

## **Swami Chetanananda**

*(Revered Swami Chetanananda is the Minister and Spiritual Head of Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri. As a part of the celebration of the completion of 40 years of Vivekananda Vidyapith, Swami Chetanananda was invited to visit the Vidyapith and give a talk on "Sister Nivedita: Celebrating Her 150th Birth Anniversary" on Saturday, April 8, 2017. Swami Chetanananda joined in the Vidyapith's Rama Navami celebration and before his main talk he briefly shared his thoughts on Sri Rama and the Ramayana. These thoughts have been prepared for publication from a video recording.)*

### **Thoughts on Sri Rama and the Ramayana**

I am happy that I could come to attend the 40th anniversary of Vivekananda Vidyapith, which is truly a historical landmark of this organization; and I am very fond of this place. To be frank with you, I have a little soft corner for Vidyapith, because you are doing what Swami Vivekananda wanted to do - practicing and encouraging all for man-making religion. One day, I asked one swami, "Swami, could you tell me what man-making religion is?" He said, 'We cannot tell people what to do and what not to do. We can simply create an atmosphere, and whoever will come in that atmosphere will imbibe the feeling, the devotion, and the love. It is contagious. When we go to Brindavan or Ayodhya and we see these holy places and see the devotion of the people, then we wish to have that kind of devotion. It is contagious. This organization is giving some impression to the young generation which will stay with them forever. They will remember that, "I was in Vidyapith, and I learned man-making religion."

Tonight, I have two subjects: I will talk about Sri Ramachandra, because it is a Rama Navami Celebration, and then I will talk about Sister Nivedita, because it is her 150th birth anniversary. Dr Jani asked me to touch on both these subjects, so I shall try.

The Ramayana is made of two parts, "Rama" and "Ayana (meaning path)," meaning "the path of Rama." Rama represents the truth. Mundakopinishad says, "Truth alone triumphs, not untruth." Rama never deviated from the truth. Truth is also of two kinds: relative truth and the

absolute truth. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says, “satyasya satyam”: Brahman is the truth of the truths. What does it mean? My hunger is true, and my headache is true. But that is not the absolute truth. What is the truth? Vedanta defines truth as the one that exists in the past, the present, and the future. Nothing else in this world is the truth. The world is Maya, continuously changing. So we have changing reality and unchanging reality.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two great epics in the world. They influence millions of people in India. Some people do not have any formal education, but they know the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Mahabharata is the largest epic in the world. It has 100,000 verses. Ramayana has 24,000 verses. From these epics we learn religion, morality, ethics, politics, and other things. We are thankful to Ramananda Sagar and B.R. Chopra who made Ramayana and Mahabharata so popular all over the world. They did a marvelous job.

You know that Sage Valmiki was a highway robber with the name Ratnakar. When Sage Narada met Ratnakar, he asked Ratnakar, “Why do you rob people?” Ratnakar replied that it is his profession, and that is how he maintains his family. Narada told Ratnakar that he is committing sin by killing people and asked him to go and enquire with his wife and children if they are willing to take share in his sin. Ratnakar went home and asked his wife if she will share his sin. She said she will not share his sins, because it was his responsibility to take care of his wife. Ratnakar gave up robbery and did tapasya, became illumined, and became the sage, Valmiki.

Now, before the Ramayana was written, Sage Narada went to see Sage Valmiki. At that time Sage Valmiki asked Narada, “O Sage, is there any person in the world at present who is endowed with all divine qualities and pure character, who is all-powerful, virtuous, humble, truthful, steady, and a benefactor to all beings? Is there any person who is learned, skillful, handsome, calm, luminous, and free from anger and jealousy? Is there any person in this world who, when he becomes angry, even the gods are scared? Do you know any such person in the world?” Narada said, “Yes, there is one person. He is Ramachandra, the son of Dasaratha.” Narada asked Valmiki to write the Ramayana. Valmiki said that he does not know anything about Ramachandra, but Narada left. Valmiki went with his disciples to take a bath in the Tamasa River. In the distance, he saw a hunter shoot an arrow which shot down and killed the

male bird of a couple. Seeing the cry of the female bird, the words automatically came from Valmiki's lips: "You will be fallen all through your life, you cruel hunter. These two birds were mating, and you killed the husband." Valmiki was very angry; but then, he wondered about the poem that had come out of his mouth spontaneously. That was the first shloka which originated in Sanskrit. This shloka originated from 'Shoka,' meaning 'grief.' Then, Prajapati Brahma appeared before him and asked him to write the whole Ramayana in verses. When Valmiki pleaded that he does not know anything, Brahma told him that he was a man of truth. His every thought is truth, and whatever comes from his lips will be truth. He encouraged Valmiki to write the Ramayana, the story of Rama, which eternally will remain in this world.

There are seven sections of the Ramayana. When Rama was born, Dasaratha asked Vashishta to give a name to his son. Vashishta said that the name of Dasaratha's son will be Rama. Dasaratha said to Vashishta, "There are so many names. Why did you pick this two syllable name?" Vashishta explained, "The Vishnu Mantra is Om Namō Narayanaya. If you remove 'ra' from the famous Vishnu Mantra, 'Om Namō Narayanaya,' it becomes 'Om Namō Nayanaya,' which means 'salutations to the sensual objects of the world. The meaning becomes reversed by removing 'ra' from the Vishnu Mantra. Similarly, if you take away 'ma' from the Shiva Mantra, 'Om Namah Shivaya,' it becomes, 'Om Na Shivaya' making the meaning just the opposite and inauspicious. So I took the essence of the Vishnu Mantra and the essence of the Shiva Mantra and gave that name to your son." Dasaratha was very happy.

Another interesting thing about these two epics is that the two main female characters of these epics, Sita and Draupadi, did not come from mothers' wombs. Sita was born from the earth and Draupadi came from a Vedic sacrificial fire. Another lesson we must learn from the two epics is: What happens if women are ill-treated. Manu Samhita says, "Where women are adored, even gods dance in delight." See what happens when women are ill-treated? Ravana kidnapped Sita, and his whole dynasty was destroyed. Dussasana humiliated and ill-treated Draupadi, and the whole Kuru dynasty was destroyed. These teachings have penetrated in the minds of millions of Hindus in India. If you ill-treat women, your peace is gone at home. We learn this from our epics.

Who is the most ideal character of Ramayana? It is Bharata—an ideal and flawless character. Another ideal character is Hanuman. About Sitaji, Swami Vivekananda made a remark: “It is blasphemy to say that Sita was pure. Sita was purity herself.” In India, people have praised Sita as a great goddess and an embodiment of purity. Purity is the backbone of the nation. When purity goes away, the nation goes down.

When you think of Sita’s flaws, there is one: When Rama went chasing after the golden deer, Maaricha, and when she heard distant cries, "O Lakshmana, please come and help!" Sita asked Lakshmana to go to help Rama. Lakshmana was reluctant to go. Sita used very harsh words towards Lakshmana. Lakshmana was then compelled to go. He prayed to God to keep Sita safe while he was gone. As the story goes, at that time, Sita was kidnapped by Ravana.

The most neglected person in Ramayana is Urmila, Lakshman’s wife. She sacrificed all her pleasures of family life, so that her husband can help Rama. She is called “upekshita” means neglected. We are human beings. We cannot judge an incarnation’s character. There is a meaning behind their every action and every aspect of their life. We see from the human point of view a flaw in Rama’s character that he shot Vali hiding behind the tree. Rama could not answer few of Vali’s questions. Vali asked him, “Why did you shoot me? I did not do any harm to you. I did not attack your kingdom either. You just came and shot me.” Rama said, “You are my enemy.” Vali said, “How come I am your enemy?” Rama said, “I made Sugriva as my friend in front of a fire. So, my friend’s enemy is my enemy.” Vali said, “Kishkindha is a barren place. What do you want from here? You do not eat monkeys. Then, why did you shoot me? If you wanted to fight with me then you should have challenged me. Why did you hide yourself behind the tree and shoot me? You are a coward. You are dressed up like a hermit, but you have a bow and arrows. You look like a hypocrite.” Suppose if I carry a gun with my ochre cloth, does it look good? Vali bombarded Rama with many questions.

See, many of Shri Krishna’s activities, we do not approve. Incarnations do whatever is necessary to establish “Dharma,” righteousness. Shri Krishna broke his own vow when he lifted up his “Sudarshan Chakra” to kill Bhishma. When incarnations become human beings, then they have to adjust. I am just telling you few interesting things from the Ramayana. Rama’s

cruel act was to test Sita to go through the fire. At that time it was clear that Rama's departure is near.

Incarnation's life is a divine drama. If Jesus had died with a heart-attack, Christians would not have worshiped him. Jesus had to go through crucifixion for the good of many. When you sang Lord Rama's name before, there was a great uplifting effect. I go to places of pilgrimages. In Dwaraka, a group of devotees came and sang, "Jay Rama Sri Rama Jay Jay Rama." It was very uplifting. All over India there is a great influence of Rama and Krishna. It is our great heritage. We can learn so many things from Ramayana and Mahabharata.

When Sita was kidnapped, Rama was profusely crying. Then, he saw a crane standing calmly and with serenity. Rama told Lakshmana, "See how this crane is calm and serene and I am crying with pain." At that time, a fish jumped from the lake and said, "O Rama! This crane had killed my wife and my children and is meditating to kill me. It looks serene, but not for good intention." There is a saying, "Sahavase viniyam sahavasinam": a person's character can be known when we live with the person. We cannot judge anyone from his/her outer look. Little squirrel's example is very impressive. How it was helping to build the bridge with a little pebble in its mouth. I wrote two articles on Rama and Ramayana and was thinking about writing few more, but I was posted at the LA Center and I could not write them. Thus, I shared my thoughts about Rama and Ramayana.

### **Thoughts on Sister Nivedita:**

Now, I will talk about Sister Nivedita. There is a doha of Tulsidas which conveys the meaning, "O Tulasi, when you were born, you cried and people around you were smiling with joy. You do such things in your life that when you die, you smile and let people around you cry for you". That is the way I think about Sister Nivedita. I love three things about Sister Nivedita: speed, action and energy. She was the embodiment of power and a great fighter. She was ready to struggle to achieve any desired goal. There is a saying that 'fortune favors a person who has tremendous energy to work'. Enthusiasm is extremely important for success and fulfillment in life. You find both of those in Nivedita.

Sister Nivedita lived for 44 years and her guru, Swami Vivekananda, lived for 39 years. But see their contributions and legacy. They both had speed. We have various speeds like bullock-cart speed, bus-speed, train-speed, airplane-speed, supersonic-speed, rocket-speed etc. Swamiji and Sister Nivedita had tremendous speed in their life. They packed all their contribution into their short lives. That overwhelms us. Human life is very precious. We have to accomplish the most when we are physically and mentally fit. Nivedita's name is recorded in the history. People who sacrificed the most and contributed the most to humanity will be recorded in history. Nivedita's life is a wonder to me. She was an embodiment of energy, virility, strength, power and fortitude. She was strong physically, mentally, intellectually and spiritually. Swami Vivekananda said that if you want to be great, you must be strong in three areas in head, heart and hand which also means in Jnana yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma yoga. Nivedita had all three.

Her pre-monastic name was Margaret Elizabeth Noble. She was born on the 28th of October 1867 in a small town called Dungannon in Northern Ireland. Her grandfather, John Noble, was a minister. They had migrated from Scotland to Ireland. Her father, Samuel, was also a minister. He died at the age of 34. Margaret had a sister named May and a brother, Richmond. When their father died, they moved to their maternal grandparents' house and went to school there in Halifax. Margaret graduated from school at the age of 17 and took a job in a boarding school as a teacher to help her mother financially. You know, sometimes poverty has helped people to grow. One has to struggle to survive and stand on one's own feet. Later she started her own school in Wimbledon, a suburb of London. She became a supporter of the new education movement in England. She introduced new teaching methods. From 1884 to 1894, she worked as a school teacher. She was a member of the Sesame club. She became well-known among the rich and elite class including Shaw, Yeats and Huxley. She was a very well-read person with knowledge of the Bible, Shakespeare, and English literature. She was an original free thinker. Christianity could not satisfy her curiosity and hunger to seek truth. She started to study Buddhism. She got satisfaction to some extent.

It was October 1895 when Swami Vivekananda came to England. Isabel Margesson invited Swamiji to her home for a meeting. Nivedita met him there for the first time. She heard

something new there. Swamiji said, "Men travel from lower truth to the higher truth, not from error to truth. It is better to be born in a Church than to die in it. Our entire struggle is for freedom. We seek neither happiness nor misery, but freedom alone." She was very much impressed. She wrote her impression, "I have recognized the heroic fiber of the man and desired to make myself the servant of his own people. But it was his character to which I had thus done obeisance."

At that time Swamiji was lecturing on Jnana yoga. (People asked me 'what was Swamiji's best contribution to the West?' I said, 'Four Yogas; Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga.' If you read Swamiji's books on these four yogas, then you will know what religion means. Swamiji said that he was leaving a manual for the western world.) Nivedita attended all the lectures of Jnana Yoga. She was a very sincere student. Margaret wrote, "Swamiji spoke with a sense of conviction born out of realization, even an unbeliever could not deny it." Swamiji said, "What the entire world wants today is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the street and say they possess nothing but God. Who will go? Why should one fear?" Margaret boldly accepted the challenge. Then she corresponded with Swamiji.

It was on 7th June 1896 that Swamiji wrote to her, "My ideal can, indeed, be put into a few words, that is, preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life." That is a great quote of Swamiji. He said, "Who will give the world light? Sacrifice in the past has been the law. It will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and the best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many and for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundreds are necessary, with eternal love and pity. Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. 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 a thunderbolt. Awake, awake, great one! World is burning with misery. Can you sleep? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the God within answers to the call." She was inspired and wanted to sacrifice her life.

Swamiji told her, "I have a plan for the women of my country in which you, I think, could be a great help to me." Nivedita wrote to her friend, "Suppose he had not come to London at that time, my life would have been like a headless torso for I always knew that I was waiting for

something. I always said that call would come and it did.” Margaret accepted Swamiji as her Guru. Swamiji traveled for three months in London and Europe and then in December returned to India through Sri Lanka. Then Nivedita wanted to come to India to serve. She wanted to give education to Indian women. Swamiji said, “Bird cannot fly with one wing. Both women and men have to be educated.” At that time, the Brahmo Samaj had started educating women as well. Most women in India at that time were behind the ‘pardah’. They had to just grow up, get married and raise children. Their life was summed up in that. Society did not see women as needing education. Swamiji wanted to change that. Swamiji wanted women to receive education and rise as the men were doing.

When Nivedita expressed interest, Swamiji 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, especially women. Your education, sincerity, purity, women’s love, determination, and above all the Celtic blood make you just the woman needed. Yet, the difficulties are many. You must think well before you plunge in. On my part I promise I will stand by you unto death whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it”. We have to understand that poverty in India was rampant at that time.

Margaret left London and came to Calcutta on 28th January 1898. Swamiji received her at the Calcutta port and took her to a place where the western people lived. Later she moved to Belur Math. The property was bought that had a small house. Mrs. Sara Bull and Miss MacLeod prepared the house and all three moved in the house. Every morning Swamiji used to go to their house and talk to them about India and how they can regenerate this nation. When Josephine MacLeod asked Swamiji how she could help, he said, “Love India”. Swamiji was pounding into their brains the Indian religion, culture, history, philosophy, scriptures, spiritual traditions and other things.

On 25th March 1898 Swamiji initiated Margaret into “Brahmacharya vow” and gave her the name Nivedita and blessed her saying ‘Go Thou and follow Buddha who gave his life for others 500 times before he attained the vision of Buddha.’ Swamiji had a passion for Buddha because Buddha never took a breath for himself. He was 100% unselfish. In Karma Yoga,

Swamiji said, "Unselfishness is God." That is how Swamiji defined God. He further said, "Selfishness is sin. Unselfishness is God." Only those people who sacrifice can help humanity. However, Swamiji had a major problem: how to make Nivedita accepted by the Hindu Society. It was a major problem because people thought of her as a white Christian who came to convert them to Christianity. Parents worried about enrolling their daughters to Nivedita's school thinking that if the daughter was converted to Christianity, then no Hindu boy would marry her. Swamiji knew this social prejudice and worried.

He arranged a lecture of Sister Nivedita at the Star Theater. The topic of the lecture was "The influence of Indian Philosophy in England." Next, he asked Nivedita to give a lecture on Kali at Kali-Ghat, the strong hold of Hindus. People were overwhelmed. Next, Swamiji introduced Nivedita, Sara Bull, and Josephine MacLeod to Holy Mother. Holy Mother ate with them. The thought was that if Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna, the top-ranking Brahmins in society, accepted Nivedita, then everybody will accept her. Holy Mother called her "My Daughter." Holy Mother asked her, "What is your name?" She said, "My name is Miss Elizabeth Margaret Noble." Holy Mother said, "I cannot pronounce that long name. I will call you 'khuki' (My little girl)." Sister Nivedita joyfully accepted that.

In 1889 there was an epidemic of plague in Calcutta. Nivedita took the broom stick and started to clean the streets of Calcutta slums. People saw that Nivedita was really sincere and they started to treat her as one of their own. That is how Nivedita entered into Hindu Society. Nivedita wanted to open her school in Bagbazar. In Kolkata, Hindus lived in the Northern and Southern parts and the Central part was mainly where the British people (Christians) lived.

Till 1912 Kolkata was the capital of India. Then, in 1912 the capital was moved to Delhi. Swamiji took the western women disciples on a pilgrimage to Almora, Kashmir, and Amarnath. During this period Swamiji was training Nivedita on how to work. In June of that year, Holy Mother inaugurated Nivedita's school at 17 Bose Para Lane. Recently, the Government of India recognized this building as a Heritage Building and gave it to the Sarada Math. The management is currently remodeling that house. In 1899, Swamiji came back to America. Nivedita and Turiyananda came with him. Swamiji wanted to collect money from his western

disciples for Nivedita's school. Nivedita got some money. Specially, Miss Ole Bull supported her. Nivedita came back to India in March 1902.

Swamiji passed away on 4th July 1902. Nivedita said, "Swamiji is not dead. I cannot even grieve." Nivedita had no time to grieve the loss of her guru because she had to carry on the mission given to her by her guru. There is a great saying by Mitchell Link, "if you have been greatly influenced by anyone, prove it in your life and not by your tears." Nivedita did not spend any time crying or lamenting for her guru. The spirit of her guru began to flow into her veins and she decided to carry out his vision.

Swamiji forecast about Nivedita, "India shall ring with her". She wrote, "my task is to awake the nation." She worshipped Mother India through her writings and her speeches. She began a lecture tour of Bombay, Baroda, Nagpur, Madras, Patna, Lucknow and various other cities in India. She came in contact with Aurobindo, Gokhale, Tilak, Lala Lajpat Roy, Gandhi, Bipin Pal, Surendranath Banerjee inspiring the young freedom fighters. Because of her involvement in politics, she officially disconnected herself from the Ramakrishna mission. Swamiji had made the rule that the Ramakrishna mission will have no connection with politics. But, she always signed her name as 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda'.

Nivedita and Aurobindo planned the future course of freedom movement in India. Her goal was, "I must make India free." She took an active role in the Swadeshi movement. This was the next chapter of Nivedita's life. A British newspaper called her a traitor when she paid Rs 10,000 towards the bail when Swamiji's brother was arrested. Nivedita had to leave India for 2 years from 1907 to 1909. She moved to the west again, to London and America, helping the revolutionaries. Being endowed with God given talent, unlimited energy, and the blessings of her guru, Nivedita became a source of inspiration to India in various important fields. In fact, she acted as the architect of the Indian renaissance. Bharat or India became her living mother. She asked her students to repeat, "Bhaarata, Bhaarata, Bhaarata, (our) Mother, Mother, Mother. Vande mataram (I salute to Mother)" What Bhaarata means? "Bhaa" means 'light' and "Rata" means 'immersed'. It means 'the country which is immersed in the light of God-consciousness'. She helped the scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose in his research by collecting money and editing his books. She inspired historians like Jadhunath Sarkar and Radha Kumud

Mukherjee and helped the economist Benoy Sarkar to write the social history of India. She edited the history of Bengali literature written by Dinesh Sen. She regularly contributed articles in art and reviews to Modern Review magazine which was edited by Ramananda Chatterjee.

She appreciated the masterpieces of Indian paintings produced by Abanindranath Tagore such as “Bhaarat Maata”. She sent other modern artists like Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar to Ajanta and Ellora to copy the frescos in those caves to recover the spiritual heritage of India. She herself travelled to Ajanta, Ellora, Agra, Delhi, Varanasi, Gaya, Nalanda, Chittore, Jaipur, Udaypur, Udaygiri and other places in order to study the beauty of Indian art and write articles on it. Nivedita was a wonderful art-critic. Nandalal Bose made a painting of Buddha. She criticized why he put so many clothes on Buddha. She said that the Indian climate is warm, so he should not put lots of clothes on Buddha. She warned them against copying art from Chinese and Japanese traditions. She said that Buddha did not have flat nose. Indian people have a pointed nose. She said Indian people are not less beautiful than the Greeks and the Romans. To her, everything Indian was great. She would fight to prove that ‘India is great.’

Here are some other glimpses on Nivedita. In India, women of the house tie house keys to the corner of their saree and throw that corner of the saree on their shoulders. This means that ‘I am the lady of the house and all power is with me.’ Now, Indian and American women keep their keys in their bags. Nivedita tied her keys to the corner of her dress and it was falling off of her shoulders making noise. Holy Mother saw this and laughed. Holy Mother said, “This girl is white outside and also white (simple, pure and guileless)”. Holy Mother said, “It was the Rath Yatra Day in 1884. I carried a food tray to Sri Ramakrishna’s room and I found the master was in Samadhi. He came out of Samadhi and told me that he went to a country where people’s body complexion was white and they are also the devotees of the mother.” In this way, Sri Ramakrishna came to the west through Samadhi. Nivedita went to Sashibhushan Ghosh, a disciple of Ramakrishna, to find out the date from the almanac. She found the date of Rath Yatra in 1884. Then she came to her home and checked her diary and found that she had the vision of Sri Ramakrishna on that day. She was very excited. She came to Holy Mother and told her that when she saw Ramakrishna’s picture in London with Swamiji, she had learned that she

had his vision already. Holy Mother said to her that she was Naren's daughter and that is why the master appeared before her.

Nivedita's life was not easy. When she went to gather girls for her school from the Baagbazaar area, some people shut the door on her face. Some people did not allow her to enter their houses. Others cleansed their homes with Ganges water after she left. She gave her life to educate Indian girls, but think how much she was humiliated. She smiled and took all that with humility. Now, her school is one of the best schools in India and it is very difficult to enroll in her school. See, what an irony. Some of her students reminisced about her: 'Nivedita would go to Dakshineswar to visit Kali temple and she was not allowed to go inside. She would stand in the courtyard and visualize mother Kali. How many Indian women were as devoted as Nivedita?'

While running her school, she would write a lot of books because she needed money to run her school. She was a fantastic writer. She wrote many famous books. Publishers were happy to publish her books. She would say in broken Bengali that "Maathaay Baro Koshto," meaning, "I have a severe headache." Many times, there was no electricity and it was very hot. In that environment, she wrote many books. Nivedita taught Indian History twice a week. One day she was teaching about Padmini of Rajputana. She taught them about the battles of Alluddin Khilji and his desire to capture the beautiful Queen Padmini. She taught the students how Rajputana women jumped into the fire to kill themselves rather than losing their chastity to the invaders. Nivedita told her students that she had been to Chittore and to the top of the mountains to get a vision of Rani Padmini. While teaching her students with so much passion about Rani Padmini, she went into silence. This passion created a deep impact in the minds of the students and they developed a great respect for Rani Padmini.

Nivedita's faith in Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Holy Mother was phenomenal. She would talk about her guru to her students. "My guru is Vireshwar. He was a God for heroes. The heroes of the world must follow in his footsteps. You all must be heroes and you should overcome this little happiness and misery of the world." In the classrooms, there was a world map on one wall and a picture of Ramakrishna on the other wall. Nivedita took the world map

and placed it below Ramakrishna's picture and said that Ramakrishna was the teacher of the world, so the world must be below his feet.

Another student wrote, "I have seen the sister waving the incense in front of Swamiji's picture with great devotion and only then start her class in the school." These little details are very important. Nirjharini Sarkar, another student of Nivedita reminisced, "The class took place on the floor. We sat on a mat and there was a low desk in front. Sister told the students to sit erect. ....Once sister took us to the museum and she had dry fruit and snacks in the horse carriage. She asked one of the girls, Prafulla, to distribute among kids. Prafulla distributed the snacks and gave some to Nivedita also. Nivedita asked if Prafulla kept any for herself, the answer was no. That is the kind of character Nivedita nurtured in those girls, selflessness." Nivedita taught these girls to have faith and love for others and to sacrifice to serve people. Swami Vivekananda made a comment on the western education. He said, "Too much brain and very little heart." To me feeling is very important. Nivedita always was mindful of taking care of not just the guests, but also the horse-carriage drivers and the horses also before attending to the guests themselves. She had such feeling for others. Another day she was going in her horse carriage, she saw a dog was hurt on the road. She stopped the carriage, picked up the dog, bought some milk from a shop and tried to feed the dog. She had feeling for all living beings. That was part of what made her great. Nivedita was glorified by the writers, poets, artists, scientists, national leaders, journalists and many Indian and foreign geniuses.

I shall read quotes of a few famous people about Sister Nivedita:

**Rabindranath Tagore:** "She was a versatile all-round genius. Another thing in her nature was militancy. She had power and she exerted that power with full force on the lives of others. I have not noticed in any other human being, the wonderful power that was hers of absolute dedication of herself. She was in fact a 'loka-mata', 'mother of the people'.

**Aurobindo:** "She was a veritable life. (She was) A Live wire."

**Subhash Chandra Bose to Dilip Roy:** "Those who try to denigrate our country because of thousand disgraceful oppressions, I ask them to read 'The Master as I saw him' about the life of

Swamiji by sister Nivedita. I do not know of any other disciple as great as Nivedita or any other guru as great as Swamiji.”

**Abanindranath Tagore:** “I saw her at a party of the Arts Society at Justice Holmwood’s house. I was given the charge of sending out invitations. I had sent an invitation to Nivedita also. The party had begun, the whole place was crowded with so many rich people, many well-dressed beautiful ladies. Nivedita came late in the evening in same white dress with rosary of Rudraksha beads around her neck and her brown hair tied in high knot. When she came there and stood as if the moon has arisen among the stars. In a moment all the beautiful women paled into insignificance. The men started whispering. John Woodroffe asked who she was and I introduced him to Nivedita. I don’t know who to call beautiful, but for me she was the ‘Maha Shweta’. In Kadambari, ‘Maha Shweta’ has been described as paragon beauty.

We see the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids of Giza, and the Great Wall of China and are filled with wonder. Sister Nivedita’s life was also equally wonderful. We wonder how she could do all these things in a short life! Out of her 44 years of life, Nivedita lived in India for approximately nine years. Nivedita is no more with us but her powerful writings have made her immortal. Apart from her voluminous writings and letters, ‘The Master as I saw Him’ and ‘The Wave of Indian Life’ and ‘Cradle Tales of Hinduism’ are masterpieces. In recent times **Sankari Prasad wrote**, “Loka Mata Nivedita” in five volumes which revealed various facets of Nivedita. Nivedita fell on India as a luminous comet from a different planet and awakened Indian people from their moribund condition through her divine power and unselfish love. She worked in the fields of religion, politics, nationalism, art, literature, science, education, journalism and more. She was a genius with encyclopedic knowledge. She became a moving figure in the renaissance of India.

I had the opportunity to visit Darjeeling and stayed in a VIP room right next to the room where Nivedita lived and died on 13 October 1911. From the room you can see Kanchenjunga. Next day I went to see where her body was cremated. Swami Abhedananda made a monument

there and afterward they put a statue there. You can see the pictures of that place on our Vedanta Society website.

Sister Nivedita, during her last moments she prayed, '*asato ma sadgamaya ; tamaso ma jyotirgamaya; mrityorma amritam gamaya*' meaning, "lead us from the unreal to the real; lead us from darkness to light; lead us from death to immortality". Finally her face became luminous and she uttered, "The boat is sinking, but I shall see the sunrise." Thus Nivedita merged into light divine. She was 44 years old. Nivedita's ashes were brought to Belur Math and installed near her guru Vivekananda's shrine. In Belur Math every morning a monk offers flowers to her relics. With lightning speed, the news of her death spread all over India. Mother India lost a wonderful, glorious and dedicated daughter. Nivedita's spirit began to travel in the veins of millions of Indians. When Holy Mother heard the news she cried and said, "All people cry for a great soul. Nivedita once said to me, 'Mother! We were Hindus in our previous birth. We are born in the west so that the Master's message may spread there.'" Nivedita left a mark on the earth and justified her name, Nivedita – the dedicated one.

Thank you.