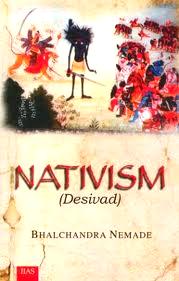
**Nativism**

Nativism in modernist literature asserts the primacy of personal and collective identity mediated through language, culture, geography, religion and race. In the defense of local identity and cultural particularity, nativism stresses the values of the native rooted to a particular place and the distinctive social, cultural and geographical qualities of being native. This essentialist Euro-American view of nativist identity promotes the superiority of any one group, culture and race over other groups, cultures and races, while overlooking similar movements in other parts of the world. So nativism remains a highly problematic term within the larger field of global modernist studies. In his book *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (1995), Walter Benn Michaels argues that modernism and nativism emerged together in American literature in the 1920s through their mutual commitment to resolve the meaning of identity – linguistic, national, cultural and racial (2-3). Here the very notion of nativism depends on understanding one’s Americanness as racial difference as evidenced in texts by modernist writers as diverse as Willa Cather, William Faulkner and William Carlos Williams. Paralleling American modernist nativism, a revival of localist discourse also occurred in England in the 1930s. As the British Empire became ‘a shrinking island’, to use Jed Esty’s resonant phrase, England made an anthropological turn, valorizing English place, local culture, rural values and national identity. Corresponding to cultural shifts of the 1930s complementary shifts were evident in modernist aesthetic practices. Even major English modernists such as T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster actively participated in this turn toward English national culture, which became ‘the basis for both social and aesthetic renewal’ (Esty 3).

Although many English, American, and European modernists understood nativism in the context of a centre-periphery model, modernist writers, artists, and critics from around the world have since identified numerous rejoinders and correctives to this predominantly Eurocentric view.



Nativism, in Indian literary studies, for example, refers to that bloc of thinking which advocates a return to local cultural-linguistic roots for both creative and critical writing. Operating as the English translation of “*desivad*,” nativism was first propounded as a desirable praxis by the Marathi novelist and critic, Bhalchandra Nemade, in the early 1980s (see esp. his essay, “Sahityateel Deshiyata”). Always a polemical formulation, nativism has since been a polarising term with limited influence in Anglophone Indian literary-critical circles. Besides Nemade, the works of G. N. Devy have been instrumental in arguing the nativist cause in India.

Bhalchandra Nemade

Nativism in Indian literary and critical practice is, more often than not, identified by its proponents with authentic and autonomous cultural expression. Alleging “cultural amnesia” (see Devy) on the part of the postcolonial Indian literary critical establishment, nativists uphold *bhasha* (‘vernacular’ or regional) literatures grounded in *desi* (local, indigenous) traditions against the hegemonies of *marga* (high-cultural) Sanskritic, national or Western and international practices. They claim that the former is only truly authentic, being rooted in local reality. Nemade, for instance, privileges a *kriti* (action) oriented social realism over formalist and fantasist forms of writing (see “Marathi Novel”).

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