

Alienation in Camus' The Outsider and Bhalchandra Nemade's Kosla: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: *Alienation is a key theme in modern literature. It captures a profound anxiety: the feeling that an individual no longer belongs fully to society, inherited values, or even their own emotions and thoughts. The modern age, marked by social change, moral instability, urbanization, educational pressure, and philosophical doubt, has created characters who feel apart from the world around them. Albert Camus' The Outsider and Bhalchandra Nemade's Kosla are two significant novels from different literary traditions that explore this theme with great depth. Despite their distinct cultural and philosophical backgrounds, both stories focus on protagonists who feel disconnected from their surroundings. Meursault in The Outsider seems detached, emotionally indifferent, and resistant to moral expectations from society. In contrast, Pandurang Sangvikar in Kosla is introspective, unsettled, and deeply unhappy with the social and educational systems around him. This paper compares the theme of alienation in these two novels. It argues that while alienation in Camus' work is primarily existential and tied to the philosophy of the absurd, alienation in Nemade's novel is social, cultural, and psychological. It arises from the pressures of youth, education, and a shifting postcolonial society. By examining these two works together, the paper aims to show that alienation is both a universal modern issue and a literary experience shaped by culture.*

Keywords: Alienation, Existentialism, Absurd, Comparative Literature, Modernism, Camus, Bhalchandra Nemade, The Outsider, Kosla, Identity Crisis

I. INTRODUCTION

The theme of alienation has become a major concern in modern literature. Writers across cultures and languages often create characters who feel estranged from society. These characters struggle with inner conflict or cannot find stable meaning in the world around them. They often feel disconnected from family, social institutions, emotional relationships, moral values, and even themselves. Alienation is, therefore, a complex concept. It includes feelings of loneliness, social withdrawal, emotional emptiness, loss of identity, dissatisfaction with institutions, and, at a deeper philosophical level, the understanding that life itself may lack guaranteed meaning.

The rise of alienation as a literary theme closely connects with the historical conditions of modernity. The twentieth century brought war, displacement, social change, industrial development, urban expansion, and the weakening of traditional belief systems. Individuals no longer felt securely anchored within inherited communities, moral systems, and clear social identities. Literature began to depict a fractured and questioning self. The modern hero often lacks traditional heroism. Instead, he may appear confused, detached, ironic, or silently resistant. Resistance may not always be loud rebellion; at times, it is marked by an inability or unwillingness to belong.



In this context, Albert Camus' *The Outsider* and Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla* offer valuable texts for comparison. These novels come from very different literary traditions. *The Outsider* stems from the French intellectual world and reflects Camus' thoughts on absurdity, freedom, and human existence. *Kosla*, however, is a significant Marathi novel rooted in the Indian social and cultural landscape, particularly in the experience of youth, education, and changes after independence. Yet, both novels present protagonists who feel distanced from the society surrounding them. Meursault and Pandurang Sangvikar are both outsiders, though their experiences of alienation differ significantly.

Meursault's alienation shows through emotional detachment and a refusal to pretend that life carries the moral and emotional meanings society expects. He does not participate in emotional rituals, making him troubling to those around him. In contrast, Pandurang is not coldly detached. He is acutely aware, restless, and often painfully reflective. His alienation stems from social disappointment, intellectual dissatisfaction, psychological conflict, and a clear perception of the hollow patterns surrounding him. Thus, while both novels explore alienation, they reflect different cultural and philosophical interpretations of the same broad modern issue.

This paper compares alienation in *The Outsider* and *Kosla* by closely examining the protagonists, their relationship with society, the reasons for their estrangement, and the narrative styles used by the authors. The paper argues that alienation in *The Outsider* is fundamentally existential and metaphysical, while alienation in *Kosla* is more deeply grounded in social, cultural, and psychological factors. Such a comparison deepens our understanding of each text's uniqueness and demonstrates how comparative literature can connect Western and Indian works through shared human concerns while respecting their cultural differences.

II. UNDERSTANDING ALIENATION: LITERARY, SOCIAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS

Alienation is a term used in philosophy, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism, and it carries different meanings in each field. Broadly, alienation refers to estrangement or separation. A person might feel alienated from society, work, relationships, cultural values, or even themselves. In literature, alienation often appears through characters who see the world around them as unconvincing, oppressive, empty, or emotionally distant.

As a social condition, alienation can arise when institutions like family, school, religion, or work fail to provide individuals with participation and meaning. In these cases, individuals view social life as external, mechanical, or hypocritical. As a psychological condition, alienation may involve loneliness, anxiety, inner division, confusion, and emotional withdrawal. A person might feel unable to communicate honestly or lose faith in shared values. As a philosophical condition, alienation can stem from the realization that existence itself lacks any fixed or ultimate purpose. In this sense, alienation reflects not just society failing the individual, but also the universe failing to provide meaning for human longing.

Modern literature uses these dimensions of alienation in various combinations. Some characters feel alienated because they are too sensitive for their world. Others become detached after losing faith in institutions. Some are isolated by society, while others choose to withdraw. Sometimes, alienation offers insight; at other times, it leads to despair or paralysis. This complexity makes alienation a rich theme in literature. It is both a personal emotion and a historical symptom.

When we read *The Outsider* and *Kosla*, we see two different but overlapping kinds of alienation. Meursault feels disconnected from societal expectations due to his emotional and existential detachment. Pandurang feels cut off because he cannot accept the social reality presented to him. In one case, alienation arises from life's absurdity; in the other, it originates from contradictions in social reality. Both experiences are modern, but they reflect different aspects of modernity.



III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theme of alienation has received ongoing attention in modern literary studies, especially in relation to twentieth-century fiction. Scholars have looked at alienation as a psychological and social issue, as well as a philosophical response to modern life, absurdity, and identity crises. In Albert Camus' *The Outsider* and Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla*, the concept of alienation is particularly important because both novels feature protagonists who feel separate from their surroundings, even though they do so in culturally distinct ways.

Much criticism of Albert Camus focuses on the existential and absurd aspects of *The Outsider*. Critics often see Meursault as a symbol of modern estrangement, with his emotional detachment and indifference challenging social norms. Camus' own philosophical ideas, particularly those related to the absurd, heavily influence much of the analysis of the novel. Many scholars argue that Meursault experiences alienation not just because he is socially isolated, but because he exists in a world that lacks fixed meaning. His refusal to display conventional emotions, especially at his mother's funeral and during his trial, is interpreted as a sign of existential honesty. In this view, Meursault becomes an outsider because he rejects false comforts and won't conform to society's moral standards.

Some critics have also highlighted the narrative style of *The Outsider* as a key factor in illustrating alienation. The simple, restrained, and detached language matches Meursault's own mindset and creates a sense of emotional distance. Scholars point out that Camus' minimal style serves a thematic purpose; it reflects the emptiness and indifference that shape the protagonist's experiences. Other readings connect the novel to colonial Algeria, suggesting that Meursault's detachment is tied to the wider social and political context of the time. Nonetheless, most criticism of Camus continues to focus on absurdism, existential isolation, and the tension between the individual and society.

In *Kosla*, criticism mainly looks at its significance in modern Marathi literature and its depiction of youth, disillusionment, and social commentary. Bhalchandra Nemade is seen as a key figure in Marathi fiction, and *Kosla* is often viewed as a groundbreaking novel due to its unique narrative voice and honest portrayal of a young man's inner life. Critics note that Pandurang Sangvikar represents a generation caught between ambition and disappointment. His dissatisfaction with education, social expectations, and institutional life reflects the larger crisis facing modern educated youth.

Several scholars observe that *Kosla* diverges from earlier Marathi fiction in its language, tone, and outlook. Its conversational style, ironic narration, and focus on personal experience mark it as a distinctly modern piece. In critical discussions, Pandurang is often viewed as alienated not just in an existential sense but also socially and psychologically. His estrangement arises from the gap between the individual and surrounding structures like family, education, and social norms. Critics also mention that the novel captures the anxiety of transition in post-independence Indian society, where traditional expectations often clash with modern ambitions. This makes alienation in *Kosla* deeply rooted in local cultural experiences.

Some broader studies in comparative literature and modern fiction have looked at alienation as a universal literary theme across cultures. These studies suggest that while alienation appears in many literary traditions, its causes and expressions differ based on historical and cultural contexts. Western modernist and existential texts often portray alienation in terms of a lack of metaphysical meaning, while Indian novels frequently relate alienation to social change, identity crises, and frustration with institutions. This distinction helps clarify the differences between Meursault and Pandurang, even though both can be considered outsiders.

Despite the extensive scholarship on both *The Outsider* and *Kosla* separately, there is relatively little comparative work bringing these two novels together through the lens of alienation. Most analyses of Camus remain focused on



existentialist or absurdist readings, while studies of Nemade emphasize regional modernity, youth discontent, and narrative innovation. A direct comparison between Meursault and Pandurang can address this gap, showcasing how two different literary traditions portray the modern condition of estrangement in distinct yet comparable ways.

This study builds on existing scholarship on alienation, absurdism, modernity, and youth disillusionment, but it goes further than separate analyses of the novels. It aims to compare the forms, causes, and implications of alienation in *The Outsider* and *Kosla* to show that alienation is both a universal modern experience and a product of cultural expression.

IV. ALIENATION IN CAMUS' THE OUTSIDER

Albert Camus' *The Outsider* is one of the most discussed novels when it comes to alienation, and for good reason. Its main character, Meursault, is one of the most unsettling and memorable outsider figures in twentieth-century literature. What makes him so striking is not his dramatic quirks, but his refusal, or inability, to act according to the emotional and moral standards expected by society. He does not conform out of a conscious desire for rebellion, but due to indifference. This indifference becomes the root of his alienation.

From the start of the novel, Meursault's attitude sets him apart. His reaction to his mother's death is straightforward, factual, and emotionally muted. He does not show grief in the usual way, and this becomes the first sign of his disconnect from society. For those around him, grief is not just a personal feeling, but also a social ritual that must be shown, acted out, and acknowledged. Meursault does not take part in this ritual. His emotional silence is seen as a moral failing.

This tension persists throughout the novel. Meursault's relationships with love, marriage, friendships, and work remain equally detached. He is not driven by ambition, guilt, romantic ideals, or spiritual desires. He experiences the world mostly through his senses—sunlight, heat, the sea, fatigue, and immediate sensations. He does not look for deeper symbolic meanings where society expects them. When Marie asks him if he loves her, his response does not fulfill the emotional script that accompanies love. When she proposes marriage, he responds without enthusiasm or idealization. He is willing to go along with things, but he will not pretend that they mean more to him than they actually do. This detachment makes him seem odd, even inhuman, to others.

However, it would be too simple to see Meursault as just emotionally lacking. Camus portrays him as someone who lives without illusions. He does not lie to meet social expectations. In a world where people constantly create comforting meanings, Meursault stands apart because he accepts the fundamental indifference of existence. This is where the philosophy of the absurd becomes important. For Camus, the absurd emerges from the clash between the human need for order and the world's refusal to provide it. Meursault lives within that silence without trying to cover it with religion, sentiment, or conventional morality. His alienation is not just social; it is also metaphysical.

The murder scene is often seen as the novel's central event, but the trial that follows reveals even more about alienation. Meursault is judged less for the complexity of his crime and more for the kind of person he appears to be. The prosecutor and others repeatedly focus on his behavior at the funeral—his calm demeanor and his lack of remorse. Society is less shocked by the crime than by his failure to exhibit expected human emotions. In this way, the novel shows that society punishes not just legal violations but also emotional nonconformity. Meursault becomes an outsider because he refuses to engage in the shared language of meaning.

His conversation with the chaplain toward the end of the novel highlights his alienation. The chaplain urges him to embrace faith, repentance, and hope for divine meaning. Meursault rejects all of it. He will not sacrifice his honesty at the last moment. He would rather confront death in a meaningless universe than accept a false sense of comfort. This



rejection grants him a kind of harsh dignity. His alienation reaches its peak here, but it also transforms into a kind of freedom. He accepts the truth of existence as he sees it: a world without ultimate meaning, where people face life and death without consolation.

Thus, alienation in *The Outsider* is deeply existential. Meursault is alienated from society because he does not believe in its emotional rituals, and he is alienated from existence because he acknowledges the silence at the core of the universe. But this recognition also gives him clarity. His alienation is painful, yet it is also a pathway to truth.

V. ALIENATION IN BHALCHANDRA NEMADE'S KOSLA

Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla* presents alienation differently. While Camus' novel is sparse, controlled, and philosophically dense, *Kosla* is expansive, ironic, intimate, and deeply rooted in social experience. Its main character, Pandurang Sangvikar, is one of the most significant alienated figures in modern Marathi literature. Unlike Meursault, Pandurang is not defined by emotional emptiness. He is sensitive, intelligent, observant, and often painfully aware of the contradictions surrounding him. Yet this awareness does not help him fit into society. Instead, it intensifies his estrangement.

At the heart of Pandurang's alienation is a deep dissatisfaction with the world that claims to be meaningful. Education, family, social connections, and cultural expectations all seem fragmented, artificial, or oppressive. Instead of providing direction, they cause confusion. He is not an outsider because he cannot feel; he is an outsider because his feelings do not align with the structures around him.

One key aspect of alienation in *Kosla* is the education crisis. Pandurang's time as a student does not lead to intellectual fulfillment or personal growth. The educational system feels lifeless, disconnected from reality, and unable to nurture individual minds. What should have been a path to self-discovery turns into a source of frustration. This is significant because, in modern India, education is often linked with progress, aspiration, and social mobility. But for Pandurang, it highlights the emptiness of institutional life. His alienation has a distinctly social and cultural foundation.

Another source of his alienation is the disconnect between personal consciousness and societal expectations. Pandurang lives in a community where family and culture continue to shape identity, but he struggles to meet those expectations. He does not see inherited values as stable sources of meaning. Meanwhile, modern alternatives also fail to satisfy him. He is stuck between worlds—tradition and modernity, belonging and detachment, aspiration and disappointment. This in-betweenness is central to his alienation.

Pandurang's mental state also plays a crucial role. He is deeply self-reflective, and this introspection often turns into irony and self-distance. He examines not only others but also himself. He questions motives, exposes pretensions, and resists simplification. Yet this keen awareness becomes a burden. The more he understands, the less he can engage innocently with the world. He cannot fully commit to institutions or relationships because he sees their emptiness. Yet, he struggles to create a fully satisfying alternative. Thus, his alienation is not just from society but also from certainty.

Nemade's narrative style is vital to this portrayal. The voice of *Kosla* is personal, casual, and rich with irony. It does not depict alienation as an abstract concept. Instead, it comes to life through real speech, everyday observations, and personal reflections. This is one of the novel's great achievements. Pandurang's alienation is not merely described; it unfolds through the narrative's texture. The reader senses his mental fluctuations, the sarcasm in his remarks, and the weariness beneath his humor.



The social world of Kosla is not just a backdrop but an active force in shaping alienation. Pandurang's estrangement reflects the broader experience of a young person in a rapidly changing society. Aspirations after independence, educational systems, urban life, and family pressures all contribute to a consciousness that feels increasingly displaced. He is not alienated from an abstract universe like Meursault; he is alienated from a tangible world that feels false, demanding, and inadequate.

At the same time, Kosla does not reduce alienation to a mere social complaint. The novel is too nuanced for that. Pandurang's alienation is also internal. He cannot find peace even within his own thoughts. His identity remains unstable. His observations do not yield final clarity but rather an ongoing sense of unrest. In this sense, his alienation is unresolved, dynamic, and profoundly human.

VI. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A comparative study of *The Outsider* and *Kosla* shows that both novels connect through the modern experience of feeling disconnected. However, they differ significantly in how they portray and structure that experience. The first clear similarity is in the protagonists. Meursault and Pandurang are both outsiders. They do not fit into the social systems around them. They cannot accept societal values without question. Their stories unfold through their distance from others, and this distance shapes their view of the world.

Yet, the nature of that distance is very different for each character. Meursault's alienation is marked by emotional restraint. He does not dramatize or reflect deeply on his feelings. His awareness stays close to immediate sensations and facts. In contrast, Pandurang is both intellectually and emotionally engaged. He thinks, comments, doubts, mocks, and reflects. If Meursault feels alienated in silence and detachment, Pandurang's alienation arises from his very awareness.

The reasons for their alienation differ sharply as well. Meursault's disconnect comes from his refusal to engage in the emotional and moral performances society expects. He does not express what he does not feel, and he will not create false meanings. His alienation is therefore rooted in existential and philosophical issues. Pandurang's alienation, on the other hand, stems from real-life pressures: the education system, family expectations, social hypocrisy, and the struggle to fit into a world that does not support his individuality. His alienation is social and psychological before it turns philosophical.

Their relationships with society highlight this difference. In *The Outsider*, society ultimately isolates Meursault through legal and moral judgment. The trial marks a dramatic moment where his alienation becomes visible to everyone. In *Kosla*, alienation is less dramatic but more ongoing. Pandurang does not face public condemnation in a single decisive moment. Instead, he experiences a slow and cumulative estrangement in everyday life. This makes his alienation feel more spread out and woven into society.

The cultural contexts of the novels are also significant. *The Outsider* comes from a world shaped by a European philosophical crisis and colonial influences. Camus uses Meursault to explore the absurd and the individual's battle with meaninglessness. *Kosla* arises from a post-independence Marathi setting, where education, mobility, and modern aspirations clash with traditional social structures. Nemade uses Pandurang to show the tensions within this changing society. Thus, while both novels depict modern isolation, one takes a philosophical approach while the other is rooted in social realities.

The narrative styles set them apart as well. Camus' writing is sparse, restrained, and clear. This mirrors Meursault's personality and establishes an emotional distance. Nemade's style is more fluid, conversational, and ironic. Through this style, Pandurang's alienation becomes personal and culturally rich. In both cases, the form supports the themes, but in very different ways.



The endings of the novels also contrast sharply. Meursault moves toward a final moment of clarity. In accepting death without illusion, he comes to terms with the absurd. Pandurang, however, does not reach a similar resolution. His alienation remains dynamic. There is no ultimate philosophical closure, only the persistence of an unsettled awareness. This difference is important as it highlights two distinct paths within alienation: one leading to stark recognition and the other remaining caught in social and psychological conflict.

VII. ALIENATION AS A UNIVERSAL AND CULTURE-SPECIFIC EXPERIENCE

The comparison between these novels suggests that alienation can be seen as both universal and shaped by culture. It is universal because feelings of disconnection, loss of belonging, and the search for meaning affect everyone, regardless of language or society. People everywhere experience moments when the world feels distant, values seem empty, and identity grows unclear. Literature powerfully captures this shared vulnerability.

At the same time, alienation always reflects local realities. Meursault's world differs from Pandurang's. Their sources of dissatisfaction are not interchangeable. One is influenced by the absurd silence of existence and the moral demands of a European colonial society, while the other is shaped by the cultural contradictions of post-independence India, educational challenges, and the chaos of youth awareness. Comparing them meaningfully does not simplify them into a single pattern; it reveals how a common human experience appears in different literary forms.

This is where comparative literature is particularly valuable. It allows us to connect texts across different traditions without subsuming one under the terms of another. By comparing *The Outsider* and *Kosla*, we see that alienation is not just an imported philosophical idea or a Western concept forced onto Indian literature. Instead, it is a vibrant literary experience expressed in culturally significant ways. Such comparisons expand our literary understanding and encourage us to treat regional works with the same seriousness as globally recognized texts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Alienation is a profound and enduring theme in modern fiction. Both Albert Camus' *The Outsider* and Bhalchandra Nemade's *Kosla* offer rich and memorable depictions of it. Through Meursault and Pandurang Sangvikar, these novels showcase individuals who remain separated from their worlds. Yet, their alienation does not stem from the same causes. Meursault's estrangement is rooted in emotional distance, existential reality, and his refusal to engage in society's comforting falsehoods. Pandurang's alienation arises from disappointment with education, conflicts with social expectations, psychological unrest, and the pressures of a shifting world.

The comparison between these two characters shows that alienation is not a single, fixed concept. It can be calm or restless, philosophical or social, cool or deeply reflective. In *The Outsider*, alienation peaks in the acceptance of the absurd. In *Kosla*, it remains open-ended, unresolved, and embedded in society's contradictions. Both forms are significant as they illustrate different aspects of modern awareness.

Ultimately, reading these novels together allows us to see both the universality of alienation and the role of context in shaping it. Camus and Nemade, though from different cultures and languages, both understand that modern individuals often struggle to find belonging. They also show that this struggle varies depending on one's environment. Their works remind us that literature does not just describe alienation; it gives voice, form, and emotional depth to experiences that might otherwise remain unspoken. In this way, both *The Outsider* and *Kosla* serve as powerful artistic expressions of the loneliness, honesty, and unresolved tension in modern life.



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