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Alienation, Identity, And Cultural Dislocation: Ethical Symbolism In J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye* And Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosala*

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Abstract

This paper compares *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger and *Kosala* by Bhalchandra Nemade, examining their protagonists' alienation. It explores how both texts resist dominant social structures and capitalist modernity through narrative innovation and symbolic frameworks.

The study reveals that the protagonists' alienation is not just psychological but deeply ethical and epistemic. Holden's messianic fantasy protects innocence, while Pandurang's cultural withdrawal resists Westernized knowledge. It introduces ethical-symbolic alienation to critique how these novels use literary form to critique their societies' moral and spiritual failures.

Keywords: Ethical, alienation, Holden, Pandurang

Introduction

Adolescence is often mythologized as a time of self-discovery and growth, yet it more accurately serves as edge of existential confusion, where identity, cultural belonging, and moral certainties begin to dissolve. J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosala* (1963), though separated by geography, language, and philosophical tradition, converge in their exploration of disaffected youth confronting alienation and institutional failure. Their protagonists, Holden Caulfield and Pandurang Sangvikar are not merely reacting to social pressures, but articulating deep, ethically charged dissatisfaction with the systems that shape their lives.

Review Literature

Scholarship on *The Catcher in the Rye* has highlighted Salinger's innovative prose style, psychological complexity, and philosophical leanings (Baskett 51; Slabey 173). *Kosala*, meanwhile, has been widely acknowledged for its pioneering role in Marathi nativist realism and its critique of postcolonial identity (Kanadey, "Critical Survey" 43; Hatkanagalekar 11). However, few comparative studies have examined how these novels construct alienation not only as a psychological or social issue but as a symbolic, ethical condition deeply tied to cultural and spiritual worldviews. The paper compares Salinger and Nemade's use of symbolic frameworks to represent alienation as a morally significant stance.

The comparative studies of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosala* are lacking, despite numerous individual analyses. Kishorkumar Gaikawad provides a foundational comparison by positioning *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Kosala* as Bildungsroman coming-of-age narratives that critique institutional authority and societal expectations. He views Holden Caulfield and Pandurang Sangvikar as adolescent figures in revolt against educational and cultural systems that stifle individuality (159–64). Gaikawad's analysis of alienation overlooks spiritual and symbolic registers.

Sam S. Baskett provides psychological insight into Holden's character, highlighting J.D. Salinger's disruption of traditional modernist form through stream-of-consciousness narration. This technique externalizes Holden's internal conflict, presenting a nuanced portrayal of the protagonist. Baskett argues that Holden "cannot articulate his values, though he knows what he rejects" (50), situating him within the postwar

landscape of existential discontent (48–61). However, Baskett, like Gaikawad, does not engage with Holden's symbolic or theological undertones.

Robert M. Slabey interprets Holden's journey as a Christian Advent season reenactment. He claims: *"The world quite clearly needs more than urban renewal: it needs Redemption. And Holden sees himself as the Redeemer as 'the catcher in the rye'"* (173). Holden's alienation is seen as a failed mission due to emotional immaturity and spiritual confusion. He highlights Nemade's resistance to Western literary models and praises *Kosala* for its *"psychological realism grounded in regional idioms"* ("Necessary Distinctions" 41; "Literary Scene" 76). Kanadey identifies the novel as a turning point in Marathi fiction. Similarly, M.D. Hatkanagalekar frames *Kosala* as a literary rupture an intentional departure from the polished aesthetics of colonial influence. He writes that the novel *"discarded sophistication for authenticity,"* anchoring Marathi prose in rural realities and existential introspection (11). *Kosala*'s role as a literary-political statement is corroborated, but Pandurang's alienation is often viewed as sociolinguistic rather than mythic or symbolic.

Bhalchandra Nemade's own writings further contextualize his ideological stance. In *Halli lekhakacha lekhakarao hoto to ka?*, he critiques post-independence literary culture for its obsession with novelty and market appeal. He provocatively asks: *"If this is the true consequence of novelty, is there any difference between literary writing and emptying one's bowels every day? Or between a shopkeeper and a writer?"* (qtd. in Nerlekar 132). This nativist manifesto forms the basis of Nemade's Deshivad philosophy, which emphasizes linguistic rootedness, cultural specificity, and epistemic sovereignty in Indian literature. Vinayak Kute interprets Pandurang as a symbolic embodiment of an ethical self-reincarnated across narratives. He contends that: *"These characters are manifestations of a single ethical atman navigating through newer, more confusing landscapes"* (4). Kute's reading places *Kosala* within the dharmic tradition of cyclical morality, where alienation is not a disorder to be resolved, but a sacred stance toward a morally disordered world.

A comparative criticism gap exists, lacking a substantial study comparing Holden's Christian-redemptive symbolism with Pandurang's dharmic alienation. Critics have not delved into how both novels construct alienation as an ethical critique.

A comparative-symbolic model of ethical-symbolic alienation is proposed, analyzing Holden Caulfield and Pandurang Sangvikar's alienation as symbolic resistance against morally corrupt societies. Holden's journey is interpreted through Christian themes, while Pandurang's is viewed through Hindu avataric thought and Deshivadi literary theory.

Holden Caulfield: Messianism and Metaphysical Recoil

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) has been widely interpreted, but its symbolic depth, especially its spiritual imagery, remains unexplored. Holden Caulfield, the protagonist, embodies a potential savior, alienated in a secular society.

Robert M. Slabey identifies Holden's three-day odyssey through New York as a symbolic reenactment of the Christian Advent season. In this reading, Holden becomes an unwilling Christ-figure: morally sensitive yet psychologically unprepared to enact redemption. Slabey asserts: "*The world quite clearly needs more than urban renewal: it needs Redemption. And Holden sees himself as the Redeemer as 'the catcher in the rye'*" (173). Holden's fantasy of rescuing children from a cliff becomes a metaphor for preserving innocence in a corrupted world. However, his inability to offer salvation to himself or others reveals the tragedy of the failed redeemer. He is a seeker without divine guidance, a prophet without revelation, trapped in a transitional state between grace and despair.

Holden's red hunting hat symbolizes his emotional turmoil and separation from society. Holden's hat symbolizes his desire to protect innocence and his fear of becoming like adults. Holden's fixation on childhood innocence, evident in his respect for his deceased brother Allie and his sister Phoebe, forms a pivotal aspect of his redemptive fantasy. He envisions an idealized moral world that has vanished. Slabey cautions that Holden's moral compass is compromised by excessive sentimentality, citing Blaise Pascal's warning: "*We are being sentimental when we give to a thing more tenderness than God gives to it*" (180).

Holden, not innocent himself, seeks to protect it. His alienation deepens as he realizes innocence is fleeting and defenseless. Instead of maturing, he retreats into romantic idealism, unable to reconcile his pure intentions with real-world ambiguity. Holden's alienation culminates in spiritual estrangement, not just from institutions but from meaning itself. Using the psychosocial lens offered by Eric and Mary Josephson, Holden fits the profile of the modern alienated man: "*The alienated man is one who feels himself estranged from*

God, from society, from the values and goals of his culture” (Josephson and Josephson 14). Holden’s critiques of “phonies,” his disengagement from school, and his inability to form lasting relationships go beyond immaturity; they indicate a breakdown of symbolic coherence. He is not only estranged from others but also from the narrative structures that could guide his transition into adulthood. This includes family, religion, education, and community.

Holden Caulfield, a symbolic figure of spiritual confusion and ethical yearning, fails to redeem himself despite his rebellious nature. His alienation stems from social hypocrisy and deeper metaphysical incoherence in postwar American culture. Interpreting Holden through Christian redemptive symbolism and psychosocial theory reveals a profound tragedy: spiritual isolation due to moral failure without the means for redemption.

Pandurang Sangvikar: Avatar, Alienation, and Nativist Identity

Pandurang Sangvikar’s alienation in *Kosala* stems from postcolonial identity contradictions, embodying ethical resistance against Western modernity and urban alienation.

Pandurang’s primary source of alienation lies in the urban university, where education is conducted in English or Sanskritized Marathi, disconnecting him from the rural cultural world he originates from. Vishwas R. Kanadey highlights that Nemade’s protagonist “resides in an internal conflict between the ritualized knowledge of his village and the institutionalized knowledge of the city” (“Critical Survey” 43). This contradiction leads to epistemic dislocation, a feeling of being educated yet unanchored in his own cultural heritage.

Pandurang rejects an education system imposing an alien language and worldview contradicting his lived experience. Vinayak Kute’s reading of Nemade’s fiction introduces a Hindu avataric framework. Rather than viewing Pandurang as a one-time, unique individual, Kute argues that he represents a recurring moral self an atman appearing in different guises across Nemade’s works: “*These characters are manifestations of a single ethical atman navigating through newer, more confusing landscapes*” (4). Pandurang’s silence and withdrawal are dharmic refusals to become complicit in cultural decline.

Unlike Holden, who fantasizes about saving others, Pandurang saves no one, not even himself. His narrative deviates from a redemptive arc, instead tracing a spiritual journey out of a corrupt world, aligning with the Indian philosophical tradition of sannyasa (renunciation) and vairagya (detachment).

Pandurang's linguistic and cultural resistance, rooted in Bhalchandra Nemade's *Deshivad* philosophy, manifests in his rural idiom, oral cadence, and introspective silence. This linguistic act of protest, embodying nativist sovereignty, asserts his identity through narrative form.

In contrast to Western frameworks that often pathologize detachment, Hindu ethics revere it. Pandurang's alienation is characterized by stillness, irony, dreams, and withdrawal, not as signs of dysfunction, but as sacred distancing from a chaotic world. In traditional Indian cosmology, avatars do not always intervene but may choose to withdraw during Kaliyuga, the age of darkness.

M.D. Hatkanagalekar points out that *Kosala* "discarded sophistication for authenticity," shedding light on the spiritual crisis experienced by post-independence youth (11). Pandurang's response, however, is not one of despair but of epistemic integrity, as he refuses to validate institutions that have lost their ethical authority. Pandurang Sangvikar is not a dropout or merely disillusioned; he is a dharmic figure, a bearer of ethical consciousness who refuses to participate in a system that demands the abandonment of cultural truth. Through the lens of *avataric* ethics, *Deshivadi* language politics, and postcolonial epistemic critique, Pandurang's alienation emerges not as a loss, but as a state of clarity. He is not alone in the world; he has simply chosen not to speak its compromised language.

Comparative Analysis

Holden and Pandurang, protagonists from different cultures, share a narrative core of alienation against societal structures. Holden's longing is Christian-metaphorical, while Pandurang's resistance is dharmic and cyclical.

Holden and Pandurang reject institutional systems because they perceive them as morally bankrupt. Their alienation is rooted in a longing for ethical coherence, but their spiritual grammars differ. Holden is tormented by the world's fallenness, seeking a redemptive mission to prevent corruption. His failed messianic vision leads to spiritual paralysis. Pandurang witnesses the epistemic collapse of his postcolonial

environment and chooses symbolic withdrawal over redemption. As Kute suggests, his alienation is avataric, appearing in dharmic crises to resist falsehoods.

Holden's language is fragmented, repetitive, and emotionally raw. His voice conveys inner turmoil and spiritual confusion stemming from a world that no longer makes sense. His informal, sarcastic narration reveals a desperate quest for genuine emotional connection. On the other hand, Pandurang's language, though also informal, deliberately incorporates rural idioms, folk sayings, and metaphorical introspection. His narrative skillfully weaves together memory, silence, and satire to express cultural dissonance and a refusal to adopt borrowed perspectives. As Nemade emphasizes in *Deshivad*, a writer must think, feel, and write from within their authentic native consciousness (qtd. in Nerlekar 132). Consequently, while Holden's voice serves as a manifestation of spiritual anguish, Pandurang's voice emerges as a powerful instrument of cultural survival.

Holden's narrative follows a quasi-Christian timeline: a three-day descent into chaos culminating in a moment of clarity while observing Phoebe on the carousel. Slabey interprets this as a symbolic Advent anticipating a redeemer who never fully arrives (177). Holden's journey flirts with resurrection but remains inconclusive. In contrast, Pandurang's narrative resists resolution. His story follows a cyclical, non-linear structure replete with repetitions, dreams, and philosophical digressions. This aligns with the Hindu worldview of cyclical time, where moral agents (avatars) emerge repeatedly across ages. Pandurang's detachment, unlike Holden's crisis of action, is a spiritually sanctioned choice.

Conclusion

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosala* both portray youthful alienation as a morally significant state. Their protagonists, Holden Caulfield and Pandurang Sangvikar, witness the ethical breakdown of their societies, with Holden's alienation reflecting Christian redemptive longing and Pandurang's reflecting Hindu philosophical frameworks and postcolonial cultural critique.

Both characters reject societal structures not out of nihilism but for ethical coherence. Their alienation isn't personal but a symbolic protest against conformity without meaning. In this sense, alienation becomes ethical clarity, a refusal to participate in moral falsehood.

This paper introduces ethical-symbolic alienation, a transcultural lens illuminating literary alienation as a profound moral response to societal disintegration. It broadens comparative literature beyond shared themes to encompass symbolic, ethical, and metaphysical grammars.

In our digital era, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Kosala* remain relevant, reminding us that alienation, rather than a flaw, may be the most authentic expression of integrity in a world lost.

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