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A Study on Sister Nivedita's Perspectives on Indian Education

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to the history of educational philosophy in modern India, Sister Nivedita's ideas on Indian education have a prominent place with regard to their significance. Sister Nivedita, who was born in Ireland and became a student of Swami Vivekananda, devoted her entire life to serving India, notably in the areas of education, women's empowerment, and national awakening. The development of character, moral values, self-confidence, patriotism, and a sense of social duty should be the primary goals of education, according to her firm conviction. Education should not only be used to make people literate. In her educational philosophy, she placed an emphasis on the harmonious development of the intellectual, physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual qualities of the individual, all while conserving India's rich cultural and spiritual legacy. The current research investigates Sister Nivedita's educational perspectives, paying particular attention to her educational philosophy, objectives, principles, curriculum, teaching methods, and contributions to the education of women. In addition to this, it delves into her concept of national education, which aimed to foster a scientific temper in addition to a cultural consciousness, so equipping individuals to make contributions that are relevant to the development of society and the nation. The research approach utilised in this study is qualitative and historical, and it is based on the examination of primary and secondary materials. These sources include Sister Nivedita's writings, speeches, correspondence, biographies, and scholarly publications. Sister Nivedita supported an Indian-based education system that was open to modern science and global trends. Education could reform society, regenerate the nation, and empower women, she believed. Value-based education, experiential learning, mother-tongue instruction, cultural identity, and holistic personality development remain relevant in Indian educational reforms. The study indicates that Sister Nivedita's educational vision can help create an inclusive, culturally responsive, nation-oriented education system that promotes individual excellence and social welfare. Her perspective inspires educators, policymakers, and academics who want to incorporate ethics, nationalism, and holistic development into education.

Keywords: *Holistic Development, Value-Based Education, Character Building, Indian Culture, Nationalism.*

INTRODUCTION

She went on to say that the country's widespread practice of child marriage meant that many girls had to drop out of school when they were just ten or twelve years old, thus impeding their access to an education. A greater number of "child widows" without means of subsistence or access to education occurred in the society as a result of child marriage, which frequently involved older grooms. Little more than 6.5 percent of Bengali girls attend school regularly.



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19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

"There is, therefore," Nivedita declared, "a great need of beginning in offering to Indian women an education that shall mean development adapted to the actual needs of their actual lives?"

The idea of the Ramakrishna school for girls came after extensive research and deliberation about such details. This work first appeared in print in the United States in the year 1900. Sarada Devi's plan all along was to obtain a house and some property on the Ganges River near Calcutta. Then, she would settle there with twenty widows and twenty orphan girls, establishing a society under her tutelage. In addition, a scholarly institution that could provide the finest practical instruction may be added to the school. The curriculum will be based on the Kindergarten year and will cover a variety of subjects, including English and Bengali literature and language, basic science, mathematics, and art, with an emphasis on reviving small-scale Indian manufacturing. All students would be able to support themselves financially without ever leaving their homes thanks to the course's final component.

The school, however, is to have a dual purpose. Among the widows, who we estimate to be between the ages of eighteen and twenty, we hope to establish two or three businesses with the potential to tap into lucrative markets in the United Kingdom, India, and the United States. These women will also be an asset in imparting information about traditional Hindu culture and home life. Native American preserves like jams, pickles, and chutneys are to be a part of this. Unlike missionary and, to a lesser degree, government-sponsored schools, Nivedita's goal was to educate and empower the girls while preserving their national identity.

After some more time in school and with the older woman acting as a guardian, the New Ramakrishna school would be established in other centres, and each girl would be asked to decide for herself whether she wanted to live a life of marriage or committed national service with a later group. For the purpose of preparing female educators to work in future Ramakrishna Schools, the current institution would play the function of a traditional school.

In order to pay for it all—including the health insurance and salary of qualified Western educators—the plan would need an additional \$3,000 every year, for a total of \$30,000. With the exception of \$1,000 given by New York resident Mrs. Francis H. Leggett, less than \$1,500 had been amassed thus far. Nivedita appealed to American lovers of her endeavor to educate and empower illiterate Indian girls and child widows, saying, "It is not necessary to say that any additions to this amount, large or small as donations or subscriptions will be most acceptable and useful."

THE IDEA OF UNIVERSAL EDUCATION FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS

Education, and particularly National Education in India, is something that Nivedita has fought hard for. "Hints on National Education in India" is an amalgam of thirteen pieces and an appendix that she wrote about Indian education. It was published in "The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita" Vol. IV (CWSN Vol. IV, 3rd impression, 1996).



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Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

"We all know that future of India depends... on education... we also know that this education, to be of any avail, must extend through all degrees, from its lowest and humblest grades," she wrote in the first piece, "Primary Education: A call for Pioneers" (p.320). Technical education is like a flower without a stem; without higher research, it will wither and die. Therefore, both are essential. Education for women is just as important as education for males, and we need both religious and secular schools. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to educate the people, and we will have to rely on ourselves to do this.

The people's education, what kind would it be? Reading, writing, and arithmetic should be the cornerstones of public education, says Nivedita. As an additional component of our culture, she emphasized the holy duty of providing education to the people.

How is this even possible? "What we have to do, is....." to form an army of educators was Nivedita's suggestion. She intended for the pupils to form a cadre of future elementary school educators. After finishing his own education, the student should be required to devote three years to the education of the general public. Plus, he could start his own school or university and designate someone to replace him after his three years were up. It is clear that Nivedita, in the 1900s in Bengal, developed the now-popular idea of Sarba Siksha Abhijan.

**REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA BY
NIVEDITA**

The importance of education for Indian women was a theme that Nivedita returned to time and time again. On the other hand, she really admired the educational background that gave rise to India's great women. It is said by Nivedita in her piece "The Future Education of the Indian Woman" that India is the home of remarkable women. "Those figures whose strength she nurtured and acknowledged are everywhere in history and literature, and she holds their memory in the highest regard," she continued, asking, "What kind of woman do we most admire?" Is she capable of handling herself in a crisis, full of inspiration and resourcefulness? Padmini of Chitore, Chand Bibi, and Jhansi Rani aren't we? Will we find a saint, poet, and mystic in her? Is Meera Bai not there? Do you think she's the queen, very good at running things? Who are Ahalya Bai, Jahanabi of Mymensingh, and Rani Bhowani? Does a woman truly shine in her role as a wife? Who is to say anything about Sati, Savitri, or the magnificent Sita? During one's youth, is it? Uma is present. And among all the women in the world, where can you find another as magnificent as Gandhari? page 362 of CWSN Volume IV, 1996.

But she thought that Indian children aren't taught to think about the greatness of these ladies. Their characters—their sanctity, simplicity, and honesty—are the key. An Indian woman's education will never be complete without a celebration of the national ideals of womanhood as reflected in her epic literature and her history. From their early years as women to their later years as human beings, all of these remarkable ladies excelled in every facet of life. From an early age forward, this should be the goal of a girl's education.



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
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However, modern India's moral ideal contains a national and civic component. A woman's role here also requires training. It is necessary to obtain a distinctive synthesis in order to get the optimal efficiency required by the demands of the twentieth century. During this critical time, it is essential that our women's education undergo some changes, and everyone who understands this, no matter where they live in India, agrees on that. In the mythological-social culture of yesteryear, it was enough to transmit a statement's spiritual or emotional meaning to the student.

Nivedita elaborated on her previous point about women's education by saying that different eras have their own unique intellectual synthesis on the subject. Science, geography, and history make up modern India's synthesis, and as truth has no gender, women can and should attain these three forms of knowledge just as much as men. "The mind of the present age moves in three dimensions—science, history, and geography—from which it seeks to envision all ideas," says Nivedita. It follows that the contemporary mind takes hold of itself through the three symbols of nature, earth, and time.

In what ways can we help women receive this education? "Certainly, offers ought to be accepted," Nivedita responded. With the help of a magic lantern and the Bhagavata or Katha kata, she proposed, we may showcase slides depicting the several pilgrimages, thus popularizing geography. A similar approach could be taken to familiarize oneself with history beyond the Mahabharata and Ramayana. The community, including the women seated behind the screens, would benefit from the wandering educators' delivery of basic lessons on environmental preservation, cleanliness, and plant and animal life. To put ideas into physical form, one needs both visuals and one's own language. It is necessary to provide a nation to adore in order to instil a love of nation. She did, however, stress the importance of schools—whether public or private, elementary or secondary—working with Indian culture rather than against it.

What is the best way to teach this kind of material? "Even more young men are needed to help women further their education in the most effective ways," Nivedita proposed. In a year, some of them would teach twelve lessons in the holidays, either at home or in the community. The development of vernacular literatures could be a responsibility that falls to someone else. How can women learn about Indian history without this? Every historical record of a great figure like Buddha, Ashoka, Chandragupta, or Akbar is published in English, making them inaccessible to the majority of people.

Finally, Nivedita emphasized that men must take the lead in educating women in order for these initiatives to succeed. She used the work of Ram Mohan Ray to abolish Sati and Vidyasagar to abolish polygamy in Bengal as examples. She did, however, note that women can play a pivotal role; for example, Vidyasagar's mother taught and inspired her son to fight for women's remarriage, an end to child marriage, and the establishment of female-only schools in various Bengali villages. She prayed with all her heart that education would transform her into a woman who could rediscover the magnificence of India's glorious history. "May the past serve as wings for the feet of the future," she proclaimed.



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Nivedita meant that no one can properly teach another when she wrote "The education of woman" (CWSN Vol. V, p.24). Any educator must know their subject. True learning comes from one's own experiences; we succeed when we strive for the ideal and work hard. Nivedita believes girls should learn science, geography, history, and the triple R's. "The great end and aim of all educational efforts lies in rendering the individual efficient as an atom in his community and that community efficient as an atom in humanity," she added. Citizens inherit in their communities. Nivedita believes education benefits society more than the individual. So "it is a felony" to "educate an Indian female to represent Western culture. Indians view women with European ties like dodo birds among pheasants—they don't belong. Bengali girls are truly educated when we let them think about India, not when we teach them French or piano. An ideal education builds a person's passion through childhood academics, travel, and the chosen task. Learning never ends; we always learn.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: NIVEDITA'S VIEWS

In order to empower women, a nation must ensure that they have equal access to education, economic opportunities, political representation, social support, and physical and mental strength. Women in Bengal did not have the notion of empowerment when Nivedita lived. Nowadays, everyone agrees that providing women with quality education should be the first priority when it comes to empowering them. Nivedita detailed the dismal state of girls' education during that age, when little was done to empower them politically, socially, economically, or in terms of gender equality. Only 6.5 percent of girls were read. At Ramkrishna Girls' School, she pioneered a new approach to education for the severely impoverished girls of North Calcutta, one that focused on play and exercise rather than traditional classroom instruction. A more tailored development to their real requirements was something she hoped the knowledge they received here would bring about. We have already covered the curriculum and the methods of instruction in great depth.

Economic empowerment is the second critical component in women's empowerment. Generally speaking, it refers to their earning potential. In rural areas, men and women work together to support their families. This allows these families to improve their children's access to healthcare, education, and nutrition. However, in upper-caste households, women had no roles outside the home. With ages ranging from eighteen to twenty, Nivedita's school had around twenty widows. A lot of widows back then were seen as a financial burden on their family, so they were only given half the food that the rest of the population had: rice, a few kinds of pulses, and a limited selection of vegetables. They were mostly living off of scraps and receiving no respect or compensation for their work as the family's chef and housekeeper. Developing economic empowerment for these disadvantaged women-folk was Nivedita's goal.

While Nivedita's piece did touch on the arts, its primary focus was on needlework and how it could be used as a cottage industry to provide Indian women with employment opportunities. Needlework, as Nivedita pointed out, is a live art form in modern Europe because to the insistence of the church and its dogma on its continual representation. "Redeem this most beautiful of the arts from so undesired a negligence, and fill it with the fullness of their imagination and tenderness," Nivedita hoped modern Indian women would do.



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
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"Successive generations of women workers made the tapestries of feudal castles in Europe," says historical research. She wanted to know why Hindu women shouldn't form groups to make banners for events like the Durga Puja processions and Vaishnava Sankirtan. Since Muslim women traditionally place a chadder of flowers on graves of loved ones, there's no reason they can't do the same with delicately embroidered fabric. Bengali women used to sew working sleepers for their husbands. Now they may employ same talent to make beautiful covers for books, desk accessories, or even work baskets for themselves. She warned against trying to replicate European or German needlework styles and instead recommended studying native specimens from Rajputana and Benaras as well as Chinese or Muslim embroidery models.

The most notable of these was Begum of Bhopal Sultan Shah Jahan (*1838–1901). For two terms, from 1844 to 1860, she ruled. Her mother served as regent when she was just six years old, and she herself became queen twice, first in 1868 and again in 1901, at the age of twenty-four. She enhanced the method for collecting taxes, which led to a rise in state inflow and salary increases for her troops, upgraded military hardware, constructed a dam and an artificial lake, and made the police force more effective. As far as the people were concerned, she was a strong and beloved monarch. She is revered as an erudite and devout woman who authored multiple Urdu books. Aligarh Muslim University was founded as the Mahammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh, to which she made a substantial contribution. Sultan Jehan, her daughter, succeeded her to the throne upon her death on June 6, 1901 (Wikipedia Website).

When discussing women's empowerment in national politics, Nivedita (CWSN Vol. IV, 1996) recalled that "the contemporary struggle of the English woman is for the rudiments of political equality with men" (actually in 1911). There was a movement in England for women to have the same voting rights as males and to run for office and other civic and political offices. Seventeen years after her death, in 1928, the Women's Voting Rights Act was enacted, granting women the right to vote and equal opportunity to run for political office. Indian girls, she argued over and again, needed a modern education that emphasized science, manual labor, civic and patriotic ideas, and overall efficiency to meet the demands of the 20th century. More important than individual salvation is the triumph of the National Freedom Movement (CWSN Vol. IV, 1996), and this can only be achieved if more educated Indian women take up leadership roles in education, medicine, science, and politics.

CONCLUSION

According to Sister Nivedita's educational philosophy, nationalism, spirituality, cultural preservation, and holistic human development were central to Indian education. Sister Nivedita was inspired by Swami Vivekananda to create an education system that taught knowledge, character, self-confidence, morality, discipline, patriotism, and selflessness. She felt education should help people reach their potential and contribute to society and the nation.



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

Sister Nivedita prioritised national education as a key feature of her educational philosophy. She claimed that colonial education ignored India's cultural and intellectual legacy and failed to foster national pride in students. Instead, she promoted an education rooted on Indian traditions, history, philosophy, art, and literature while studying modern science and technology. Her educational vision balanced India's cultural character with modern knowledge.

One of Sister Nivedita's greatest accomplishments was educating women. She understood that women's education and empowerment drove national progress. She promoted confidence, independence, and social responsibility in girls via intellectual, moral, physical, and vocational development in her educational programs. Her work addressed social stereotypes and created a more inclusive and equal school system.

The study also shows that Sister Nivedita advocated learner-centred and value-based education. She valued observation, creativity, critical thinking, experience learning, and practical application over rote memorisation. Teachers should be guides, mentors, and role models who influence children via their example, she felt. She also emphasised mother-tongue instruction, cultural understanding, and community involvement in education.

Modern educational policies and procedures reflect Sister Nivedita's educational goals. Her focus on holistic development, ethical education, national identity, women's empowerment, cultural inclusivity, and scientific knowledge and moral values aligns with current efforts to create an inclusive, equitable, and socially relevant education system. Her theories are still relevant to present educational issues like value erosion, cultural alienation, educational disparity, and character formation.

In conclusion, Sister Nivedita's creative approach to Indian education transcends time. She continues to inspire educators, policymakers, scholars, and social reformers with her dedication to national regeneration through education, women's empowerment, and human development. Her educational philosophy can help create a system that balances knowledge, morals, tradition, and national development. Sister Nivedita's impact continues to shape India's innovative, culturally anchored, and value-based education system.

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**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
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19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

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