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## One Day National Level Seminar On Indian Literature in Transition



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## For and Against Nativism

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### Abstract:

The theory of Nativism, propounded by Bhalchandra Nemade in India, is the most debated theory in Indian Literary Criticism from the positive as well as negative point of views. Nativism asserts for the preservation of the cultural traditions, languages and literatures that have been transmitted to the present generation from thousands of years. The nativists affirm that one should fight against the foreign invasions in the field of culture, literature and language. However, when one talks of the protection of the age-old culture and traditions, we really need to think whether everything that the native cultural traditions have, is worth to be venerated and preserved. There have been so many evil and inhuman practices that have malignified the native social system. How is that to be justified? At the same time, when the age-old native languages which are the treasure houses of the traditional knowledge, the native arts and the environmental resources are in danger, and, if nothing is done to safeguard them, it would be a great injustice not only to the ancestors but also the future generations. Thus, the theory of Nativism can be studied from both the perspectives and the critics from both the sides have very valid arguments to make. The present paper attempts to highlight the problematic areas as well as the strong points of Nativism.

Key Words: native, Nativism, traditions, culture, language, literature

The theory of Nativism was proposed by Bhalchandra Nemade in India. Nemade writes that the theory was inspired by the American Anthropologist Ralph Linton's research article entitled, "Nativistic Movement". The entries of the word 'native' in the New Oxford American Dictionary(2001) and the Bloomsbury English Dictionary(2004) give the comprehensive meaning of the word. They define 'native' as human beings, plants, and animals that are connected or associated to a place where they are born and that carry the specificities and peculiarities of the place. Bhalchandra Nemade states in Nativism(Desivad) (2009) that naturally what belongs to a person or a thing is 'native'. Being 'native' or desi means being attached to a particular place. 'Native' means something of indigenous origin, something which belongs to the soil.

The Indian equivalent of 'Nativism' is 'desivad'. Bhalchandra Nemade discusses the theory of Nativism in his essay, "Sahityatil Deshiyata" (1983) in Marathi and in his book in English, Nativism(Desivad). Referring to Ralph Linton, Nemade writes that the native societies try to protect the native cultural values when the native cultures are under threat from other more aggressive cultures. Nativism is a social movement. It fights for assertion and protection of the interests and culture of the native inhabitants and tribal people against the foreign cultural invasions. The nativists believe that the dominant cultures from outside destroy the age-old local cultures which have been born out of their own social and environmental contexts. The nativists take pride in native traditions which are specific to the place and time and take efforts to preserve them. Ganesh Devy in After Amnesia (1992) discusses that Nativism not only resists the foreign or Western elements but also goes against the dominant mainstream Indian or Sanskrit or marga traditions that are oppres-



sive, exploitative and subversive. In short, Nativism is a cultural movement which gives preference to native values and linguistic, literary and cultural traditions rather than foreign values, language, literature and culture. It believes in the value of indigenous and local cultures and stands against acceptance of Sanskrit and foreign or Euro-American cultural values.

The theory of Nativism has various aspects. The nativists who emphasise the importance of native languages, literatures and cultures are concerned with their protection and preservation as they fear that the native cultural heritage could be destroyed in the flow of modernization and globalization. Nemade writes in Nativism that the nativists are more concerned about the soulful strains of a poor shepherd's flute, made of bamboo from his own forest rather than listening to the vast, expansive, aggressive, sky-rendering symphonies. Nemade further affirms that the native styles and the principles relate the work of art to the environmental and cultural point in time and space of its production. A piece of music or a particular style of singing in India will help in recognising the region it belongs to. Nemade argues that regional specificity generates the feeling of love and attachment towards one's homeland or the native place. Geopieté which is a sense of rootedness, a sense of being attached, and sharing an emotional bond with the place one belongs to is an essential feature of Nativism.

Human beings grow different from each other genetically, physically and psychologically due to the geographical and environmental conditions. This distinguishes one culture from another. The cultural expressions like eating habits, housing systems, behavioural patterns of the people vary from region to region. The nativists believe that the native culture or the native styles of eating, dressing and housing were polluted when traders from the Western countries

started invading India and the foreign influences in the form of 'one culture, one language' policy became forceful. Keeping in mind the diverse, multi-linguistic and multicultural nature of Indian society, the nativists assert that the native principle of plurality must be respected. The distinct and unique identities of all the regional cultures have to be protected and preserved so that all the communities will live together happily and peacefully.

Nativism believes that every piece of literature or any art for that matter is the product of the native socio-cultural system. The native elements are expressed in all kinds of works produced in a particular culture. In Nativism, Nemade writes that man's innate relationship with his environment is reflected in the literary and artwork: "Our (native) sculpture, painting, dance, architecture, folklore, mythologies, and epic poetry present our rich seasons, rivers, lakes, birds, animals, trees, and plants as participating in resonant moods, in the human drama and the general impression, uniquely so with our arts, is that of unitive emotional bonds between man and his environment." The nativists expect that the code of the land should be reflected in literature. They insist, the social system including all its castes, communities and groups and their lifestyles to be articulated in literary works. The nativists think that all the great European or American works are nativist because they are thoroughly concerned with their native social contexts.

In Indian context, the oral traditions in regional languages and dialects are the examples of the nativistic literature. Bhakti movement or devotionism is one of the major oral literary traditions of Maharashtra. In Marathi literature, Tukaram's abhangas and Bahinabai's poems have unique importance. Literature of the tribal people is still in oral form preserved by the thousands of tribes living in the remote parts of the country. The Bhakti poetry and the tribal literature carry the code of the land and the so-



cial and environmental features of the land are present in this literature. The nativists claim that after the contact with English language and the division of literary taste into the elite and the masses, the educated class considered oral styles as vulgar and maintained a safe distance from them. Nemade feels that the richest treasures of the ancient literary system must be preserved and studied so that the native styles of literature are reconstructed.

According to Nemade, a nativist writer writes primarily for his/her own time and for his/her own community and relates himself/herself to his/her tradition and culture in a responsible manner. He/she does not write for a foreign audience. As a nativist, a writer is conscious of his/her social and geographical context and the native literary traditions. He/she should be concerned with the native social issues and should take efforts to preserve, cultivate and spread the native cultural values. At the same time, he/she should be very open to different thoughts and ideas. The writer must affiliate himself/herself with a particular socio-cultural community and bring positive changes in the life of the people. He/she should add to the seriousness of literature and be honest, responsible and committed to the society. He/she should not write only for the entertainment or sensual excitement of the readers but should adopt verbal action in his/her writing. Nemade thinks that Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, Dante, and Puskin for instance, were the true nativists who wrote about the society, which they were a part of.

The nativists give more importance to the natural language and creativity of the masses than the artificial language and creativity of foreign, anglicised or Sanskritised people. The nativists claim that literature produced in dialects express true native identity of the social groups. The beauty of these native languages is understood through the folk songs and folk traditions that are sustained by the village folks. Therefore, the nativists insist that a na-

tivist writer must perform creative writing in his mother tongue only. They disapprove the use of foreign language, especially English in literary writing. Nativists believe that there is no doubt that English is required but not at the cost of one's mother tongue. They strongly believe that mother tongue of the learner must be the medium of instruction in educational institutions. Nativism objects the use of the western critical standards in evaluating the native literature. The main contention of Nativism is that due to the differing ideas of literary criticisms from culture to culture, the oral, written and printed Indian literature should not be evaluated by using foreign tools and ideas of culture and history. The nativists believe that instead of applying western theories to Indian literature or examining native literature through western perspective, there is an urgent need of creating native standards for the evaluation of Indian literature based on native linguistic, literary and cultural traditions.

Nativism goes against the bogus internationalism as well as the Western modernism. Nemade observes that under the name of modernisation, the Indian intellectuals imitated the Western modernism that led to individualism, nuclear families, bankrupt farming, giant of media, film culture, polluted and crowded cities, English medium schools, etc. In exchange, Indians have lost age-old bonds of kinship, joint family culture, traditional agriculture system, vernacular medium schools, peaceful life in the villages and so many other things. The nativists insist that there is the need of creating Indian modernity, different from its ugly Western face, that will suit the native cultural heritage.

Globalization is another phenomenon that Nativism disapproves. In his speech entitled "Sahitya, Sanskruti ani Jagatikikaran" in Sola Bhashane, Nemade believes that a few dominant countries like America, England and Australia have the remote control of the process of globalization in their hands. Under the name of



creating World Economy, these countries destroy the multiculturalism and multilingualism, the true identity, the cultural heritage and wealth of the countries like India. The nativists express the need of using Nativism as a weapon against the growing tentacles of globalization.

The theory of Nativism has been discussed widely by the Indian scholars. Some of the critics have backed Nativism by pointing out its strong points and some of them have harshly criticized it for its lacunae. The essays in *New Quest* (May-June 1984) discuss the theory comprehensively. Chandrakant Patil writes in his essay, "Nativism in Modern Marathi Poetry" that Nativism is a reaction against colonialism as the colonisers caused revolutionary upheaval in the traditional way of life of the coloured people by imposing their customs that brought the collapse of the native existing pattern. Shankar Mokashi-Punekar writes in his article, "Nativization of Kannada Language and Literature" that the pre-independence generations of writers have built a mass of native literary patterns with intelligent awareness of need for the existing life patterns through literature. He says that after independence Karnataka has become America within India as the native literature is side-lined by the critics but the artificial, unusual experimental, unreadable stuff is lauded into a modern classic due to the foreign model in it. M.D. Hatkananglekar in his article, "Nativism and World Culture" stresses the importance of tradition in Nativism by referring to T.S. Eliot's essay, "Tradition and Modernity" that gives importance to tradition and historical sense. Chandrashekar Jahagirdar in "Nativism in Modern Marathi Fiction" says that Nativism is a mode of perception and also of indirect action which enables the writer and his reader to understand the problems of their own culture and society.

**The essays in Nativism:** Essays in Criticism too, analyse positive as well as the negative aspects of Nativism. In his essay, "Nativism: The Intel-

lectual Background", R.B. Patankar criticizes Nativism for blaming the British, and claims that when there was complete anarchy in Maratha confederacy during 1790s, the British established peace in the region and introduced various social reforms. Prasanna in his essay, "A Critique of Nativism in Contemporary Indian Theatre" argues that there is nothing Indian or desi as such in today's time, as there has always been a mixture in India for the last two thousand years. Rajee Seth in "Nativism: An Area of Introspection", asserts that the Western literature and aesthetics developed a new sensibility in Indian literary consciousness and the doors of world-wide information are thrown open to us.

Vilas Sarang writes in his research paper, "Perils of Nativism" that Nemade's deshivad is embedded in Western thought process. Nemade borrows the concepts like Nativism, novel and realism from the West. According to Sarang, Nativism is a sign of narrow-mindedness. Raosaheb Kasbe in his book, *Deshivad: Samaj ani Sahitya* (2016) calls Nativism as chauvinistic and says that it is an attempt to revive Hindutwa and establish the traditional Brahminic and hierarchical caste based socio-cultural order. Nitin Wagh too in his book entitled, *Ra. Ra. Nemade, Deshivad ani The World is Flat* (2017) questions why one should be proud of the traditions that are based on casteism, untouchability, chaturvarna system, sati system, the history of thousands of years of discrimination and exploitation. Motiram Katare in his book, *Deshivad: Roop ani Rang* (2010) argues that Nemade does not speak on growing fascism under the guise of Hindu extremism in India and speaks like a mediator of Hindu extremist organisation. Harishchandra Thorat in his book, *Sahityache Sandarbha* (2005) claims that Nativism is not a theory as it is based on emotionality and it is self-contradictory and rejects logical arguments. Thorat brings to light the contradiction that the nativists advocate the



use of native languages but write the theory of Nativism in English. Thus, the theory of Nativism has been discussed in the field of literature and criticism from all the perspectives.

Nativism in India is a reaction to the colonial influences and the increasing dominance of the Western culture and the mainstream Indian traditions on the native languages, literatures and other cultural expressions. It asserts the sustainability, protection and preservation of the native culture. Nativism promotes literature in regional languages and expects a writer to be socially committed and to practise creative writing in his mother tongue only. Use of mother language as a medium of education is very essential for the nativists for protecting the traditional knowledge system. As a literary theory, Nativism evaluates native literature on the basis of native standards and denies to apply Western literary theories. The nativists welcome the external elements that are nourishing to the native culture. They resist the elements that are exploitative, oppressive and subversive for the native culture. Nativism opposes nationalism, internationalism, modernisation and globalization that attempt to impose one language and one culture, rejecting the native linguistic and cultural varieties. It advocates native modernity and argues against the Western concept of modernism because of its destructive and mercenary nature. However, one understands that Nativism does not talk clearly about the oppressive and exploitative nature of the native social systems like caste hierarchy and varna system. It does not criticise the evil practices prevalent in the native social system. With all its limitations and contradictions, Nativism needs to be appreciated as it helps one to get rid of the inferiority complex and makes one aware of the rich native cultural heritage and opens up the doors to the treasure house of traditional wisdom and knowledge systems.

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