Sister Nivedita, whose previous name was Margaret Noble, was of Irish parentage and was born at Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, on October 28, 1867. After finishing her education at the Halifax College, she worked in various girls' schools gaining practical experience of teaching. In 1892, at the age of 25, she opened a school of her own in Wimbledon and settled down to serious work. She was a close student of Pestalozzi and Froebel and one of the enthusiastic supporters of the New Education movement, then in vogue in London. With her manifold intellectual interests Margaret had one deep-rooted trouble, namely, the growing consciousness of uncertainty and despair with regard to religion. It was at this time that Swami Vivekananda reached London with his message of Vedanta. And his words "came as living water to men perishing of thirst" to quote Margaret's words. She met him first in November, 1895. His teachings aroused Margaret's dormant religious aspirations and desire to serve humanity unselfishly, and she finally decided to take the plunge, though Swami Vivekananda, on his part, was very frank in putting forward all possible arguments against her intention to join his mission. On 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 specially. "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." Yet the difficulties are many. You cannot form any idea of the misery, the superstition, and the slavery that are here. You will be in the midst of a mass of half-naked men and women with quaint ideas of caste and isolation, shunning the white skin through fear or hatred and hated by them intensely. On the other hand, you will be looked upon by the white as a crank and every one of your movements will be watched with suspicion. "Then the climate is fearfully hot; our winter in most places being like your summer, arid in the south it is always blazing.

"Not one European comfort is to be had in places out of the cities. If in spite of all this you dare venture into the work, you are welcome, a hundred times welcome. . . ." Margaret's earnestness helped her to make a quick decision. She left England at the end of 1897, and reached Calcutta on January 28, 1898. On March 25, she was initiated into Brahmacharya and given by her Guru the name Nivedita, the dedicated. After a tour of the Almora and Kashmir regions from May to October with Swami Vivekananda and others, Nivedita returned to Calcutta in November. On November 13, in the presence of the Holy Mother and with her blessings, her school in Bagh Bazar was declared open. But it was only an experimental school, attended with much difficulty, and after a few months she decided to close it and go abroad to find new means and opportunities. In June, 1899, she left with Swami Vivekananda for Europe and America. Everywhere she went she employed her oratorical powers on India's behalf and strove to secure financial help for her educational experiment in India. Nivedita returned to India in the beginning of 1902.

She could not be with Swami Vivekananda for long, for he died on July 4, 1902. The end of personal association did not deter her from carrying on his work. "He is not dead; he is with us always. I cannot even grieve. I only want to work," she wrote to a friend immediately afterwards. With the help of Christine Greenstidel, an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who joined her some months later, she expanded the scope of her school-work. From a tiny Kindergarten School it grew into a High School, with a separate section for elderly ladies also.
The school-work was gradually entrusted to Christine and Nivedita took to a wider field of work—that of 'Nationmaking'. During her tour of Europe and America she had keenly felt that a country under foreign domination cannot dream of regeneration—social, political or cultural. Political freedom was the point to start with. Therefore, from 1902 to 1904, she went on extensive lecture tours to different parts of India urging people to realize the need of the hour and strive to make India free and great.

According to her, the three things on which people should lay great emphasis were: first, to have infinite faith in their own reserve power; second, to gain all-round strength to free themselves from the shackles of the foreign government; and third, to realize that the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was to give light to those who walked in darkness.

All her writings and speeches of this period reverberate with these sentiments. By the end of 1904 the political atmosphere in the country, especially, in Calcutta, was very disturbing. The declaration of, the Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon accelerated the political activities of the different patriotic parties. Nivedita experienced the joy of seeing the growth of the new spirit and the dawn of a new India. She was the most fervent and convinced 'nationalist'; her invaluable writings and speeches inspired young men with a burning passion to lead higher, truer, nobler and purposeful lives, and her challenge to the leaders to rise to the occasion influenced an ever-widening circle of friends as years passed by. Among her eminent contemporaries, who became very friendly with her, were statesmen, poets, artists, scientists, historians and journalists. Romesh Chundra Dutta, G. K. Gokhale, Bipin Chandra Pal, Jagdish Chandra Bose, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Abanindra Nath Tagore, Jadunath Sarkar and Ramananda Chatterjee were a few amongst them.

Nivedita's work was much handicapped by her failing health. In 1905 she fell seriously ill. Yet, in 1906, she visited the famine and flood-stricken parts of East Bengal, as a result of which she suffered from a long spell of malarial fever. These two illnesses and the heavy strain of work shattered her health. In the middle of 1907, and again for six months in 1910-11, she left for the West. She returned to India in the spring of 1911 and in the Puja holidays went for a change to Darjeeling, where she breathed her last before completing her forty-fourth year. Nivedita's life was short, but full and busy one. She lived in the great time of the National Revival in India.

India was the theme of her writings and for that she made a deep study of Indian literature, philosophy, mythology and history. Her mind was therefore amply furnished with rich facts. Combined with her comprehensive mind was a remarkable largeness of heart and deep insight of love. This helped her to interpret in an extraordinary and inexplicable manner Indian religion and thought, art and literature, custom and tradition. Her interpretations nourished the imagination and exalted the spirit of the people of this land, generally and lastingly, then, as they do now. The impact of her mind and its creation was felt even by her contemporaries who had reached eminence in their respective fields of work. That is the reason why they paid glowing tributes to her life and work. It will not be out of place to remember today what some of them said of her four-and-a-half decades ago. Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh : "If our Sister fell under the spell of India we in our turn fell under her spell, and her bewitching personality attracted thousands of our young men to her. If the dry bones are beginning to stir it is because Sister Nivedita breathed the breath of life into them."
Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee: "She was an Indian through and through, an Indian to the very marrow of her bones. Her nationality was but an external incident her soul was Indian. It seemed as if the liberated spirit of some Rishi of the olden times had been reincarnated in her, so that vitalised by the life of the west, she might once again, amid familiar environments, serve the people of her ancient love."

Mr. G. K. Gokhale: "Her marvellous intellect, her lyric powers of expression, her great industry, the intensity with which she held her beliefs and convictions, and last but not the least, that truly great gift capacity to see the soul of things straightway all these would have made her a most remarkable woman of any time and in any country. And when to these were joined as was in her case a love for India, that over-flowed all bounds, a passionate devotion to her interest and an utter self-surrender in her service and finally a severe austerity of life accepted not only uncomplainingly but gladly, for her sake, is it any wonder that Sister Nivedita touched our imagination and captured our hearts, or that she exercised a profound and far-reaching influence on the thoughts and ideas of those around her, and that we, acclaimed her as one of the greatest men and women that have lived and laboured for any land!"

Rabindra Nath Tagore: "I have not noticed in any other human being the wonderful power that was hers of absolute dedication of herself. . . . The life which Sister Nivedita gave for us was a very great life. There was no defrauding of us on her part, that is, she gave herself up fully for the service of India ; she did not keep anything back for her own use. . . . She was in fact a Mother of People. . . . When she uttered the word "Our People," the tone of absolute kinship which struck the ear was not heard from any other among us. Whoever has seen. What reality there was in her love of the people, has surely understood that we while giving perhaps our time, our money, even our life have not been able to give them our heart." The writings and speeches of Nivedita amply prove the truth of all these sentiments.