

Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) Highlights

Margaret Noble: (1867 to 1911)

Margaret Noble was born in Northern Ireland in 1867 and devoted herself to her studies with concentration and perseverance. She graduated from Halifax College in 1884 at the age of seventeen. She developed an interest in music, art and the natural sciences and became a teacher with a spirit of service and love for the poor miners in that community. Both her grandfather and her father were Protestant ministers in the Wesleyan church. Their religious zeal made a deep impression on Margaret and she imbibed their spirit of freedom and love for Ireland.

Before her father died at the age of 34, he had a premonition of his daughter's future calling. He whispered to his wife about Margaret: "When God calls her, let her go. She will spread her wings. She will do great things."

She engaged herself with education studies, further exploring the significance of preschool experiences which gratify and cultivate the normal aptitude of the child for exercise, play, observation, imitation and construction. As she gained self-confidence and experience, she decided to start her own experimental school in London which opened in 1892, just a year before Swami Vivekananda's arrival in America.

Gradually, Margaret grew into a mature educator. She became acquainted with some of the most learned and influential people of the time in London including Lady Ripon and Lady Isabel Margesson. They formed a literary circle known as the Sesame Club at which famous writers like Bernard Shaw and Thomas Huxley were regular speakers. A keen reader and thinker, Margaret soon became an active and enthusiastic member of this club.

She met Swamiji in London in November, 1895. At only thirty-two years of age, Swamiji believed that the time had come when nations should exchange ideas, even as they were already exchanging commodities in the marketplace.

Margaret's attitude towards Swamiji's views was that of a sceptic. He told her later, "Let none regret that they were difficult to convince! I fought my Master for six long years, with the result that I know every inch of the way! Every inch of the way!"

When the Swami left for America that winter, Margaret awaited his return to London in April, 1896. He then focussed his talks on Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and others. One day during the question class, the Swami suddenly rose and thundered: "What the world wants today is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the street yonder and say that they possess nothing but God. Who will go?"

In these words the Master was summing up all the truths he had come to teach and they evoked a deep response in Margaret's heart. She was inflamed with a desire to follow his lead. But just then did not know how and what she should do.

Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) Highlights

She wrote to the Swami to find out from him his plan of work. His reply came on June 7th, 1896: "Dear Miss Noble, My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life. ... Misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else. Who will give the world light? What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.... You have the makings in you of a world-mover, and others will also come. Bold words and bolder deeds are what we want. Awake, awake, great one! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers the call. ... May all blessings attend you for ever! " Yours affectionately, Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda felt that there was no chance for the welfare of India unless the condition of women was improved, just as he used to say, "It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing." So he paid great attention to the uplift of women in India in his plan for the regeneration of the nation. At that time he could not find any woman in India who could shoulder this responsibility.

One day Swamiji turned to Miss Margaret Noble and said, I have plans for the women of my own country in which you, I think, could be of great help to me. It was then she knew that she had heard a call that would change her life.

In Swamiji's letter of July 29, 1897, he wrote to her: "Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman, a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women especially. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted."

A daughter of Ireland, Margaret reached Madras, India on January 24th, 1898 and then landed in Kolkatta a few days later. Swamiji arranged for her to take lessons in Bengali. After the plague was brought under control, Swami Vivekananda left with a large group for Almora on May 11th, 1898 as Mrs. Sara Bull's guests for five months. The party included Josephine MacLeod and Sister Nivedita, as well as Swamis Turiyananda, Niranjana, Sadananda, and Swarupananda. Mrs. Patterson, the wife of the American Consul General also joined them.

In her works, *The Master as I Saw Him*, and *Notes on Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda*, Nivedita kept a faithful record of this tour. In her foreward to the Notes, she wrote: "Beautiful have been the days of this year. In them the Ideal has become the Real. First in our river-side cottage at Belur; then in the Himalayas, at Nainital and Almora; afterwards wandering here and there through Kashmir;-- everywhere have come hours never to be forgotten, words that will echo through our lives for ever."

Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) Highlights

Throughout their journey, Vivekananda taught them about India and his plans for the Math for men and the even greater responsibility he planned for the work for women, which Nivedita was to begin in Kolkatta on their return.

On July 4th, 1898, just four years prior to his mahasamadhi, Swamiji surprised the Western disciples by arranging for the celebration of American independence day. An American flag was made with the help of a Brahmin tailor, and the Swami composed his poem "To the Fourth of July", which concludes in the following words:

"Move on, Oh Lord, in thy resistless path,
Until thy high noon overspreads the world,
Until every land reflects thy light,
Until men and women, with uplifted head,
Behold their shackles broken and know in springing joy, their life renewed!"

It was also on this pilgrimage that Swami Vivekananda wrote his famous poem, "Kali the Mother" after an intense meditation. In these poetic verses, he declared in part:

"Come, Mother, come!
For terror is Thy name, Death is in Thy breath,
And every shaking step destroys a world forever.
Thou Time, the All-destroyer, Come, Oh Mother, come!"

Once they had returned back to Kolkatta in October, Nivedita focussed on the beginning of her work in India. On November 13th, 1898, the day of the worship of Mother Kali, the Nivedita Girls' School was opened in Kolkatta. At the end of the inaugural ceremony, the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi prayed that "the blessings of the Great Mother of the Universe be upon this school and the girls it shall train be ideal girls." Nivedita, who witnessed the ceremony along with the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, said: "I cannot imagine a grander omen than her blessing spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future."

Once the Sister Nivedita Girls' School was established in 1898, the thunderbolt became its symbol and some of its students became the sannyasinis of the future Sri Sarada Math. Sister Nivedita breathed her last on India's sacred soil in Darjeeling on October 13, 1911.