts were practically unheard of in India.

Nivedita strived to protect Indian forests and to bring about a deep understanding of natural conservation in Indian minds. She wanted that all-renouncing monks take up the study of

sciences so that they could, through practice and precept, teach science to the masses. She created a flag for India. Though it was never adopted as the national flag, this flag, the vajra, best symbolises Nivedita's energy. She, Swamiji's offering in the female form, shakti, came upon India as a thunderbolt. Wherever she went, whoever she met, whatever she read, whatever she saw—all were encompassed with and entrenched in the thought of India. Her collaborations with Patrick Geddes were for India. Her meetings with Rabindranath Tagore were for India. Her sojourns to the Himalayas were for India. She lobbied with the rulers, dined with the ruled, and learnt at the feet of masters—all for the sake of India. She herself became India as a result. That is why she could turn the very course of the life of a great poet like Subramania Bharati. She turned him towards Kali, whom she had inherited from Swamiji. Bharati's life became transformed because of Nivedita.

Nivedita was passionately mad with the thought of India. The Indian cause occupied her body, mind, and spirit, till her passing away. That aggressive dedication is what we need to imbibe. We need to wander through lost lanes of history, dust its brittle pages, and unearth that undying dynamism. We need to be aggressive in social, philosophical, national, cultural, and spiritual life today. A sense of urgency to attain the goal is what characterises the lives of the great ones, especially the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sister Nivedita. That urgency is much needed today. The comfort of complacency has never been the path of progress. Nivedita is India. We need to know Nivedita to know India. Anyone even remotely connected with India or anything Indian needs to study Nivedita in depth.

We need to acknowledge the vajra shakti, thunderbolt power, that Nivedita was. This power is speaking to us through its charges of brilliance even today through the numerous

women who are excelling in their pursuits. All of them have minuscule specks of Nivedita in them. The greater Nivedita has pervaded into so many smaller Niveditas. The best way to commemorate Nivedita would be to celebrate the excellence of women in no matter how small a venture. If an Indian woman writes well and with power, Nivedita writes through her. If an Indian woman displays her expertise in any of the performing arts, Nivedita performs through her. And, if an Indian woman educates naturally through her maternal instinct, Nivedita teaches through her.

The need of the hour is to critically analyse the writings of Sister Nivedita, especially her letters. It is unfortunate that till date, there is no comprehensive biography that covers her multi-dimensional personality. Though Nivedita was the truest offering ever possible, the age-old Indian orthodoxy has distanced Indian minds from her and has made them see her only as an outsider, who came to learn and help. To call Nivedita an outsider to India is to betray one's lack of patriotism. She is an outsider to India only as much Swamiji is.

Many Indian institutions of national importance like the Indian Institute of Science would never have seen the light of day but for Nivedita's untiring efforts. And yet, we have dismissed her as a forgotten figure, who is not even granted enough pages in history textbooks or studies. The postmodern penchant that haunts the aspiring intellectual has reduced many a national icon to a faint memory of no importance. It is a grave injustice to the cause of India that such is the fate of Nivedita's writings. If not anything more, her writings would bring the much-wanted sincerity in individual and public discourse that has plagued India and has forced its administrators to launch desperate drives to protect its sanctity. Nivedita calls upon us to try to know India. Through her, everyone can become a patriot of India irrespective of the country of birth. 