



Theme of Contemporary Alienation in Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla* and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

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Abstract

Bhalchandra Nemade and J.D. Salinger are prominent figures in their respective literary spheres, each leaving an indelible mark on modern literature. Nemade, a pioneering force in Marathi literature, played a crucial role in shaping the Little Magazine Movement of the 1970s and 1980s in India. His works, characterized by their exploration of rural life and critique of urban modernity, have significantly influenced the trajectory of Marathi writing. On the other hand, Salinger, an American author, gained widespread recognition for his contributions to coming-of-age literature. Salinger's distinctive voice and themes of alienation and loss of innocence resonated deeply with the post-World War II generation, cementing his position as a key figure in the American literary movement of the 1950s. While operating in different cultural contexts, both Nemade and Salinger have made substantial contributions to their respective literary traditions, challenging conventional norms and inspiring subsequent generations of writers.

Bhalchandra Nemade's "Kosla" and J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" are two literary works that explore the theme of contemporary alienation in the modern world. The theme of contemporary alienation is a significant and relevant topic in today's society, as it touches on issues of identity, belonging, and disconnection. These works share striking similarities in their exploration of youthful disillusionment and alienation. Both novels feature protagonists who struggle to find their place in a world they perceive as inauthentic and oppressive. Nemade's Pandurang and Salinger's Holden Caulfield grapple with societal expectations, rejecting the established norms and institutions that surround them. These characters embark on introspective journeys, searching for their true identities amidst feelings of isolation and loneliness. The novels delve into the complexities of adolescence, highlighting the protagonists' internal conflicts as they navigate

the transition to adulthood. Through their respective cultural lenses, both authors masterfully capture the universal themes of alienation, disillusionment, and the quest for authenticity, resonating with readers across different generations and societies.

Keywords: Alienation, Identity, Disillusionment, Rebellion, Isolation etc.

Bhalchandra Nemade is a renowned Marathi writer, poet, critic, and linguistic scholar who has made significant contributions to Marathi literature. Born on May 27, 1938, in Sangavi, Maharashtra, Nemade's literary career spans several decades and encompasses various genres. His debut novel, "Kosala" (1963), is widely regarded as a modern classic in Marathi literature, known for its exploration of existential themes and innovative narrative techniques. The novel's protagonist, Pandurang Sangvikar, grapples with questions of identity and purpose, reflecting the broader social and cultural changes of post-independence India. Nemade's work often challenges conventional literary norms and incorporates elements of postmodernism, making him a pioneering figure in contemporary Marathi literature. His contributions extend beyond fiction, as he has also published notable works of poetry, literary criticism, and linguistic scholarship, cementing his status as a multifaceted intellectual in the Marathi literary landscape.

"Kosla" begins with two powerful epigraphs that set the tone for the novel's exploration of self-discovery and transformation. The first, a sutra by Shri Chakradhar, and the second, a Tibetan prayer, both resonate with the central themes of the narrative. These carefully chosen quotations serve as a philosophical framework for the story that unfolds. The title "Kosla," which translates to "cocoon" in English, is a metaphor that encapsulates the essence of the novel. It symbolizes the protagonist's journey of metamorphosis, much like a caterpillar transforming within its cocoon. This imagery suggests a process of introspection, growth, and eventual emergence into a new state of being.

The cocoon represents both protection and confinement, mirroring the protagonist's struggle between the safety of familiar constraints and the desire for personal evolution. Through this metaphor, the author invites readers to contemplate the universal human experience of self-transformation and the challenges that accompany such profound change.

"Kosla" presents a unique narrative structure, eschewing traditional plot conventions in favor of a retrospective first-person account. The protagonist, twenty-five-year-old Pandurang Sangavikar, navigates between his rural origins in Sangavi and the urban landscape of Pune, Maharashtra's educational and cultural hub. While superficially appearing to be a tale of failed ambition—a young man sent to the city for career prospects only to return unsuccessful—the novel's true depth lies in its exploration of societal misalignment. Through Pandurang's perspective, readers gain insight into the protagonist's struggle to fit into both rural and urban environments. This misfit status raises questions about whether society is ill-equipped to accommodate individuals like Pandurang or if he is simply under-socialized for the world he inhabits. By challenging conventional storytelling and societal expectations, "Kosla" offers a thought-provoking examination of individual identity within the broader context of social norms and expectations.

J. D. Salinger is an American writer who gained widespread recognition for his novel "The Catcher in the Rye" (1951). This seminal work, featuring the iconic protagonist Holden Caulfield, became a classic of 20th-century

American literature and continues to resonate with readers today. Salinger's writing style is characterized by its conversational tone, keen observations of human behavior, and exploration of complex familial relationships. His influence on American literature and popular culture remains significant, with "The Catcher in the Rye" continuing to be widely read and studied in schools and universities.

"The Catcher in the Rye," J.D. Salinger's only published novel, offers a brief yet intense glimpse into the life of Holden Caulfield, a disillusioned teenager grappling with the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The narrative unfolds over three days, following Holden's aimless wanderings through New York City after his expulsion from school. Reluctant to face his parents before the start of Christmas vacation, he drifts through various urban landscapes, including streets, hotels, and nightclubs, in a futile attempt to fill the void of his existence. Holden's journey is marked by the physical and emotional turbulence of adolescence, as he struggles to reconcile his desire to preserve childhood innocence with the harsh realities of the adult world. This internal conflict serves as the central theme of the novel, highlighting the universal challenges of coming of age and the often painful process of self-discovery.

Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," embodies the internal conflict between seeking genuine human connection and rejecting the perceived phoniness of adult society. His iconic fantasy of being the "Catcher in the Rye" serves as a powerful metaphor for his desire to preserve childhood innocence, reflecting his own deep-seated fear of maturation and the complexities that accompany adulthood. Holden's fleeting contemplations of embracing monastic life or retreating to the West as a deaf-mute underscore his desperate search for inner peace and escape from the overwhelming sense of alienation that plagues him. These escapist fantasies reveal Holden's profound longing for a more authentic

and uncomplicated existence, free from the societal pressures and disillusionment he experiences in his current environment. Through these internal struggles and imaginative flights, Salinger masterfully portrays the universal challenges of adolescence and the transition to adulthood.

Both the novels explore how the sense of disaffiliation, rooted in the childhood experiences of both protagonists, intensifies during the challenging and formative stage of adolescence. "Kosla," as previously mentioned, serves as a chronological reflection of Pandurang Sangavikar's life. He believes that only his age and name are worth recounting, yet he vividly recalls his disordered and fear-filled childhood in the novel's opening. "My whole childhood passed in awe of my father," he laments. Growing up in a household dominated by a 'wicked' and 'cruel' father, who frequently punishes Pandurang regardless of his wrongdoing, he finds his innocence crushed as he is discouraged from engaging in activities like planting flowers, playing the flute, or participating in drama. His life is far from joyful. Although he cannot confront his father directly, his rebellious spirit manifests in his attempts to exterminate the rats in their large, old house, as he witnesses them mercilessly toying with the life of an innocent baby hare.

In contrast to his father, Pandurang's mother represents a nurturing presence. "For my mother, though, I felt great love," he reflects. However, this deep affection does not entirely alleviate the fear instilled by his formidable father. Compounding his struggles, he is frequently harassed and intimidated by the son of a local sweet maker for no apparent reason. Notably, Pandurang describes a series of terrifying dreams that serve as an introduction to his character. In these dreamscapes, he finds himself transformed into various forms: a creature resembling a horse that must run at a terrifying speed until his chest feels as if it will crack, or a house among larger structures that begin to move and silently crush smaller homes.

At times, he envisions himself as a cactus from the waist up or as a massive boulder, akin to an elephant, rolling and smashing everything in its path. Although Pandurang admits that he cannot fully comprehend these dreams, they appear to be a haunting nocturnal reflection of his disordered childhood existence.

While Pandurang Sangavikar's childhood can be characterized as a landscape of fear, Holden Caulfield describes his own upbringing as "lousy." For Holden, this feeling of lousiness is so profound that he is reluctant to engage with it for two main reasons: "First, that stuff bores me, and second, my parents would have about two hemorrhages each if I shared anything too personal about them; they are quite sensitive about such matters, especially my father." Similarly, Pandurang is hesitant to disclose much about his family, reflecting that "a person who shares such things is usually a fool, or worse, a listener, for instance, a crook." Although Holden is not inclined to share his personal experiences in a "David Copperfield kind of crap" manner, it becomes evident through his indirect comments that he, like Pandurang, harbors a fear of his father that is not alleviated by his mother's affection. Unlike Pandurang's mother, who embodies a typical Indian maternal devotion to her "only son," Holden's mother simply offers a parting kiss and says "Good Night." This emotional malnourishment fosters a sense of disaffiliation—essentially, a detachment from their fathers—in both Pandurang and Holden. As a result, their younger sisters, Mani and Phoebe, emerge as the emotional anchors in their respective lives.

Pandurang's sense of alienation intensifies following the tragic and premature death of his younger sister, Mani. Struggling to understand why the life of a five-year-old girl should be so cruelly cut short, he experiences a surge of emotional violence. In a fit of rage, he expresses his thoughts: "I'll murder father. I'll kill Grandma. Then I will set fire to that house. Spare only mother." However, recognizing the

impossibility of such actions, he resorts to a symbolic act of destruction by cutting up a "flame-yellow" sari and burning it.

Later, during a trip to Ajanta, Pandurang reflects on his grief, realizing that his sorrow is merely a small fragment compared to the profound sorrow experienced by the Buddha. He comes to understand that death liberates the departed: "Mani is now free from all else. Free from this, free from that. Colour-free, flesh-free, mind-free, perception-free, she is even freedom-free." Despite this philosophical insight, which serves as a form of self-consolation, Pandurang remains deeply troubled by the harsh realities of life and the pervasive sense of loss that characterizes his existence in a world filled with emotional turmoil.

Pandurang comes to the painful realization that the death of a child, particularly a girl, is often treated as a trivial matter by the emotionally hardened adults around him. This societal brutality contributes to his sense of alienation, driving him to contemplate escape through death. He sharpens a knife with the intention of ending his life by stabbing himself in the stomach, but ultimately hesitates and changes his mind. On another occasion, he imagines, "it must be gorgeous to commit suicide in this sea."

Despite his profound detachment from the harsh realities of life and his allure towards the idea of an 'all-free state' after death, Pandurang refrains from taking the drastic step that Girdhar, another character, impulsively chooses. Girdhar's suicide serves as a means of escaping a similar life crisis, yet Pandurang's internal struggle and fear prevent him from following that path. This highlights the complexity of his emotional state, as he grapples with the desire for liberation from suffering while simultaneously recognizing the weight of his existence and the implications of such a final act.

Holden, being younger than Pandurang, exhibits a less philosophical approach to life and

its challenges. When faced with the trauma of his brother Allie's death, he does not seek philosophical comfort; instead, he reacts with raw emotional violence. Unable to cope with his grief, he chooses to sleep in the garage the night Allie dies, expressing his pain by breaking windowpanes until his hands are injured. Unlike Pandurang, who contemplates violence against others, Holden's emotional turmoil is directed inward, manifesting as self-harm rather than thoughts of harming others.

While Pandurang considers the idea of killing his father and grandmother as a means to challenge the oppressive patriarchal system of Indian society – one that also conditions women like his grandmother to support it – Holden's thoughts of self-extinction stem from a different place. He contemplates suicide but ultimately rejects the idea, not due to a lack of courage, as is the case with Pandurang, but because he realizes that death would not free him from the superficiality of societal rituals. He imagines the scene of his funeral, where people would come to pay their respects, placing flowers on his grave, and he recognizes that even in death, he would be trapped in the same "ceremonial phoniness" that he despises. This realization leads him to choose life, despite his overwhelming despair.

Both "The Catcher in the Rye" and "Kosla" explore the theme of alienation, addressing it from psychological and socio-moral perspectives. However, the depth of this alienation differs significantly between the two works. In "The Catcher in the Rye," Holden Caulfield's alienation does not ascend to a higher spiritual or existential level, as it does in "Kosla." Holden, being younger and less philosophically inclined than Pandurang, experiences his alienation as a transitional phase. He reassures his concerned teacher, stating, "I'll be all right. I'm just going through a phase right now. Everybody goes through phases and all, don't they?" This indicates that he views his struggles as temporary.

By the end of the novel, Holden's alienation is primarily characterized by feelings of powerlessness, normlessness, and self-alienation. His journey reflects a more superficial understanding of his emotional state, lacking the profound philosophical insights that Pandurang grapples with in "Kosla." While both characters experience alienation, Holden's is framed within the context of adolescence and the challenges of growing up, whereas Pandurang's alienation is deeply rooted in existential despair and a critical examination of societal norms.

Both novels explore the profound sense of alienation experienced by their protagonists. In *Kosla*, the protagonist Pandurang Sangavikar grapples with existential questions and societal expectations, mirroring Holden Caulfield's struggle in "The Catcher in the Rye" with the phoniness of the adult world and his quest for genuine human connection. "Kosla" is deeply rooted in the Marathi cultural and social milieu, reflecting the post-independence Indian society's challenges. In contrast, "The Catcher in the Rye" captures the post-World War II American society's disillusionment and the pressures of conformity.

Conclusion

Both the novels, Bhalchandra Nemade's "Kosla" and J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" masterfully explore the theme of contemporary alienation through their protagonists' experiences. These novels, despite emerging from different cultural contexts, share striking similarities in their portrayal of young individuals grappling with societal expectations and personal identity crises. The protagonists in both works embody the sense of disconnection and disillusionment characteristic of modern society. Their struggles to find meaning and authenticity in a world they perceive as insincere or hostile resonate with readers across generations and cultures. This universal appeal underscores the enduring relevance of the theme of alienation in literature. Through their

unique narrative styles and character development, Nemade and Salinger offer profound insights into the human condition, particularly the challenges faced by young adults in navigating complex social landscapes. The novels serve as powerful critiques of societal norms and institutions, encouraging readers to question conventional wisdom and seek genuine connections in an increasingly alienating world. Ultimately, "Kosla" and "The Catcher in the Rye" stand as testament to the power of literature in articulating the often-unspoken feelings of isolation and alienation that permeate modern existence. Their continued relevance and impact on readers worldwide highlight the timeless nature of this theme and its significance in understanding the human experience in contemporary society.

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