Volume : 2 | Issue : 4 | April 2013 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper | Literature

The Indecisiveness and Hypocrisy of Holden in J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye.

Mr Chandramani

Lecturer in English, Gandhi Institute of Industrial Technology, Golanthara, Berhampur-761008, Odisha.

ABSTRACT

The novel The Catcher in the Rye of J. D. Salinger's speaks of the typical American youths through the main protagonist Holden Caulfield. The novel is about Holden's dilemmas as an embodiment of typical America youths. He refers his society as 'a diseased one.' He is often misunderstood, underestimated and humiliated by others in exception to Phoebe. He sets on a sojourn for the quest of an enlightened being. He later assumes himself as 'the catcher' to catch the people who go astray. Hegoes through the illusionsand grim realities which unfolds him into a brave new world. He later discovers that the change he is seeking in the people is impossible unless he change his own self. He tries to save the people by epitomizing himself as the only mortal savior. The indecisiveness of Holden is as a result of his excessive inclination towards spiritual and morality. Thus, the novel highlights transformation of self by purifying the inner-being.

KEYWORDS: typical, dilemmas, embodiment, conscience, epitomising and mortal saviour.

J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye is designed for the general youths to explore what life was like for teenagers such as Holden, in the 1950's in America. The article investigates the lifestyles of teenagers in the 1950's. Salinger's novelis essentially autobiographical and based on his real life experiences. It is quite ironic that Salinger suggests the need to connect with and understand one another in The Catcher in the Rye; yet in his private life he sets himself apart from the world.

The novel and its character Holden in particular is severely criticized yet most of the Critics idealize Holden by resisting down the seriousness of his ambivalence, exhibitionism and assign the blame for his severe depression entirely to society, to the world of perverts and phonies. Salinger asserts that Holden is right and the world wrong and there is a sharp dichotomy between Holden and the world he loathes. Charles H. Kegel refers to Holden's "absolute hatred of phoniness." Carl F. Strauch cites "the violent contrast between... society and Holden's world."And Ihab Hassan rightly views Holden's "retreat to childhood" as "an affirmation of values."

Ambivalence is characteristic of Holden and the evidence of his mental instability. If he loathes what he loves and does so intensely, he is by no means well. He is also not what the readers assume he is: an anti-establishment figure whose disgust is directed entirely at other people. It's easy to demonstrate that Holden is ambivalent since he is ambivalent toward so many people and things. He hates movies and the Lunts but attends movies and takes Sally to a play starring the Lunts. He is contemptuous of Pencey but is careful to emphasize that it has a "very good academic rating". He claims to loathe the perverts but makes a special effort to watch them and even admits that "that kind of junk is fascinating" and that he wouldn't mind doing it himself "if the opportunity came up". He criticizes phony conversations but engages in them himself-with Mr. Spencer and Ernest Morrow's mother. He criticizes others for using a phony word like "grand", but he uses equally phony words such as "nice" and "swell". He loathes Ackley and Stradlater but misses them as soon as they're gone. He wants to see people like Mr Antolini, Mr Spencer and Carl Luce but doesn't like them when they're in his presence. Thus, Holden's ambivalence is a certain indication of his mental instability.

The novel tackles numerous themes such as the misfit hero, the phony versus the nice world, alienation and vulnerability, love of different kinds, society, philosophy, escapism and quest for a moral idea. Like any great novel of the present time, it too finds its base on socio-cultural situations. The novel is beautifully presented through the elation and woes of Holden Caulfield. He desires to find a peaceful existence as a consequence of his fretful mind. Although he finds his desired place in the field of Rye yet we are uncertain of his success as 'a catcher.' When Holden says that he wants to be the Catcher in the Rye, he reveals a great deal about himself-a great deal more than he knows. He reveals that he does not seriously want to learn about himself and won't make the effort. Phoebe's efforts to make Holden realize in this regard go in vain. The novel encompasses the character of protagonist as a major revolution in the American society and the authenticity of the protagonist lies in his judgmental attitude.

Holden throughout the novel does not allow evil thoughts to have control over his mind. However, we could see glimpses of evil thoughts in him for a brief periodreigning his mind. No doubt, these thoughts are less harmful yet he remains indecisive of making them come into reality. His fickle mind is justified when we consider an incident that happened with Holden in Edmont Hotel involving a Prostitute. Though he wants the company of a prostitute, he does not really feel good about her bizarre sexual activities. He says, "My sex life stinks" (The Catcher148). This suggests his inability to relate sexually to females. His conscience never permits him to get involve in nasty activities. His conscience remains intact and undiluted in a series of evil tendencies unlike other typical American youths of the 1950s.

This research paper unravels the complexities of an emotional war, one that happens inside an individual in need of more satisfying life. Holden's personality is portrayed as challenging who ventures deep in search of spiritual fulfilment. He identifies himself as a loner in the world- a different being in the pursuit of spiritual happiness. He wrestles with his conscience to survive in a diseased society. He strives for spiritual freedom, spiritual bliss and spiritual conscience. He fights to overcome loss and rise to the zenith of social conventions making people realize of the rightful path. In a fight against social norms, He is faced with a unique fate. The very glue that holds him intact is the determining factor in whether or not he becomes spiritually fulfilled.

The novelist primarily discusses the concept of the 'misfit hero' (Paul Levine) or 'the moral hero' who represents the young characters who dissociate themselves from the rest and who share aspecial moral code that springs from the feelings of love, alienation and salvation. The misfit hero is a person in conflict with himself, and at the same time he represents a combination of nice and unique qualities. The most noticeable of Holden's "peculiarities" is how extremely judgmental he is of almost everything and everybody. He criticizes and philosophizes about people who are boring, insecure, and people who are "phony." Herejects more complex judgments in favour of simple categorical ones.

Holden finds the hypocrisy of the world around him unbearable and through his cynicism he tries to protect himself from the pain and disappointment of the adult world. The criticisms that Holden aims at people around him are also aimed at himself. He

is uncomfortable with his own weaknesses, and at times displays much phoniness and superficiality. As the novel opens, Holden stands poised on the cliff separating childhood from adulthood. His inability to successfully negotiate the chasm leaves him on the verge of emotional collapse.

Holden desperately needs human contact and love, but his protective wall of bitterness prevents him from interaction with others. Alienation is both the source of Holden's strength and the source of his problems. For example, his loneliness propels him into date with Sally Hayes but his need for isolation causes him to insult her and drive her away. He manifests complete apathy toward his future. His emotional state is affected by the two traumas that happened in his past: the death of his brother Allie and the suicide of one of his schoolmates.

Holden's name suggests dual meaning: a 'caul' is a membrane that covers the head of a foetus during birth.Thus, theCaulin his name may symbolize the inability of the child to see the complexity of the adult world. His full name might be read as Hold-on Caul-field: he wants to hold onto what he sees as his innocence, which is really his blindness. Holden's stunted emotional maturity and stubborn outlook seem less charming and more foolish. In reality, Phoebe realizes that Holden's bitterness toward the rest of the world is really bitterness toward himself. She see him deeply sad, insecure young man who needs love and support. Towards the end of the novel, when she shows up at the museum and demands to come with him, she seems not so much to need Holden as to understand that he needs her.

Salinger uses concepts to make the readers achieve the very essence of reaching a state of awakening which can help an individual surpass all conscious knowledge and thus achieve the ultimate state of 'Moksha' and the enlightenment necessary to ease the way to achieving 'ultimate freedom.' The sojourn of Holden is brought about by a series of interpretations by Robert A. Hipkiss who sees him suffering from a fear, "that to move into adulthood in American society is to destroy oneself spiritually" (Hipkiss 96).

Holden's home situation is quite unfortunate and it is easy to empathize with him. His family situation is far from ideal. The father barely exists as far as Holden and Phoebe are concerned, and the mother is not emotionally involved in the lives of her children. This is revealed in the scene in which the Caulfields return from a party. First of all, they are indifferent to Phoebe. Although she is still a child, they have left her home alone. When they do return home late at night, only Mrs. Caulfield bothers to look in on her daughter. In other words, Holden wants to live apart from men. Holden moves randomly and nervously from one subject to another. He feels trapped in life, and he frequently attempts to find his way in a world in which he feels he doesn't fit.

Holden attempts to move forward brushing aside his evil. For a contended life he stops retrospections of his ugly past toprovide solace to himself. He did realize that one will not get affection, love and care unless one gives his sincere efforts. Holden's realization of himself is one way of realizing his soul for spiritual bliss. The conclusion of the novel affirms that a spiritual journey has taken place. Holden is more improved in state than described at the beginning of the novel. Thus, at the end of the novel he is granted a new perspective on the conflict that once consumed his life. He successfully completes his most difficult task that of finding his sense of self. As a result, he faces the future with strength and confidence.

REFERENCES

Carl F, Strauch. Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure, A Reading of Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 2 (Winter, 1961), 11. Charles H,Kegel. "Incommunicability in Salinger's TheCatcher in the Rye," Western Humanities Review, 11 (Spring, 1957), p. 189. Hassan, Ihab. Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 261. Hipkiss, Robert A. Jack Kerouac, Prophet of the New Romanticism. The Regents Press of Kansas, 1976. Levine, Paul. "J. D. Salinger: The Development of the Misfit Hero." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Vol. 12. Eds. DedriaBryfonski and Gerald J. Senick. Detroit: Gale, 1980. 498-500. Print. Salinger, Jerome David. The Catcher in the Rye. 1951. London: Penguin Books, 1994. Print.