



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.2., 2017 (April-June)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

UNDERSTANDING THE ESSENTIALS OF NEMADE'S NATIVISM

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ABSTRACT

The literary and critical talent and prowess of Bhalchandra Nemade is now universally acknowledged. His extraordinary zeal and solitary pursuit in preaching, practicing and popularizing Nativism in India has hardly any parallels in contemporary times. This paper attempts to understand the concept of Nativism and its various implications and ramifications as enunciated by Nemade in his "Nativism in Literary Culture". It also attempts to understand why Nativism is so crucial to not just art and literature but also to the overall social and cultural life of our society and the nation. In the course of this discussion an attempt has been made to reflect on the penetrating insight of Nemade that bring to our notice the key features Nativism and their contemporary relevance and significance in the fast-changing world-order marked by globalization and its after-effects

Key Words: Nemade, native, nativism, art, literature, internationalism

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INTRODUCTION

Among the living writers of India there is hardly any parallel to the formidable creative genius of Bhalchandra Nemade. He is a novelist, a poet and a distinguished critic. The impact of his original thinking and the force of his powerful argument on the contemporary literary and intellectual life of India is unparalleled in recent history. His greatest contribution to Indian literary criticism is his theory of Nativism. As a literary critic he has been passionately advocating it. As a creative writer he has demonstrated how theory can be brought into practice. Hence his novels like 'Kosala' 'Bidhar' 'Hul' 'Jhul' 'Jarilaa' and 'Hindu' can be best described as experiments in Nativism. Most of Nemade's critical ideas have been compiled in a Marathi book titled 'Tikaswayamvar' which has been translated into English by IIAS (Indian Institute of Advanced Studies) Shimla with few changes. The essay "Nativism in Literary Culture" is the part of this book.

Nemade's "Nativism in Literary Culture" is one of the most significant and original critical statements in 20<sup>th</sup> century India. The fact that nothing much has happened in the last five centuries in the field of Indian literary criticism after the golden days of Sanskrit criticism makes Nemade's contribution to Indian literary criticism even more significant. In the present essay Nemade emphasizes the need and significance of nativism in literature. The essay can be divided into two parts. In the first part, after exposing the evils of bogus internationalism pursued by Indian writers, Nemade defines his concept of *desivad* or Nativism. Then he elaborates on the scope and limitations of nativism, and the place of nativism in literature in the second part. Here Nemade demonstrates how nativism forms the bedrock of all good literature of all times and places. The paper aims to understand and analyze the essentials of Nemade's theory of nativism as reflected in his

aforesaid essay. It also attempts to highlight and analyze the significance and relevance of his views on Nativism as also the role of Nativism in the overall domain of art, literature and by extension of society and culture.

### **Discussion**

#### **Nemade's Attack on Bogus Internationalism**

Before defining his concept of nativism and its need in literature and criticism, Nemade comes down heavily on the hollow and bogus internationalism pursued by Indian writers and critics before and after independence. He admits the fact of cultural imperialism that hampers our growth as a confident society, nation and culture. "...West may not be there, but it is very much there in the mind of the East, and that cultural imperialism does exist." (Nemade, 2009: 10) Nemade expects us to look into our own tradition to form our own standards to judge the quality of a literary work. He laments the fact that in our times Indian writers and critics by and large suffer from West-worship mania. There is tendency in India to accept all that is Western as modern, standard and progressive. Such a tendency often leads to blind acceptance of Western norms in art, literature, culture, politics, media, fashion etc. Funnily enough such a tendency is mistakenly equated with cultivation of international consciousness. The tendency of West-worship simultaneously leads to looking down upon everything native. As a result those who talk about the worth and value of things native are branded as regressive and fundamentalists. Nemade makes it clear that nativism is opposed to fundamentalism. We need to correct our faulty notions of being modern and international, only then we can appreciate the intrinsic worth of native arts and culture. Nemade pokes fun at our bogus internationalist writers and intellectuals and remarks that nothing much is lost if our writers and scholars do not read Dnyaneshwara and Tukaram but they must study in detail every insignificant English or American author, "How can a great international consciousness be nourished otherwise?" (Nemade, 2009: 11) Nemade blames westernized Nehru for bringing in the cult of bogus internationalism. To bring home his idea Nemade points out what Chinese leader Mao has said about Nehru. Mao says, "Jawaharlal Nehru does not seem to have understood that India is a part of Asia and not of Europe" (Nemade, 2009: 36). Significantly, Nemade adds that these words of Mao should be considered as a general definition of nativism.

#### **The Concept of Nativism: Its Scope, Definition, and Place in Literature**

The English term 'nativism' is used as synonymous for the Marathi term '*desivad*'. Nativism aims to understand our literature through our own point of view to achieve cultural confidence. The concept of nativism is not merely literary or critical concept but a general part of culture. Nemade strongly argues for devising our own standards to evaluate the merit and excellence of a literary work. We cannot blindly follow European or American standards of merit and excellence and apply them to our own art and literature for the simple reason that every society on earth cannot be expected to be European and American. The culture of every society is distinct and literature being a social and cultural product has to be evaluated keeping in mind the distinctiveness of that literary work. Only then we can do justice to the intrinsic merit of any literary work. In this sense all great writers and great works of all times and places are nativistic in spirit. Hence, Shakespeare was nativistic, Tolstoy was nativistic and so was Premchand. Nemade makes it clear that nativism is not a qualitative term. It is a general principle present in good as well as bad literary works.

There is conflict between tradition and modernity in every society. The trouble is that the two words have acquired peculiar meanings under the influence of bogus internationalism. Being traditional is considered as bad, regressive and undesirable, whereas being modern implies imitation of western ideas and norms. Nemade seeks to correct this notion. To him the concept of nativism is closely associated with awareness of one's own tradition. To produce good literature the author must have sound understanding of his own tradition. In India, very few writers have produced nativistic literature in the recent past because most of the writers have been happy imitating Western ideas and Western norms of expression which shows their lacks of sound understanding of their own tradition. Nemade's own novels and poetry shows his sound understanding of his own tradition.

While defining Nativism, as noted by renowned scholar, teacher, translator Dileep Chavan, Nemade discards "the Anglo-Brahminic smoke around it." (Chavan, 2015: 103) In India, there are two traditions. One is

the Brahminic and Sanskrit tradition which is dominated by small but powerful minority. The other tradition is the Bahujan tradition which is enriched by people like Gautam Buddha, Charvaka, Mahavir, Basaveshwar, Akkamahadevi, Chakradhara, Dnyandev, Namdev, Tukaram, Bahinabai, Jotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, Shahu Maharaj, Gandhi etc. Within our one common pan-Indian culture these are two different traditions. They can also be called Vedic and Non-Vedic. Indian literary history is the conflict between Brahmin and Shudra. Indian literature has been produced under the moral shadow of high class Brahmins. Nemade rejects their morality and accepts the Shudra tradition. So he is for non-Vedic Shudra tradition. Nemade's support for Shudra tradition comes from his belief that "...India is not a mono-centric but a gradually changing, multi-centric, multi-axled geographical continuum". (Nemade, 2009: 19) And this belief of Nemade is the foundation of Nativism.

#### **Nativism as Bedrock of Literature:**

The essence of nativeness has been sufficiently reflected in the literatures of all times and places. The only thing is that it has hardly figured in any high profile academic formal discussion of literature. Europe did not discuss nativism because nativism by nature is opposed to colonialism, through which Europe thrived. Europe's evil colonial designs would have been exposed had it discussed nativism. Interestingly enough, many Indian scholars and writers also preferred not to discuss nativism and this shows their colonial hangover and mindset. However, the undeniable fact is that nativeness has always been central to literature. Such periods are found across all times. During such periods literatures of respective countries have blossomed. Yadav Period in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra, Period of Shivaji in Marathi, Elizabethan and Romantic Period in English literature are good examples.

Literature shares inherent relationship with the place and period of its production. Linguists, stylists, anthropologists, archeologists and art historians agree that every age produces distinct art and literature mirroring human behavior in a particular period and land. Hence, principle of nativeness can be applied to determine in which period and land a particular work of art was produced. Literature uses the medium of language to express itself, and the nature of language is such that it minutely reflects in its stylistic features the historical, geographical and social contexts of the land and times of production of the work of art. Thus a literary work shares deep and inherent relationship with the land and times of its production. This also explains as to why a particular work is produced at a particular time and place. The fact that the Mahabharata and the Iliad were produced only during ancient India and Greece respectively is the proof of how principal of nativeness is always at work. This method of finding principal of nativeness in literature is as simple as matching wild animals with their natural habitation, says Nemade. But this easy task can be difficult for those who are ignorant of native tradition just as urbanized kids associate wild animals like tiger, lion and bear with their place in the zoo. Of course our *desi* Westernized scholars could hardly see this obvious because they have little knowledge and scant respect for native tradition. Blinded by West worship their idea of universal begins and ends with what is Western and English.

Nemade emphasizes that nativeness implies a kind of geographical and cultural continuation. To him nativeness is awareness of the "...totality of the geography, of the consciousness of the homogeneity of all its castes, ethnic communities, sects, religions, traditions, period and places—with their vertical and horizontal intersections". (Nemade, 2009: 30) Lack of nativeness in a work of art can never be filled by sheer imagination, modernistic techniques and tools. Nemade laments the fact that before and after independence the ideals of borrowed modernity and bogus internationalism marginalized elements of nativism in all major aspects of our national life.

#### **Nemade's Awareness of Dangers of Nativistic Self-Love:**

While emphasizing the principle of nativism in the creation and criticism of literature and art, Nemade shows his awareness of the dangers of excessive nativism. Excessive nativism can sometimes lead to jingoistic self-love and even fundamentalism which Nemade rejects outright. To him nativism does not mean hatred of other cultures but the proper and just appreciation of one's own as well as other's culture. This is because every culture is distinct and there is nothing superior or inferior about culture. In fact, self-certifying self-righteousness can be harmful than beneficial. For example, self-centered Brahminic Hindu nativist arrogance

prior to 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. would have brought disaster but for a newly-arrived liberal Muslim class that accepted India as their new home. Similarly, the anti-Brahminic self-purifying nativist movements like Mahanubhav and Warkari laid new foundation of Indian society. While advocating Nativism, Nemade warns that “the excess of nativist narcissism can lead a society to extreme self-centeredness and ultimately to its downfall...Such an excess gradually gives rise to the tendency of living in isolation from the outside world, a kind of ethnic-racial-caste superiority complex, and of course only self-certifying lifestyles flourish in such a society. Naturally, there is a danger of such cultures being wiped out in the event of external aggression.” (Nemade, 2009: 32) He reasons that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century excesses of Brahminic orthodoxy damaged the strength of Indian society and consequently the Indian society failed against the knowledge-worshipping, science-oriented Western culture.

#### **Nativism as an Effective Tool to Fight Foreign Dominance:**

Nemade accepts that nativism sometimes tends to join hands with traditionalist regressive forces. But it is equally true that nativism is the only potent weapon of the suppressed society to challenge foreign forces that aim to undermine the able native systems. In Indian context, Gandhi’s spiritualism or Ambedkar’s revival of Buddhism could be sited as brilliant nativistic examples which served the cause of broad Indian civilization and which are no less important than the so called progressive internationalism. Finally, Nemade asserts that nativism aims to continue the eternal struggle between tradition and modernity which is the sign of liveliness of any society. Modern Indian society is yet to find the balance between tradition and modernity, religion and science, worldly and temporal, nationalism and internationalism which is must for its own health and wellbeing. He concludes his arguments on an optimistic and confident note. “I think we Indians, being the members of the oldest living civilization of the world, are the most eligible to establish the native principle as an essential and fundamental requisite of human existence.” (Nemade, 2009: 37)

#### **Conclusion**

It is seen that Nemade with his usual trademark honest bluntness and forceful logical arguments brings out his idea of Nativism, its need in art and literature not just to lend originality and authenticity to artistic expression but also to uplift the nation and the society to stand on its own solidly and confidently and thus come out of the dark shadows of colonialism and its hangover that attempt to perpetuate West-worship and subservience through cultural imperialism. His argument supplemented by ample irrefutable illustrations that universality cannot be parachuted from above by adhering to Western norms but must come from within, from one’s own soil, has the force of its own. That all great writers and great works of all times and places are nativistic in spirit. That Nativism is not about hating the West but about understanding, accepting, acknowledging and locating the beauty and worth in things native without the tendency to necessarily apply Western standards of beauty to judge the worth of native works of art and literature. Nemade rejects and exposes the evil designs of West-worshipping intellectuals who deliberately tend to brand anything native as orthodox, regressive and fundamentalist. Simultaneously he also cautions against the dangers of nativistic self-love. He emphasizes that Nativism is the only potent weapon of the suppressed society to challenge foreign forces that aim to undermine the able native systems.

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