



## **RELOCATING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: NEMADE'S HINDU**



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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper tries to explore and examine the cultural arguments established by Bhalchandra Nemade in his Marathi novel *Hindu, Jagnyachi Samriddha Adgal* (opulent place for living with outdated/unwanted articles), and poses certain questions and doubts pertaining to Nemade's cultural stance. It also attempts to investigate into the cultural context that prompts Nemade to insist on a certain religious position.

### **KEYWORDS**

Hindu, archaeology, excavation, Mohenjo-Daro, Sindhu, Brahmanism

## RESEARCH PAPER

Hindu, as a religious identity, has been continuously defined and redefined by many scholars, historians, religious pundits, literary theorists, philosophers and even political activists and leaders, yet, there seems to be some possibilities for new definition of the term, which in recent time has been attempted by Dr. Bhalchandra Nemade in his Marathi novel *Hindu, Jagnyachi Samriddha Adgal* (opulent place for living with outdated/unwanted articles). Nemade seems to be trying to establish a comprehensive and a vast definition of Hindu identity which will encompass the people of all religions and castes belonging to Akhand Bharatvarsha.

Nemade's first novel *Kosla* came when he was 24 and then came *Bidhar, Hool, Zarila* and *Zool*, this was a quartet. Dr. Nemade is a well-known critic and poet. He taught English and comparative Literature, linguistics, anthropology and Marathi in various colleges and universities and the School of Oriental and African Studies London. He is the Sahitya Academy Award recipient. But the most important contribution of Nemade is the Discourse of Nativism which has to be indispensably studied in Post Colonial Theory. But Nemade's theoretical position pertaining to Nativism is certainly debatable. *Gram sanskriti* (village culture) is the very centre of his whole discourse. He proudly insists on the necessity of this *Gram Sanskriti* in order to meet the challenges posed by the globalization. Apparently this idea seems to be attractive but can not be fully ideal from the lower caste's point of view. Of course Nemade has his own perceptions of the anthropological roots and emergence of caste system. However discussion of Nativism is not the concern of the present paper, it attempts a brief critical comment on Nemade's controversial novel *Hindu*. Therefore the present paper does not claim to bring a comprehensive critique of Nemade's ideological position.

Dr. Nemade has very cleverly and subtly given the title and subtitle to this novel *Hindu: Jagnyachi Samridha Adgal* (opulent place for living with outdated/unwanted articles). This subtitle is suggestive and defines the title of the novel. It suggests India, the land of contradictions- where women are considered Goddess but treated as subhuman; where some castes have been enjoying every pleasure of life at expenses of other castes' misery. Therefore the title itself implies contradiction.

From *Kosla* to *Hindu* we find brilliant experiments in novel writing that prove Nemade's view that novel can't be for entertainment, rather it is the socio – cultural and historical reflection. The protagonist of *Changdeo Chatustya* (*Bidhar, Hool, Zarila* and *Zool*) Changdeo Patil is indifferent to whatsoever happens around him. He has remarkable reactions and comments on those happenings. But Khanderao the hero of *Hindu* is the active participant in all that happens around him. With full of commitment and emotional attachment Khanderao narrates the incidents in the novel. In fact there are no melodramatic or thrilling and sensational incidents in the novel, there is no suspense story but notwithstanding this, the novel arrests the reader and compels to complete it.

Khanderao is an archeologist who has his own assumptions about the ancient culture of Mohenjo Daro, Harhappa. His attitude, when he discusses with his Ph.D guide Dr. Sankhaliya, underlines the distinctiveness of opinions from the prevalent archaeologists. His argument insists on the study of feelings and sensibility that has been buried along with the ancient buildings, ornaments, bricks, pots etc. There can't be neutral, and indifferent study of the old archeological objects, rather we should be able to study the cultural sensibilities of the ancient people.

Novel starts with the excavation camp on the banks of Sindhu River, Mohenjo Daro and Harhappa. As a matter of fact much has been written on Sindhu culture till today but Nemade for the first time brings Sindhu culture and the whole process of excavation with such an emotional touch that links history and mythology to create vast cultural ethos of India. Fictional Writing, normally, is not essentially an intellectual exercise; it is considered to be the imaginative writing stuffed with the realistic/unrealistic and imaginary happenings. But Dr. Nemade, for the first time makes it an intellectual and research oriented phenomenon that not only challenges the prevalent narrative techniques but also brings a paradigm shift in the content. There are several themes in *Hindu* which prove Nemade's vast reading, research and contemplation.

Khanderao's colleagues in the excavation camp in Saptasindhu– Dr. Mandi, Ali, Dr. Jaleel, Dr. Sankhaliya and others discuss on several dimensions of Sindhu culture. Many times they have disagreements, debates but still they work unprejudiced and without conflict. The friendly atmosphere in the camp among the scholars is entirely contrary to the atmosphere in various departments in the universities. Nemade has not commented,

like his earlier novels, in detail on the mistrust, deception, enmity and jealousy that prevail in university departments. In fact Khanderao and other characters are the true scholars and researchers with full understanding and commitment to the research. Certainly there are contradictions and differences of opinions but personal enmity has no place in it.

It is a seminal feature of Nemade's writing that it gives a healthy and necessary attitude to the professors and researchers. We have seen in *Zool*, the protagonist Changdeo Patil is the man of large understanding and deep literary and artistic taste which is necessary to be a good teacher of literature and social sciences. Khanderao also has a deep understanding of culture that shapes his lifestyle. His research articles are genuine research articles based on hard work and deep commitment (which are not merely for the sake of CAS). We know that lacks of rubbish articles using *Cut Paste Technology* have been written out of the greed of promotion and threat of NAAC. Every day new journals and new editors are emerging like mushrooms in the rainy season. And they are producing second and third rate research that is not at all changing the face of society and nation. There is no contribution to the knowledge in true sense and the result is only the disgusting competition of publication!

For Khanderao archeological research is passion. He has decided to dedicate his life for those hidden cultural truths which will prove integrity and unanimity of Indian subcontinent. Khanderao though lives in present but connects the past very beautifully and places brilliant comments and arguments. In a way he tries to redefine the present in the light of past. He has pride in the past glory of India which is based on the evidences of Sindhu culture.

Khanderao is in search of his aunt Tironi, who was lost in the days of partition. She, at the early age, has been initiated to the *Mahanubhav Panth*, During the partition riots, Khanderao believes, Tironi aunt might have been lost in some Pakistani *Mahanubhavi* monastery.

He goes to search her along with his colleagues Dr. Mandi and Ali in various monasteries near Lahore. They discuss on many socio-religious and cultural aspects during this search. Dr. Mandi gets disturbed to see the beggars in front of all the temples and

monasteries and her restlessness could be experienced when she opines about the beggars.

It sounds strange / bizarre either we give or don't" on this Khanderao has philosophic reply – "Beggars don't force us to pay. They exploit nobody. They don't indulge into misappropriations. There is no ambitious, monstrous tendency. Most importantly they accept that they are beggars and helpless without any pride, because it requires courage to accept your poverty. It requires very much courage to be open and sincere beggar. There is humble greatness in begging also. The People in the Parliament, Army Officers, and University Professors are more helpless than these beggars.(48)

Khanderao's interpretation of beggars and begging is rare. No Scholar or philosopher might have elevated the beggars in such a way. As I said earlier, Nemade's arguments and comments are so distinctive and brilliant that no novelist can imagine and think.

He receives telegram informing about the last moments of his father. He, with the help of Ali sets to return to *Morgaon*, a small village in North Maharashtra, his native place. His observations and interpretation of minute details with brilliant comments are remarkable and striking. Crossing the *Wagha* border with the help of Ali, his experiences in Lahore, and in the excavation camp, his three months association with Muslim friends at Dilwar's *Dhaba*, these things capture the attention of readers. Khanderao does not seem to accept Pakistan as a separate and independent country, because his perception of totality compels him to see the present deeply rooted in past. His perception of partition seems to be based on emotional level so that he does not allow himself to accept historical and political aspects of it.

First episode of the novel has been enriched with unbelievable references concerned with Indus Valley Civilization, independence, sexuality, sexual education and understanding of *Labhani* women in North Maharashtra, its socio-cultural and mythological aspects, literary and artistic differences between Europeans and Indians, Khanderao's own perceptions of Indian Culture etc. In this very episode Nemade highlights his concept of **Nativism** and advocates his arguments with many socio-cultural evidences. But the most crucial feature of this episode is his creative psyche encompasses the past of thousands of years and it communicates with him in such a way that readers get compelled to

participate in it. Khanderao's dialogues with subconscious takes the reader into the deepest cultural past and focuses on some historical truths.

In one of this communications Khanderao experiences curse by *Parashuram* (Aryan God)

Evil Khanderao and others like you, this *Kevel Bhrigu*, enemy of *Kshatriya* gives you the curse that this *Sindhu* will be estranged, you will be known by the corruption of her name (Hindu is considered to be the corruption of *Sindhu*). You will always and forever be the slaves of somebody – the slaves of *Sanskrit*, *Arabi*, *Pharashi*, and British People. Your boundaries will be contracted and you will perish into your own ocean. If at all you invent anything that will be just *Shunya*(zero) in Mathematics or game of chess or you will invent only negative things like *Maya*, *Sanyas*, *Aparigaha*, *Ahinsha*, *Samaadhi*, *Hathyog*, *Sallekhana* – *Om Swaha*.(14)

This imaginary dialogue certainly compels the reader to reconsider the mythology. It underlines the vast range of Nemade's thought and imagination.

Second chapter gives the detailed information of Khanderao's native place Morgaon in North Maharashtra with its socio-historical and geographical-political account. Very few novels in India might have touched the socio cultural and religious details as *Hindu*. This is another very crucial feature of the novel that every caste, with its cultural – social position and details has been depicted by Nemade. Every caste in Maharashtra has certain features, which are so minutely and realistically presented by him. In traditional Marathi novel we never found this kind of vast and pervasive canvas of society with cultural past. India is the only nation on this planet that has around 4500 castes and thousands of sub-castes, with thousands of languages and dialects. This is the greatest challenge to encompass all the castes and sub-castes in a single literary text, but Nemade seems to have successfully overcome this challenge. Therefore *Hindu* does not merely remain a story of Khanderao and his caste but the story of all the castes and sub-castes with their entire socio cultural and psychological construct.

Nemade very sensitively delineates the exploitative relationship of backward castes and untouchable castes with *Kunbi* (agrarian caste). One cobbler women used to call 'brother' to Khanderao's father and visited on *Bhaubij* every year. Khanderao's father gave her

one rupee as gift of *Bhaubij*, hence that untouchable sister, used to arrive early in the morning in the *Waada* but not allowed inside by the people in the *Waada*. She waited for a long time, for just a gift of a rupee. What sort of love it was? Nemade whole – heartedly depicts this tradition and states that these untouchable women needed some strong support, because they were always victimized and exploited at the hands of upper caste Hindus. Once in the year these untouchable women used to get gift of one rupee and in exchange faced exploitation rest of the year. This was the special Hindu style of exploitation.

After Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism Indian society experienced the drastic changes. Especially the untouchable *Mahar* caste metamorphosed thoroughly and challenged the Hindu traditions. Nemade has taken serious cognizance of this metamorphosis. Nemade's interpretation of *Mahar* caste before and after conversion is so seriously put forth which compels the Ambedkarite intellectuals to introspect.

Khanderao's life in Aurangabad in fifth chapter is interesting. It brings the reminiscences of *Zool*. His rented bungalow in Begampura, the area adjacent to university, his friends Wankhede and Anantrao, their conversations and comments on various things and Khanderao's journey as university students these are the crucial and contemplative features of this narration. He has his own perceptions of university politics and academics. In *Zool* also we have experienced the special and brilliant satirical commentary on university politics. His association with the great poet Bashir Nawaz and his love for Urdu *Shayari* and *Ghalib* indicate his bent of mind.

Pawar sir of history department has been described as the committed professor and researcher who ceaselessly works for the academic improvement of the university. He has done Ph.D on Takshshila University in London. He has decided to improve university and works accordingly but only frustration comes in the end. He comes to the conclusion that, to work for university improvement is to waste the time. Khanderao's interpretation is so realistic and contemporary.

Nemade sarcastically comments on the university politics by giving references of various appointments like V.C. and registrar of the university. These posts are closely connected with politics due to which universities are losing its spirit of academic excellence. His narration of university politics is typically *Nemadpanthi*.



Feminism is one of the most important and indispensable aspects of *Hindu*. Nemade's treatment of women characters is remarkable. He forces Indian feminist theorists to redefine the concept of feminism, at least in Indian context. In Indian patriarchal system women are not considered to be individuals, but Nemade's women characters are a brilliant manifestation of individualism. Agriculture and women have deep organic relationship and Nemade very well knows this fact. Therefore his women too highlight the culture of soil and invite attention of the reader.

Khanderao observes how women managed to have their freedom, how did they fall victim to patriarchal system. He links this with ancient India. Till Buddhist period Indian women enjoyed freedom but suffered slavery from Bramhanic period. Khanderao narrates his aunts' story – how she gives births only to daughters and how her husband threatens her of his remarriage for son. She refuses and he again threatens her with death. She meets a tribal woman, a *Madia Gond*, who has expertise in country medicine. She asks her do you want a medicine to kill your husband. She was shocked. How did this wandering woman guess her thoughts? She runs away when she has to be killed, a maid tells her this is your last day, I will take care of your girls, don't worry. She becomes revengeful. Why should she suffer and then she remembers this *Madia Gond* woman and gets the medicine from her and murders her husband. This may be, as Nemade says, a legend which he has used in *Hindu* to show the individualism that women maintained even in the face of patriarchy.

Many incidents in this narration have focus on women's individualism; Indian feminist theorists must take note of this and rethink about Indian feminism. But had Nemade given references of *Nirrti*, his feminist interpretation would have reached the highest peak.

Every individual develops his / her attitude according to the upbringing in a certain community. Every community holds a certain cultural commitment and accordingly behaves and propounds the views. His perceptions are formed and shaped by the certain socio-cultural milieu. The cultural conditioning makes him feel superiority. As a result of this, people seem to uphold their own ideology and culture as superior to others and live in certain complex. They fail to think rationally, they fail to enquire and interrogate prevalent concepts of their culture. Dr. Nemade puts on very transparent glasses through



which he sees the exact and true colors of all the objects around him. He appreciates whichever is good and castigates whichever is evil in all the religions, castes and faiths in India.

Dr. Nemade's *Hindu* is certainly one of the extraordinary novels in world literature. It is highly intellectual and rooted in Indian culture. Hindu can be compared, undoubtedly, with the masterpieces of the world literature. It is the epitome of how Indian *Nativistic* writing should be. Hindu is a brilliant statement on partition, feminism, nativism, culture in general and Indian culture in particular. It is a beautiful comment on literature, music and *Shayari*. It is the intellectual interpretation of history, geography, archaeology, religion, and psychology. It is the beautiful assimilation of illusion and reality. It is the unending search for lost culture. It is the eternal journey into deepest core of cultural past. It is the most complex novel which goes beyond all the *isms* and definitions of literature.

Nemade's attempt to relocate the Hindu religious identity must be appreciated. But still some questions and issues emerge after reading *Hindu*. No doubt Hindu is a vast and pervasive concept which has been corrupted by Brahmans as Nemade thinks, but is it possible to think Buddhism and Jainism under the same rubrics of Hinduism? Hindu is a derogatory term used by Muslim invaders, so what is the point to uphold this nomenclature and seek pride in it? Why Nemade does not take adequate cognizance of Buddhist and Jain culture of knowledge and debate and project them as chief identity of India in order to have alternative to colonial and Aryan culture? Hindu is truly such a room in home, as Nemade believes, stuffed with outdated and unwanted articles which needs to be reconstructed, then what are the tools to be used to reconstruct? Despite these questions Nemade's novel brings a potential critique on caste discrimination, feudalism and Brahmanism.

## REFERENCES

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