

# Literature: A Means of Production and Reflection of Nationalistic Ideal

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**Abstract**— This article claims that literatures work as means of production and reflection of nationalistic ideology. It helps in the production and reflects ideology like nationalism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, humanism, internationalism, and so on. To discuss many ideologies in this short article is not possible; I, therefore, will be mainly concentrating on the nationalistic ideology reflected in various works of literary art. Literature is something that reflects the condition of human in the society; it reflects through ideology and influences the society socially and politically. Literature, thus, creates a world out of words. As an ideology nationalism involves a strong identification of a group of individuals with a nation; it refers to a strong feeling of love and pride in one's country. From socio-political perspective, nationalism denotes a policy based on a strong desire for political independence by a country colonized by another country. A quest for nationalism means a quest for identity. Moreover, a strong love shown by the people for a certain cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and other such types of groups, to which they belong is a kind of nationalistic feeling. Several diverse conceptions come under the concept of nationalistic ideal. Various definitions of nationalism given by different people--Frantz Fanon, John Stuart Mill, Craig Calhoun, and Michael Ignatieff--help understand that nationalism is an overarching umbrella term encompassing many concepts which this article discusses.

**Keywords**— ideology, nationalism, reflection, ideology, internationalism.

## I. LITERATURE: CRITICAL OVERVIEW

There is no exact definition of literature. It is far from a single and clear conception. Definitions of literature change as it is relative to time, place, and person. To get some conceptual ideas on literature we have to ponder upon some questions like-- What purposes does literature work for? What differentiates literature from non-literary works? What makes us treat something as literature? Seems to be unclear, but literature is as literature does. In exploring ideas about what literature is, it is useful to look at some of the things that literature does. Literature is something that reflects society, makes us think about ourselves and our society, allows us to enjoy language and beauty, it can be didactic, and it reflects on "the human condition". It reflects ideology and changes ideology, just like it follows generic conventions as well as changing them. It has social and political effects. Literature, thus, is the creation of another

world, a world-- created out of words-- that we can see through reading literature. Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* rightly points how ideology is in the aesthetic and narrative forms similar to a work of literary art:

Ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions. (79)

Literature reacts to nationalist ideology and nature of a national culture and is changing which Frantz Fanon makes clear, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, using a famous phrase, the "zone of occult instability" (183).

Literature, thus, is work of art that tells a story, expresses emotions, analyzes and advocates ideas, and dramatizes a situation and thus reflects the society. For this, the literary artist uses various genres of core literature like story, essay, novel, poetry and play. Other types of nonfiction prose works like news reports, textbooks, feature articles, editorials, historical and biographical works also are used to express ideals of various sorts.

## II. EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISTIC IDEOLOGY

Many writers/theorists/critics have expressed nationalistic ideology in various different literary works. The term nationalism does not agree any attempts of single definition. It has various characteristics depending on where and when the term is used. Nationalism is the belief that groups of people are bound together by territorial links like South Asian, African, so no and religious links like Hindu, Islam, Buddhist and other links – cultural, linguistic, political, ethnic and so on.

Talking about diversified nature of nationalism, in *Nationalism*, Craig Calhoun says: “Nationalism is too diverse to allow a single theory to explain it all. Much of the contents and specific orientation of various nationalisms is determined by historically distinct cultural traditions, the creative actions of leaders, and contingent situations within the international world order” (123). Calhoun’s view makes clear that no single, universal theory of nationalism is possible as its notion has a wide range of coverage like culture, region, religion and ethnicity.

Michael Ignatieff, in *People, Nation and State*, raises a question, “can you have patriotism without nationalism?” (141). Dichotomy of patriotism and nationalism is as confusing as the one between civic and liberal nationalism on the one hand and ethnic and closed nationalism on the other hand. These two oppositions largely overlap. Ignatieff rightly defines nationalism as, “not one thing in many disguises, but many things in many disguises” (9). Nationalism can be viewed from various different perspectives such as ethnicity, religion, and culture and so on. Various theorists of nationalism lead into a core principle and feature to nationalism; it demands that the peoples of the world are divided into nations. Moreover, it seeks that each nation has to be allowed the right to self-determination, either as self-governing entities within existing states or individual nation-states.

The theory of nationalism is like any ideology-building process. The creation of a nationalist ideology aims at creating something new to cope with the cultural threats posed by the dominant “other.” It is also a defense of the prevailing culture that needs to be reinvented to meet this challenge. Benedict Anderson’s theory is relevant for explaining an important element of nation-making. It deals with the feeling of forming a community--nationhood--than for our understanding of nationalism as an ideology. Nationalism is rooted in the past and it depend on a linear and abstract conception of time.

Despite its multiplicities of meanings, it is used to describe, in contemporary literature, two phenomena: (1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity; this raises a question about the concept of nation defined in terms of common origin, ethnicity and cultural ties. In such a situation, an individual’s membership in a nation is regarded as involuntary. (2) the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve self-determination; this raises questions about whether sovereignty restricts the acquisition of full statehood with complete authority for domestic and international affairs, or something less than statehood would be sufficient.

Observed from cultural view, nationalism claims that individual may be unique and may have different identities or affiliations. Nationalism is an ethic of heroic sacrifice in which one becomes ready even to justify the violence in the defense of one’s nation against enemies. Despite the difficulty inherent in choosing a general definition of nationalism or nationality, various people have endeavored to define it in their own ways. Incorporation of various meanings have made it vague to define on the one hand and widened its scope and coverage on the other. John Stuart Mill, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, presents his view about the feeling of nationality and its causes like language, religion, culture ideology: “This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language and community of religion greatly contribute to it.” (359-360)

As nationalist sentiment is acquired, it is an acquirement rather than an inborn quality. It differs from person to person according to how it is instructed and acquired. Eqbal Ahmad in *Confronting Empire* classifies nationalism as “an ideology of difference” and “collective identity built on the basis of the Other” (75). In crux, it requires that all individuals belong to a nation for the

realization of their true moral worth. As a result, they be indebted their primary devotion to their nation over any other sub-groups to maintain the moral value. Sometimes the extreme form of nationalistic view leads the individuals, their sub-group and nation to a dark moment. For instance, racial hatred and ethnic cleansing are bleak sides of nationalism. The parochial feeling of the principle of nationalism creates a dichotomy of “we” and “they” among the human beings. This dichotomy creates a kind of evil field where hatred, conflict, and struggle spread its roots among different nations. For instance, in the post-conflict period in a South Asian country Nepal, after the establishment of “Loktantra” (“democracy”/ “rule of the people,”) people belonging to different regions, ethnicities, culture and other nation groups made various demands in the name of retreat from the oppressed state which prolonged the interim period and led the country to instability .

The issue of nationalism points to a domain of problems having to do with the treatment of cultural and ethnic differences within a democratic polity. In a country practicing democratic form of government, different cultural and ethnic groups come up with various demands of their cultural and ethnic interest; they give pressure to the government for the fulfillment of their demands. In such a situation, issues of collective interest of all nationals of the country, which should be put on the top from the viewpoint of priority, remain in shadow. Cultural, linguistic, religious and other nationalities create borders and divide human beings in different groups that becomes a cause of tension in the society and among the societies. However, formation of borders of some sort by a nation is removal of borders of nation created by other forms of nationalism. For instance, religious borders blur the borders created by regional nation.

In some countries--Rwanda, Sri Lanka--the parochial feeling of different nationality groups caused tension and division between various groups of different nationality, which took the form of civil war for years and years. Nationalism promotes conational partiality: a sense of special commitment among “co-nationals.” The term “conational” refers to the fellow members of a nationality group. A nationalism that does not boost patriotism, loyalty and a special concern for one’s co-nationals would be an empty form of nationalism. The problem of conational partiality and global justice is an instance of a fundamental problem in moral philosophy. The ties, among the conational, can create certain special duties among the fellow members.

Regarding the beginning of nationalism various theorists/writers--LiahGreenfeld, Eric Hobsbawm, Charleton B. Hayes--differ in their opinion. Greenfeld assumes that nationalism is a phenomenon resulting from the modernization of the European societies in the context of growing demands for social mobility from the 16th century onwards. Greenfeld states that the inventors of nationalism were members of the new English aristocracy. This interpretation is more closely related to a theory of the nation than to a theory of nationalism.

Greenfeld in *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* argues that nationalism was born in England in 16th century in the garb of an “individualistic civic nationalism” that was to spread in British colonies, including the United States and further East (14). Nationalism later developed in reaction to those from the West. In France, feeling of nationalism developed in the 18th century. It was after the country “ceded to England the position of leadership it had held in the seventeenth century” (77). Such a feeling and reaction led to demand the introduction of “liberal reforms in order to make France a nation similar to the English” (178).

The rise of the notion of nationalism is often connected with the French

Revolution of 1789, when the first “nation-state” is said to have been created. Eric Hobsbawm, in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* says, “‘nation-making’ was the essential content of nineteenth century evolution” (23). Although most of Europe’s nations were created only in the 20th century, the seeds for their emergence were spread in the previous century, during which empires slowly began to dissolve. According to Hobsbawm, the most fruitful era for the study of nations and nationalism has been roughly between from 1968 to 1988. In this period, the number of works related to the study of nationalism brightened the question of what nations and national movements are and what historical role they play.

Kohn, towards the end of *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background*, sums up the concept of historical development of nationalism: “From Hebrew and Greek ideas the age of nationalism drew many of its initial and fundamental inspirations . . . pointing forward on the road to deeper liberty and to higher forms of integration” (576).

Modern nationalism emerged in the 19th century in Europe to change the course of history. The spread of knowledge, of national languages at the expense of the

language of the empire, economic reasons, could help in creating bigger markets for business. The 1848 revolutions have been called the “springtime of peoples,” despite the fact that the revolutions themselves failed to change any nationality’s situation except the freedom of Serfs in the Habsburg Empire.

Kohn, discussing the rise of nationalism and its impact upon nature and people, says, “The rise of nationalism demanded a new attitude of this worldliness and affirmation of nature, the birth of individualism, and a new interpretation of history” (104). During both the Renaissance and Reformation, there were appeals to something like nations. The modern nationalism of the West depended on the primacy of the state over ethno-cultural appeals to unity. It was in England’s seventeenth-century civil war, a rebellion attempted extension of that very “absolutism” that “the first great surge of nationalism embraced a whole people” (125). Kohn argues, “This religious nationalism was experienced by the English people as a revival of Old Testament nationalism” (168). He viewed, “English nationalism was born in the great decisive hour of its history by repeating the experience of the chosen people and of the Covenant” (176).

To understand nationalistic ideology and what it does we have to know about what a nation is. Viewed from a broader perspective, a nation is like somewhat mixed both ethno-cultural and civic category. Walker Connor in *Ethno-Nationalism: The Quest for Understanding* says ethnicity represents, “a step in the process of nation-formation” (102). Max Weber in *Economy and Society* offered an interpretation by pointing out that the concept of the ethnic group corresponds to that of the nation but that “the sentiment of ethnic solidarity does not by itself make a nation” (389-395). Connor tries to clarify this distinction by arguing, “While an ethnic group may . . . be other-defined, the nation must be self-defined” (103), which means that it has developed a nationalist ideology. To come up with one definition under which all nationalities fit is impossible. Joseph Stalin has given a definition: “A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture” (qtd. in Hobsbawm5).

Nations, viewed from another perspective, are timeless phenomenon; it can be understood as cultural and ethnic community as well. Another school of thought opines that nations have been aroused for a very long time, though they take different shapes in different points in history. A

dispute is what constitutes a nation and how these national borders should be drawn. Talking about built up of nation, in *Global Cultures: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, A. D. Smith argues that many nations were “built up on the basis of pre-modern ‘ethnic cores’ whose myths and memories, values and symbols shaped the culture and boundaries of the nation that modern elites managed to forge” (180).

### III. CONCLUSION

Literature reflects the social activities/society; it works as means of production of nationalistic ideology. The notion of nationalism did not come at once as it is now but it has a significant history of development. Nationalistic ideology begun many centuries ago is continuous developing in various phases of its history. Its growth promoted fragmentation as opposed to unity in multi-national states. A new era of nationalism began in which different culturally, linguistically and territorially similar nations bound together by common threads. They protested against the imperial powers that had controlled them for centuries. Community of common culture, origin and language, are focal bases for the construction of nationalist claims. In the classical view, an ethno-nation is a community of origin, culture, language, and custom. Philosophical discussions and definitions of nationalistic ideology are highly concerned to its ethno-cultural variations which a good work of literature reflects.

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