

Margaret Elizabeth Noble's Interpretations of Indian History: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Elizabeth Noble popularly known as Sister Nivedita felt a keen interest for a thorough rewriting and reconstruction of India's history on a truthful and authentic manner. In her writings we find abundant proofs of her knowledge of Indian past through the ages – particularly on the Indian traditions of spirituality. She felt the need of the time in re-discovering India as a nation. At her time knowledge of Indian history was very limited and inadequate. Available contemporary historical works were mostly written by the British scholars. In those works preconceived and distorted notions of historical facts were furnished. That prompted her to take up a serious research and representation of Indian heritage and culture. The present work is an attempt to revisit the writings of Margaret Elizabeth Noble and present a critique of her interpretations of Indian History.

1. Introduction

In an interesting letter to the historian Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, Margaret Elizabeth Noble (28 October 1867 – 13 October 1911) strongly emphasized the need for proper historical research in India. In this connection she mentioned several points. We may note these one by one. She wrote:

- (i) In all that you do, be dominated by the normal aim. Remember that truth, in its fullness, is revealed, not only through the intellect, but also through the heart, and the will¹.

The historical research-worker must have a strong moral sense and a deep regard for truth. This meant that even if some unpleasant facts were found, these also had to be recorded. Another implication of proper research was that the approach was not only to be intellectual, but it was also to be guided by the heart and will. That is to say, a deep feeling and a firm determination were also to be guiding factors. There was to be the element of sympathy, and also the will to know.

- (ii) Never be contented with the ideas and the wisdom which are gathered in the study. We are bodies, as well as minds. We have other senses and other faculties, besides those of language. We have limbs, as well as brains. Use the body. Use all the senses; use even the limbs, in the pursuit of truth. That which is learned, not only with the mind, by means of manuscripts and books, but also through the eyes and the touch, by travel and by work, is really known. Therefore, if you want to understand India, visit the great historic centres of each age².

In other words, all the powers of mind and body must be used to the full. Important historical centres must also be visited in order to gain the right perspective.

- (iii) Never forget the future. 'By means of the Past to understand the present, for the conquest of the

Future. Let this be your motto. Knowledge without a purpose is mere pedantry³.

Margaret Elizabeth Noble popularly known as Sister Nivedita felt a keen interest for a thorough rewriting and reconstruction of India's history on a truthful and authentic manner. In her writings we find abundant proofs of her knowledge of Indian past through the ages – particularly on the Indian traditions of spirituality. She felt the need of the time in re-discovering India as a nation. At her time knowledge of Indian history was very limited and inadequate. Available contemporary historical works were mostly written by the British scholars. In those works preconceived and distorted notions of historical facts were furnished. That prompted her to take up a serious research and representation of Indian heritage and culture. The present work is an attempt to revisit the writings of Margaret Elizabeth Noble and present a critique of her interpretations of Indian History.

According to her, historians usually become too much involved in the past. To discover and reveal the past becomes often the consuming passion of the historian. In that event historical research misses its true aim. It becomes purposeless. The right procedure will be to know first the past, then to understand the past in the light of the present, then with the fund of knowledge thus acquired the attempt should be made to mould the future. Thereby a high purpose is fulfilled.

- (iv) And now comes the question of the scope of your work, the question of what you are actually to do. On two points I know you to be clear, - first, nationality, and second, you know that to do this, you must make yourself a world-authority in that particular branch of work⁴.

Thus, the historian is to have two high ambitions. First, though his knowledge he must endeavour to serve the cause of the nation. Secondly, he should study his subject so deeply and widely that he may become an international authority in his branch of specialization.

She also points out that the field of labour may be wide to such extent that the Indian may truly assimilate the modern spirit. Three elements are important – Modern science, Indian History; and the world-sense or geography. A person may specialize in any one of those three, but he may also try to have a broad background of historical knowledge. To illustrate the above point, she says:

- (v) If you were a worker in science, you might read a good deal of History, in interesting forms, as recreation, and so on. One of the modes by which a line of high research becomes democratized is just this⁵.
- (vi) But whatever you do, plunge into it heart and soul. Believe that, in a sense, it alone, - this modern form of knowledge, young though it be, - is true. Carry into it no prepossessions, no prejudices. Do not try, through it, to prove that your ancestors understood all things...⁶

In other words the spirit of work must be thoroughly scientific, absolutely free from any bias or prejudice. There should not in particular, be the tendency to glorify the past (our ancestors) in an emotional way.

- (vii) And now as to the subject itself. Already you have progressed in the direction of history and Indian Economics. It is being supposed therefore that your own specialism... do not forget to interest yourself in subjects as a whole⁷.

In this context Nivedita suggests that a person studying history must study geography also. Similarly, the specialist in geography must study history also. This is a very practical suggestion, because there is a close interconnection between the two subjects. Another point made by Nivedita in this context is:

Again if Indian History be your work of research, read the finest European treatises on Western history. They may not always be valuable for their facts, but they are priceless for their methods⁸.

This will not only broaden the horizon of knowledge, but will ensure a thorough training in methods of historical research.

Then Nivedita refers to some specific historical works published by European writers and underlines their comprehensive and positivist approach. She proceeds to say :

In Indian History, such a point of view is conspicuous by its absence. Some writers are interested in Buddhist India ... and some in various stages of Mahratta or Sikh or Indo-Islamic History ... But who has caught the palpitation of the Indian History glorious. It is India that makes the whole joy of the Indian places⁹.

To Nivedita it is India, the spirit and soul of India that should catch the imagination of the Indian historian. He should feel intensely the heartbeat of the Indian people. Indian

nationalism should be the mainspring of his inspiration no matter in what branch of history he is specializing.

In her discussion of the subject of historical research Nivedita also makes a pointed reference to Kropotkin's book on Mutual Aid. She had come into close contact with Russian sociologist (philosophical anarchist Prince Kropotkin) and was much influenced by his ideas Kropotkin had created a great sensation by his book on Mutual Aided exploded the biological doctrine popularized by Darwin that human social evolution was governed by natural selection and the struggle for existence. It gave rise to the notion that man must resolutely fight against fellowmen, and in this fight the stronger persons, the physically more fit, will survive and the weaker ones will go to the wall-perish. Kropotkin's concept of Mutual Aid was a counter-blast to the biological theory. Kropotkin brought out the grand ideas that social evolution was influenced more by 'mutual aid' than by a relentless struggle for existence among men. This revolutionized social thought.

Nivedita wanted historians to give proper importance to this new viewpoint the scientific perspective in their study of historical development. Referring to this as 'Mutual aid' concept and its importance, She wrote:

Now this is surely a line of thought and research, which is most important to the question of Nationality. In my own opinion, we are entering here on a new period in which Mutual Aid, Co-operation, Self-organisation, is to be the motto, and we want, not only determined workers, but also great leaders, equipped with all the knowledge that is to be had, and therefore capable of leading us in thought¹⁰.

Finally, Nivedita maintained that proper historical research was to be carried on not only by individual efforts but also by collective efforts in which many persons were to collaborate.

She wrote:

Are you to be a solitary student? Or are you one of those most happy and fruitful workers who can call about them fellow-captains and fellow-crewmen to toil along the same lines and exchange the results of thought¹¹.

A number of essays of Nivedita were collected together in a work entitled *Footfalls of Indian History*. This is included as the initial chapter in Vol. IV of *Complete Works of Nivedita*. The essays are disconnected and there is no logical or systematic coherence interlinking them. Nevertheless they throw interesting sidelights on Indian history – particularly, on India's religious history. She felt keenly the need for a thorough-going and detailed account of India's historic past. But at that time adequate data about India's history were not available. But, as we have already noted, she was extremely anxious that India's history should be reconstructed by individual and collective research work.

Nivedita wrote:

The character of a people is their history as written in their own subconscious mind, and to understand that character we have to turn on it the limelight of their history¹².

Again she wrote :

India, as she is, is a problem which can only be read by the light of Indian history. Only by a gradual and loving study of how she came to be, can we grow to understand what our country actually is, what the intention of her evolution, and what her sleeping potentiality may be¹³.

She writes a great deal about Buddhism – particularly about places associated with the name and tradition of Buddha. On the other hand, Upanisadic or Vedic period of Indian history is not dealt with properly. Her exaggerated emphasis on Buddhism is not unnatural or unjustifiable, although Buddhism as a religion was driven out of India almost completely during the Islamic period of Indian history. Nivedita's Master Vivekananda had a great respect for Buddhism, though he did not himself accept Buddhist metaphysics at all. At the parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893), Vivekananda delivered an interesting lecture on Buddhism which was entitled "Buddhism, the fulfillment of Hinduism".

He spoke as follows:

I am not a Buddhist...and yet I am ... Far be it from me to criticize him whom I worship as God incarnate on earth.

The great glory of the Master (Buddha) lay in his wonderful sympathy for everybody, especially for the ignorant and the poor. Some of his disciples were Brahmins. When Buddha was teaching, Sanskrit was no more the spoken language in India. It was then only in the books of the learned. Some of Buddha's Brahmin disciples wanted to translate his teachings into Sanskrit, but he distinctly told them, 'I am for the poor, for the people, let me speak in the tongue of the people'. And so to this day the great bulk of his teachings are in the vernacular of the that day in India. ... Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, not Buddhism without Hinduism. Then realize what the separation has shown to us, that the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, not the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist. This separation between the Buddhists and Brahmins is the cause of the downfall of India. That is why India is populated by three hundred millions of beggars, and that is why India has been the slave of conquerors for the last thousand years. Let us then join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmin with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanizing power of the Great master.¹⁴

There is some exaggeration in Vivekananda's description as indicated in the italic sentence. Nevertheless, it is clear that Vivekananda had a great personal veneration for Buddha though he did not accept the philosophy of Buddha. This must have greatly influenced the thought and attitude of Nivedita towards Buddhism. In this connection special reference may be made to Nivedita's essay entitled, "The Relation Between Buddhism and Hinduism". She begins by quoting a sentence of Vivekananda which is as follows:

There was never a religion in India known as Buddhism, with temples and priests of its own order¹⁵.

Then she writes:

'These words of the Swami Vivekananda appear to myself the finest postulate of any clear study of the question laid down as the title of this paper. Socially Buddhism in India never consisted of a church but only of a religious order. Doctrinally it meant the scattering of that wisdom which had hitherto been peculiar to Brahmin and Kshatriya amongst the democracy nationally it meant the first social unification of the Indian people. Historically it brought about the birth of Hinduism. In all these respects Buddhism created a heritage which is living to the present day. Amongst the forces which have gone to the making of India, none has been so potent as that great wave of redeeming love for the common people which broke and spread on the shores of humanity in the personality of Buddha. By preaching the common spiritual right of all men whatever their birth. He created a nationality in India which leapt into spontaneous and overwhelming expression as soon as his message touched the heart of Ashoka, the people's King. This fact constitutes a supreme instance of the way in which the mightiest political forces in history are brought into being by those who stand outside politics. The great Chandra Gupta, founding an Empire 300 B.C., could not make a nationality in India. He could only establish that political unity and centralization in whose soil an India nationality might grow and come to recognize itself. Little did he dream that the germ of that Indian solidarity which was to establish his throne on adamant foundations lay, not with himself, but with those yellow-clad beggars who came and went about his dominations, and threaded their way through the gates and streets of Pataliputra itself. Yet time and the hour were with him. He built better than he knew. From the day of the accession of this Chandra Gupta, India was potentially mature. With the conversion of Ashoka she becomes aware of her own maturity¹⁶.'

Nivedita, however, goes on to add as follows:

'In the days of Ashoka, however, Hinduism was not yet a single united whole. The thing we know by that name was then probably referred to as the religion of the Brahmins. Its theology was of the Upanishads. Its superstitions had been transmitted from the Vedic period. And there was as yet no idea that it should be made an inclusive faith. It co-existed with beliefs about snakes and springs and earth-worship, in a loose federation which was undoubtedly true to certain original differences of race.

With the age of Buddhism all this was changed. The time had now come when men could no longer accept their beliefs on authority. Religion must for all equally be a matter of the personal experience, and there is no reason to doubt the claim made by the Jainas, that Buddha was the disciple of the same guru as Mahavira ... in repudiating the authority of the Vedas, Jainism proves itself the oldest form of non-conformity in India. And in the same way, by its relative return upon Vedic thought, we may find in Buddhism an element of reaction against Jainism. Only by accepting the Jaina tradition, moreover, as to the influence which their Gurus had upon Buddha are we able to account satisfactorily for the road taken by Him from Kapilavastu to Bodh-Gaya through Rajgir. He made his way first of all to the region of famous Jaina teachers. If again, there should be any shred of truth in Sir Edwin Arnold's story (presumably) from the Lalita-Vistara) that it was at Rajgir that

He interceded for the goats, the incident would seem under the circumstances the more natural. He passed through the city on His way to some solitude where he could find realization, with His heart full of that pity for animals and that shrinking from the thought of sacrifice, which was the characteristic thought of the age, one of the great preoccupations, it may be, of the Jaina circles He had just left. And with His heart thus full, He met the sacrificial herd, marched with them to the portals of Bimbisara's palace, and pleaded with the king for their lives, offering His own in their place¹⁷.

The above description brings out why Vivekananda spoke so highly of the heart of Buddhism, and felt the need of combining this heart with the intellect of the Brahmins. The other point emphasized by Vivekananda, and re-emphasized by Nivedita was that Buddha preached high and noble religious thoughts, for the benefit of the common people. In this connection we may appropriately refer to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's view that Buddha popularized the Upanisadic philosophy among the common folk, We quote from him as follows:

Buddhism helped to democratize the philosophy of the Upanisads, which was till then confined to a select few. This process demanded that the deep philosophical truth which cannot be made clear to the masses of men should for practical purposes be ignored. It was Buddha's mission to accept the idealism of the Upanisads at its best, and make available for the daily needs of mankind. Historical Buddhism means the spread of the Upanisad doctrines among the peoples. If thus helped to create a heritage which is living to the present day. Such democratic upheavals are common features of Hindu history¹⁸.

In the light of the above remarks, Vivekananda's and Nivedita's respect and admiration for Buddha as a preacher of high wisdom, which is embodied in the Upanisads, for the benefit of the common people becomes clear. This also brings out that there was no inherent contradiction between Buddhism and Hinduism (as represented in the Vedas and Upanisadas).

Nivedita also gave high importance to Ramayana and Mahabharata as important sources of historical data regarding India. She wrote:

The great national epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, are in Sanskrit, and stand to this day as the type and standard of imaginative culture amongst all save the English-educated classes¹⁹.

In another book of her, *The Web of Indian Life*, Nivedita made ample references to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Some of her observations deserve to be quoted at length.

Nivedita wrote:

Ever since the commencement of our era the Hindu people have possessed in their present forms two great poems, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana ... Thanks to the long-established culture of the race, and the prestige which all literature enjoys as 'sacred', the Mahabharata is to this day the

strongest influence in the shaping of the lives and ambitions of Hindu boys.

The battle which it describes took place, if at all, very nearly fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ. It lasted many days, and the field of combat was called Kurukshetra ... For many a century after Kurukshetra the wandering bards all over India sang of the great battle²⁰.

Regarding Ramayana she writes at length as follows:

'Long ago, in the age of heroes, there dwelt kings in Ayodhya, of whose race came one Rama, heir to the throne, great of heart, and goodly to look upon. And Rama was wedded to Sita, daughter of Janaka the King.

... Now Ram had been trained in all knowledge and in the sports of princes, ... there arose a trouble between the king his father, and one of the younger queens, Kaikeyi, who desired that her son Bharata should inherit the throne, ... and when one told Rama of this contentions ... he replied at once by a vow to reduce the throne and retire to the forest for fourteen years ...²¹.

Nivedita narrated briefly the whole story of Ramayana. She admired particularly the character of Sita. She wrote:

'Let us look at the love story of Sita. Her feeling is consecrated by the long years of poverty filled with worship, in the forest. When it is thus established, she undergoes the dreary persecution and imprisonment at the hands of Ravana. Every moment finds her repeating the name of Rama, her faith unshaken in her ultimate rescue. At the end she herself suggests the fiery ordeal, and goes through it with dauntless courage²².

Then Nivedita turns to the story of Mahabharata. She pays handsome tribute to two characters in this epic poem-to Bhishma and Krishna, more perhaps to the former than to the latter. She begins:

'The story of Mahabharata would be less easy to recount. Mighty warriors, beautiful women, and great saints move to and fro across its scenes in a glittering melee. The local colour is rich to a fault ... But it is in the conception of character which it reveals that it becomes most significant. Bhishma, the Indian Arthur, is there, with his perfect knighthood and awful purity of soul. Lancelot is there-a glorified Lancelot, whose only fall was the utterance of a half-truth once, with purpose to mislead-in the person of the young king. Yudhisthira. And Krishna, the Indian Christ, is there, in that guise of prince and leader of men that has given him the name in India of 'The Perfect Incarnation'²³.

Nivedita is full of praise for Bhishma. She proceeds to write:

'The central character of The Mahabharata fulfills a very subtle demand. Bhishma is intended for the type of king and knight. Now knighthood implies the striking of many blow and knighthood the protecting of manifold and diverse interests but perfection requires that nothing shall be done from the motive of self-interest. In order, therefore, that he may display all the greatness of character that is possible to man in these

relations, Bhishma is made heir to the throne, to renounce all rights of succession and even of marriage, at the beginning of his life, by way of setting his father free to marry a fisher-girl whom he loves, and make her son his heir.

From this point, having set aside the privileges of parent and sovereign. Bhishma is made to bear to the full the responsibilities of both; and finally, in the energy and faithfulness of his military service, life itself can only be taken from him when he with his own lips has given instructions for his defeat. In Bhishma, therefore, we have the creation of a people who have already learnt to regard detachment as a necessary element of moral grandeur ... as king as Bhishma remains a militant figure in the battle of Kurukshetra he is acting as generalissimo for what he regards as the worse cause of the two. He has done his best to prevent the war, but when it is determined on, he sets himself to obey his sovereign, in the place that is his own²⁴.

Regarding Krishna, Nivedita writes:

'In like manner it is told of Krishna that after he has done his utmost for peace in the interests of justice, he is approached by both parties for his aid, and that such is the calmness of his outlook on life that he submits the matter to a moral test. To one claimant he will give his armies; the other he will serve in person unarmed, he says, leaving the choice to them. It is clear that the man whose greed and ambition are plunging whole nations into war will not have the spiritual insight to choose the /divine Person for his champion, rather than great hosts. And he does not²⁵.'

These accounts show how appreciative Nivedita was of the legends narrated in the epics, and how she sought to derive a moral lesson and high philosophy from them.

Nivedita was much interested in the history of ancient India, but she felt the lack of adequate data regarding this period as a great drawback for the students of Indian history. On account of this she attached a certain measure of importance to Vincent Smith's book *The Early History of India*, but she was keenly conscious of its limitations. She both appreciated and criticized this book. She wrote:

'Fortunately we are now in possession of a single precious volume – *The Early History of India*, by Vincent Smith – of which it may roughly be said that it embodies the main results of the work concerning India done during the last century by the Royal Asiatic society. The faults of this work are many and obvious, yet they are relatively of little importance, since a perfect history of India, written by any but an Indian hand, would be a wrong, rather than otherwise, done to the Nation of the coming days²⁶.'

Yet Nivedita thought Vincent Smith's work was valuable. She commended it as "so handy a compendium summarizing" the results of research. She felt particularly happy about the revelations that this work made about the 'Gupta Empire'. She wrote:

'Nothing surely in all the story here told of early India is more inspiring than that of the Guptas of Magadha and the

empire which they, from their ancient seat of Pataliputra, established over the whole of India. The central fact about this great Gupta Empire, as it will seem to Indian readers, is the identification of Vikramaditya, who is now seem to have been 'of Ujjain' merely in the familiar modern sense of the little added to the name of the conqueror. Vikramaditya of Ujjain, then, was no other than Chandragupta II of Pataliputra who reigned from A.D 375 to A.D. 413²⁷.'

From the account that she gives, it becomes clear how inadequate were the data furnished by Vincent Smith in his book. She rightly said that a proper and adequate history of ancient India could only be written by India's only. That is absolutely true. And today we can claim that the whole history of India from the earliest times to the present days has been ably written and thoroughly reconstructed by a group of Indian scholars led by the reputed historian Dr. R. C. Majumdar. The inspiring spirit and organizer behind this magnificent venture was Dr. K.M. Munshi who set up the institution, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan with its headquarters at Bombay. This institution published eleven volumes of Indian History – beginning from the 'Vedic Age' to the 'Struggle for Freedom' under the general title 'history and Culture of the Indian People'. Had Nivedita been alive today she would have certainly appreciated, this stupendous work as a great achievement of Indian scholarship.

Finally, we have to refer to some observations of Nivedita regarding Bodh-Gaya, which cannot be too quickly ended by the spread of accurate knowledge on the subject. The idea that there were once in India two rival religions, known as Hinduism and Buddhism respectively, is a neat little European fiction, intended to affect Asiatic politics in the way that is dear to the European heart. It cannot be too often repeated that there never was a religion in India known as Buddhism, with temples and priests and dogmas of its own. Neither was there a religion called Hinduism. The very idea of naming and defining Hinduism was impossible, until after the Mohammedan era, and cannot in fact be considered ever to have been accomplished until the famous oration of the Swami Vivekananda at the Chicago parliament of Religions in 1893 was accepted and authenticated by the whole of India. It is then, absurd to think of Buddhism in India as superseded by Hinduism, at a definite moment in its career, and the care of the Bodh-Gaya temple passing from the one sect to the other²⁸.

Nivedita goes on to say:

'As a matter of fact, the village and temple of Bodh-Gaya form a historical monument so extraordinary, being a record of human faith absolutely continuous during a period of almost twenty-five centuries that there is nothing in the world of its own kind to approach it in value. We are able to day to trace the position of the house of Sujata, a village woman who gave food to Buddha on the eve of the Great Enlightenment – we can gather an idea of the ancient village, forest, tank and river, we can point to the actual spot on which grew a certain tree all at a time between five and six centuries before the birth of Christ²⁹.'

Again she writes:

'Bodh-Gaya is unique of its kind. It is unique also in the intimacy and detail of its personal revelations ... 'Buddha', we are told, 'for seven days after the illumination, did not speak. He walked up and down here in silence and at every foot-step a lotus blossomed.'³⁰

The following concluding remarks of Nivedita are pregnant with deep significance: 'Still one other point, however, makes Bodh-Gaya of supreme value today to the Hindu people. The modern consciousness has made many things inevitable. It necessitates the recovery of the historic relation of the various parts of Hinduism. But from most Hindu temples, the modern Hindu, - unless indeed he goes in disguise, - is shut out. This is not so at Bodh-Gaya. There the tradition of the Math has been the responsibility of protecting the worship of foreigners. All, therefore, that can be demanded is that one come in reverence, and the modern Hindu is as welcome at the altar itself as the most conservative of the orthodox. Not him, while he remains to worship. This fact makes Bodh-Gaya a great national as well as religious Centre'³¹.

Nivedita preached her concept of nationalism through numberless articles, speeches, and books. As she started her struggle for creating a sense of Indian nationalism, she began by locating the strength and weakness of Indian through a thorough study of the country's history. Europeans had no idea of what came to be known as 'Unity is diversity'. Europeans looked at India as a land of diverse languages, religions, and cultures which maintained an unhappy existence and without any hope of harmonization. This typical European view she rejected, while accepting the outer fact that there were diverse religions and cultures. But she was gifted with the inner sight which enabled her to discover that beneath all these diversities, there constantly flew an inner sense of cohesion among cultures—the life style of the people and their sense of belonging to one geographical entity. She also had the knowledge how, to the outer sight, the Indian societies had many things to be condemned. But the outer sight was quite superfluous and deceptive. It required a depth of sight and a sound intellect that forces of unity were always present, though enfeebled because of historical reasons. She understood that if India was to achieve independence and resurgent flow of life, she will have to be conscious of India's glorious past, of her peerless culture on the one hand, and, on the other, reap the benefits of the new knowledge which flowed into the country from the western world. She knew that India in the ancient times spanning through centuries lived a life of meditation and spiritualism, and made great sacrifice for this. This is the inner strength of the country which must be revived and directed towards the building up the spirit of nationalism.

Nationalism must be accepted with religious sentiment; nationalism must be the religion of the people of India. In all her writings she preached this philosophy, this religion of nationalism which would give India a position in the world beyond the reach of any other country. It is worth mentioning that after Nivedita's death, the West Minister Gazette noted that Miss Noble "addressed large audiences in various cities on Indian ideals, ancient and modern, and there are many who

think that her voice was the first to give definite and challenging form to the religion of nationalism."

2. Conclusion

Margaret Elizabeth Noble's greatest work on the philosophy of nationalism is '*The Web of Indian Life*'. She had started writing the book while in England in 1901 and completed it in 1903. She believed and repeatedly said that the book was written not by herself but by Swami Vivekananda — such was the inspiration she received from her Master. The book was completed after the demise of Swami Vivekananda to whom she dedicated it. The vision about India that was current in the Western countries because of the motivated misrepresentation done by the missionaries in connivance with the imperialists was shattered by Nivedita in this book with such force and arguments that her critics had either to strongly eulogize it or condemn it.

While the lavish praise gave her some comfort she was mentally prepared for condemnation. The condemnation of the book was largely based on the fact that in it the author explored the necessity and possibility of channelizing the ancient bases of Indian society and religion towards the building up of a new and progressive India which was in consonance with her concept of Indian nationalism. Many of the critics, however, could not understand what Nivedita was driving at; and the few who understood it, failed to appreciate it. She had to take up pen to interpret the book in which religion has been shown as the unifying factor. She categorically stated that the theme of the book is the unity between the Hindus and Muslims of India and their same glorious future. This theme and its elaboration through the pages must be considered absolutely relevant to India of our contemporary times.

Nivedita was entirely devoted to concept of Hindu-Muslim unity in India. In two independent chapters of *The Web of Indian Life*, the *The Synthesis of Indian Thought*, and *Islam in India* she dealt with the culture of the Indian Muslims. In one of her later essays, *The Modern Epoch and the National Idea*, she discussed the contribution of the Indian Muslims to the concept of Indian Nationalism. She also firmly believed that national unity depends on "place"; that India is geographically so situated that it may become the ground for Indian nationalism. Lala Lajpat Rai refers to this while discussing another very important book written by Sister Nivedita, *Footfalls of Indian History*:" Sister Nivedita refers to the 'geographical synthesis'. This is a theme of absorbing interest to all Indians interested in the future of their country, because it is absolutely necessary to realize that 'the whole of India is necessary to the explanation of the history of each one of its parts India is at once the occasion and the explanation of the web of Indian thought'."

'*The Web of Indian Life*' was attacked vehemently by the imperialists — religious and political. The first group was represented by Miss Carmichael who in her book *Things As They Are* used 'unmissionary-like language' to debunk the book. For this sort of attack she was not, however, spared by even some Europeans. Political imperialism had as their mouthpieces the paper *The Pioneer* which held that Nivedita's book was nothing but a political pamphlet in disguise, the

object of which was "the demonstration that India is a single nation and not a congeries of divided races and religions and an appeal to that nation to realize its destiny by becoming independent family. Its leading characteristic is cunning and its content mischievous." There is no doubt that from the imperialist's point of view the book was cunning and

mischievous, because it struck point blank the imperialist method of divide and rule. This must be regarded as one of the most fundamental and greatest services rendered by Margaret Elizabeth Noble to India; she unmasked the face of the imperialist powers and paved the way for the growth of Indian nationalism.

Notes & References

1. C. W. S. N., vol. IV, p. 369.
2. C.W.S.N., vol. IV, p. 389.
3. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 390.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 390-91.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 391.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 391
7. C.W.S.N, vol. IV, p. 392.
8. *Ibid.*, vol. IV p. 392.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 393.
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