

Political Polarization and Societal Struggles in Pakistan: A Dialogic Exploration of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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ABSTRACT: *Following qualitative research, the empirical study has engaged educators in an online inter-university dialogue to explore their perceptions of the socio-political realities of the contemporary world, with reference to the play Waiting for Godot. Participants were engaged in dialogue via Google Circles. Using Google Docs in groups, participants liaised digitally about the selected play, which is common across the curricula of public-sector universities across Pakistan. Since the present study engages educators in dialogue exchange, Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism (1984) has guided this study. The collected data from participants' written dialogic exchange transcripts via Google Circles was analyzed using the Thematic Analysis model, explicated by Saldana (2015). The key arguments based on the findings demonstrate that participants discussed and connected to the socio-political realities of contemporary Pakistan in the play, where both the literary plot and the real world reflect the state of hopeless waiting, dissatisfaction, and uncertainty. In both, power dominance is shaped by political polarization, socioeconomic inequalities, and systemic flaws. The findings are valuable for curriculum designers, literature instructors, and researchers in dialogic teaching as they provide significant insights into arguments for socio-political turbulent tides and their reflection in the literary world.*

Keywords: Dialogism, literary exchange, dialogue, paralysis, Waiting for Godot, Political polarization

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Introduction

Political unrest and instability in any country lead to social turbulence and economic devastation. Similarly, the stress associated with political disagreements leads to deleterious effects not only on social performance but also on mental and physical health. The harmful effects of political polarization are a known perpetuating stressor, cluttering society and traversing daily life through media, various internet platforms, and persisting news feed (Ford 123-124). Additionally, the American Psychological Association (APA 11) identified politics as a major source of stress for today's adults. There is a large body of research pointing towards the abusive effects of cultic politics and its adverse emotional consequences.

Pakistan is a South Asian Muslim country of more than 220 million population with a relatively unstable political history and abysmal socio-economic and health indicators. Mental health statistics are staggering, with a wide treatment gap and no dedicated budgetary allocation of annual gross domestic product (GDP) (Sikander 845). In addition to the existing heavy burden of mental health issues and traditional entrenched religious intolerance in Pakistan, the recent wave of political intolerance and social insecurities has polarized the society to an unprecedented level. This wave of polarization has permeated all strata of society, with sporadic reports of violence, which is likely to deteriorate further in the presence of unregulated and excessive use of social media.

Pakistan is a country where, due to political uncertainty and corruption, societal norms and ethics have deteriorated alongside economic depression (Imran et al. 03). Security dilemma, lack of justice, dearth of employment opportunities, increased crime, and violence have exacerbated the social and economic downfall in the country. The country has a multitude of risk factors, including distal determinants such as poverty, a demographically young population, political instability, terrorism, and frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. These are compounded by more proximal determinants, including the lack of legislation and enforcement on socio-political concerns (Hyder and Razzak 12). The given political climate of polarization and social insecurities has a tremendous social impact, where more than half a million people are suspected to be psychologically traumatized. Unfortunately, the young population is affected more easily by the polarized environment in the country, which should be the most productive segment of society. The reviewed literature reflects that the younger population is more impressionable and highly vulnerable to becoming radicalized in a polarized society. Feelings of social disparities, dissatisfaction, a sense of marginalization, and deprivation are evident, and suicides are more prevalent among those less than 35 years of age. (Hyder and Razzak 3-4),

Dialogue is a fundamental concept in Bakhtin's understanding of language, literature, and society. Discussing social issues and engaging in meaningful dialogue helps us learn and comprehend the world more thoroughly. In literature education, connecting literary themes to the real world is common in literary analysis. The theoretical dimensions of dialogism (02) view that all languages are inherently dialogic, meaning that every utterance exists in relation to other utterances and the social context in which they are produced. This dynamic interplay between different voices creates a rich and complex tapestry of meaning that is always in flux, constantly shifting and evolving as new voices enter the conversation. Therefore, understanding is always provisional and open to revision.

The present study establishes the connection between literature and life by focusing on the socio-political issues of the age in which the work was written (Afshan & Ali 124). Undoubtedly, literature resonates with the realistic picture of life, men, and mannerisms; so is the case with Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, which reflects life after the Second World War. The very existence of human beings is seriously questioned amidst the absurdity and chaos after WWII. The actions and conversation between the two trams truly depict the futility of human existence and the environment where nothing is done. Likewise, Pakistan is passing through similar conditions where political and economic instability has created manifold problems, and the meaning of human life and its very existence are endangered. All these conditions have led the masses to become mentally sick; they have started behaving insane manner, engaging themselves in futile activities, and qualified people are migrating abroad. Hence, the current socio-political circumstances resemble the plot of the play, reflecting a sense of boredom and chaos. Pakistan is currently struggling in darkness with an uncertain future, unemployment, inflation, and decreased living standards, echoing the depressed air (Yousafzai 01). Feelings of social disparities, dissatisfaction, a sense of marginalization, and deprivation among the vulnerable youth of the country are evident (Hyder and Razzak 3-4). The trams in the play face a similar chaotic fate, resulting in futile activities to pass the time, and they remain in a state of waiting for someone who will come as a messiah and will resolve their issues. Keeping the striking similarities between Beckett's play and the current state of Pakistan's youth, the study has engaged literature teachers in an online dialogic literary exchange, directed by Bakhtin's dialogism (02).

Research Questions

Q1: How do participants relate the current socio-political situations of Pakistan to the characters' state of *Waiting for Godot*?

Q2: How do participants connect the actions and dialogues of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* to the activities of Pakistani youth?

Theoretical Framework: Bakhtin's Concept of Dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin, a renowned Russian philosopher and literary theorist, is known for his concept of dialogism. Dialogism refers to the idea that communication is an ongoing dialogue between individuals or groups, where multiple voices are heard and interact with each other. Dialogue, according to Bakhtin (6-7), is a position we adopt towards other people and their ideas. A dialogic position involves us being constantly aware of the other person, not to adopt their ideas precisely or force our own on them, but to comprehend the relationship between our thoughts and their ideas. Seeing ourselves and our ideas in the context of others and their views helps us learn and comprehend the world more thoroughly.

The theoretical dimensions of dialogism by Bakhtin are key ideas in literary theory and cultural studies. He posits the view that all language is inherently dialogic, meaning that every utterance exists in relation to other utterances and the social context in which they are produced. Furthermore, he argues that dialogue is not just a matter of two individuals exchanging words, but rather a complex social process involving multiple voices and perspectives. This dynamic interplay between different voices creates a rich and complex tapestry of meaning that is always in flux, constantly shifting and evolving as new voices enter the conversation. Therefore, understanding is always provisional and open to revision, as it depends on ongoing conversations with others.

Dialogue is a fundamental concept in Bakhtin's understanding of language, literature, and society. His comparison between dialogue and monologue is a key component of his method. 'Monologism is a restrictive manner of being that, at its most extreme, denies the existence of another consciousness with equal rights and responsibilities outside itself' (Bakhtin 292). He believes that the dialogue encompasses voice, language, and existence itself as a normative and descriptive category. His analysis of Dostoevsky's works provides the following illustration to show the breadth of the concept:

Open-ended dialogue is the only suitable medium for verbally expressing authentic life. Life is dialogic by definition. Living entails engaging in conversation: listening, responding, and agreeing, and so on. A person engages

fully and throughout his entire life in this discussion with his eyes, mouth, hands, soul, and spirit, as well as his entire body and actions. He devotes his entire being to conversation, and this discourse contributes to the global symposium and the dialogic fabric of human life (Bakhtin 293).

From the viewpoint of heteroglossia, language is not a system of reference that is neutral and abstract but rather a medium through which one can engage in the historical flow of social interactions, conflicts, and meanings. The term heteroglossia was first used by Bakhtin in his essay, "Discourse in the Novel". In order to examine how meanings in novels were created and how they differed from other literary forms like epic poetry, he introduced the concept of heteroglossia. His concept of heteroglossia did not gain any popularity in the English-speaking world until Emerson and Holquist's translation of it was released (Bakhtin 10). This work was unpublished under several Soviet regimes until 1975. Since then, the phrase has gained enormous attention in literary studies and the research of academics who are interested in the social and political implications of language.

Every literary work contains repeats of prior remarks that other speakers pick up and alter. As a result, the speakers do not say anything particularly original or innovative; rather, they reframe what they have read in light of the current circumstances. The social, interactive, and generative features of language are highlighted because persons who have heteroglossia draw from a variety of linguistic levels and "the word is born in a discourse as a living reply" (Bakhtin 279).

According to Bakhtin (278), things only exist in the context of their relationships and not by themselves. His theory of dialogism refers to the process by which the author, the work, and the reader interact to create meaning. Rather than just being viewed as isolated examples, all of these components are positioned by sociopolitical factors. The dialogic approach favors student-centered discussions to assist them with text analysis. The main idea in the text serves as the focal point of discussion. Since students actively participate in the dialogic process of understanding the world around them, these talks tend to be more transactional than traditional lecture-based approaches to teaching and learning (Applebee et al. 01). Teachers foster an equitable social dynamic in the classroom by providing students with opportunities to speak. Through dialogue, students add layers of meaning (Bloome et al. 25). This way, learners understand the meanings and connect literary pieces to the world in a better way (Howe 10; Hennessy 18). It is emphasized that to understand and appreciate literature, individuals must engage in dialogue and discussion about the texts they read (Hébert 20). Within a classroom setting in literature instruction, students must collaborate through

conversation to construct meaning from what they are reading. Rather than simply receiving information passively from their teacher or text materials alone, active participation between peers promotes diverse perspectives by encouraging the sharing of interpretation ideas among everyone involved. Through such a dialogic approach, learners develop a deep understanding of the text that is more multifaceted than any one individual could achieve alone. Furthermore, Boyd et al. (21) also reflect that encouraging literary dialogues motivates thinking and reflection. The dialogues that might result in the transformation of ideas and actions are made meaningful for learners when they participate in reflective speaking (Vetter and Meacham 02).

In conclusion, Bakhtin's dialogism as a theoretical framework in literary analysis offers an insightful and dynamic approach to comprehending literary works. Facilitating conversations and diverse viewpoints, educators have the opportunity to prompt literature readers towards enthusiastic criticism while enabling them to improve their skills for navigating through complex literary landscapes.

3. Literature Review

Over the past forty years, the approach of dialogic teaching and learning has particularly blossomed. Researchers are interested in the application of dialogism and argumentation in literature classrooms as the focus in education shifts from an abstract, individual learner to the contextualized, collaborative, social child, whose capabilities are intertwined with the competencies of others. Several non-empirical textual studies have applied Bakhtin's Dialogism (278-279). Chaudhary (01) conducted a non-empirical, textual-based study in which he closely examined Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in the light of Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia, polyphony, and the carnivalesque. The findings revealed that Morrison's book fits the description of a dialogic novel due to its emphasis on the dialogic relationships between heteroglot languages, characters' voices, and socioeconomic classes.

Moreover, some empirical studies on the application of dialogism in literature teaching have also been conducted. In an empirical study, Javaid, Shaikh, and Malik (01) explored the university students' perceptions of cultural and religious identity issues in relation to Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by engaging 16 participants in dialogue through Google circles. The theoretical concepts of Bakhtin's dialogism and mestiza consciousness are used as frameworks guiding the study. The key arguments revealed that the participants discussed and connected to cultural and religious identity in the novel as they were geographically, socially, and temporally close in terms of their local and global contexts.

A considerable body of research now supports the idea that collaborative dialogic exchange in small groups is beneficial for cognitive growth (Seymour et al. 15; Clarke et al. 18; Littleton & Mercer 13; Littleton & Howe 10; Murphy et al. 20; Lyle 08). A significant international study on whole-class interaction was done by Alexander (01), which has sparked this issue. Five classroom practices were examined, revealing a variety of options for student-led discussions and corresponding deep learning. When teachers and students collaborate to build on one another's knowledge and ideas to promote coherent thinking, Alexander refers to this process as 'dialogic teaching'. In his most recent research, Alexander (01) did a randomized control trial of a dialogic teaching intervention to maximize the advantages of classroom discourse to support students' engagement and learning. According to the results of this extensive study, students in the intervention group, whose teachers had undergone more dialogic training, demonstrated a 2-month improvement in English, Mathematics, and Science tests after 20 weeks of participation in the study compared to the control group, whose teachers used traditional teaching methods.

The reviewed literature shows a dearth of research in the application of dialogic literary pedagogy where readers engage in dialogic conversations and arguments to interpret and give meaning to literary texts. Hence, the present study is an endeavor to engage literature teachers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds in a dialogue on the themes related to the play *Waiting for Godot* and relate those thematic concerns of waiting and the meaning of life to the modern socio-political and cultural landscape of Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This empirical study is a qualitative research design. The qualitative research approach ensures in-depth analysis of the research problem under investigation (Cohen et al. 178). The present study engages literature educators in an online literary dialogue where they discuss the relevance of the play *Waiting for Godot* to the contemporary Pakistani socio-political situations.

Sampling of the participants is done according to Cohen et al.'s (221) guidelines about considering size, access, representativeness, and sampling strategies. Ten participants (6 males, 4 females) from two public-sector universities of Sindh were selected through convenience sampling, as the researchers had access to the universities. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where units are chosen for the sample based on their accessibility to the researcher. This may be a result of geographical proximity, availability at a specific moment, or willingness to take part in the study (Bryman 16).

The participants had varied academic and professional exposure. The ten selected participants had a teaching experience of 1 to 5 years in English literature. In the context of social background, only the aspect of rural/ urban background was considered. Six out of ten participants had an urban background (4 males, 2 females), whereas the other four belonged to rural Sindh (2 males, 2 females). The demographic information of the respondents is given in the following table.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants (N= 10)

Participant	Gender	Location	University	Teaching Experience (No. of years)
P1	Female	Rural Sindh	University of Sindh	1 – 5
P2	Female	Rural Sindh	Karachi University	1 – 5
P3	Female	Urban Sindh	University of Sindh	1 – 5
P4	Female	Urban Sindh	Karachi University	1 – 5
P5	Male	Rural Sindh	University of Sindh	1 – 5
P6	Male	Rural Sindh	Karachi University	1 – 5
P7	Male	Urban Sindh	University of Sindh	1 – 5
P8	Male	Urban Sindh	Karachi University	1 – 5
P9	Male	Urban Sindh	University of Sindh	1 – 5
P10	Male	Urban Sindh	Karachi University	1 – 5

The participants were invited to participate in an online dialogue via Google Docs. The dialogic exchange of written responses of the participants on Google Docs served as the data for the study, as suggested by Varga et al. (05) and Naylor et al. (07). Two discussion prompts were shared with the participants to initiate the discussion. The questions were:

Q1: How do you relate the current situation of Pakistani youth to the characters' state of *Waiting for Godot*?

Q2: How do you find any resemblance in the activities of Pakistani youth with the actions and dialogues of characters in *Waiting for Godot*?

Participants were asked to comment at two different points, so each group had a chance to respond to the others at least once. The discussion was kept asynchronous for practical reasons, as participants were doing it in their own time. Even though asynchronous discussions could be difficult (Hrastinski 08; Stahl, Koschmann, & Suthers 20), it was hoped that the time difference would provide room for reflection and more detailed answers.

The data from the Google Docs was analyzed using the thematic analysis model provided by Saldaña (11). We familiarized ourselves with the data by reading it. The data was then coded. The codes were rechecked to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 19). Themes were generated from the codes, which are presented in the following section of the findings. Data collection and data analysis were done ethically, as recommended in methodological literature (e.g., Bryman 20; Cohen et al. 07). Standard ethical protocols were followed.

Findings

The participants' responses to the given prompts in the Google circles were analyzed thematically. The following themes were developed after coding:

Table 2

Themes Developed after Coding of the Data

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1. Characters' *Waiting for Godot* is in line with the masses' waiting for political stability and social peace.
 2. Drawing parallels between characters' disillusionment with the masses' dissatisfaction with the current political Capitalism and social unrest.
 3. Relating the characters' state of inaction to the youth's social engagements
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5.1 Theme of Hopeless Waiting: Relating the State of Characters' *Waiting for Godot* with the Masses' Waiting for Political Stability and Social Peace

Ten extracts were coded, under this theme. In response to the first prompt about the relevance and resemblance of the characters to society, participants highlighted different dimensions of Pakistani people and their contextual realities. Some participants shared their views relating to the theme of waiting in the play as similar to the waiting of Pakistani people for some 'superhero' to emancipate them from 'current deteriorated moral, economic, spiritual, and existential chaos'.

In their dialogic exchange, participants unveiled that, similar to Vladimir and Estragon, Pakistani people are also waiting for an undefined improvement in their situation. One of the participants added that, like the plot of the play, rather than making efforts, our people also rely on external sources and wait for the help that would save them from all the socio-political issues. Political instability, economic struggles, or social issues create a sense of powerlessness and waiting for an external force to bring change. It has also been pointed out by one of the participants that as Vladimir and Estragon have delved themselves in fate and fear of being denied; even though they do not fully understand who or what they are waiting for; similarly Pakistani people are also trapped in hidden power domain, fatalism, and the fear of deprivation and their hopes are also faded likewise Vladimir and Estragon's. As commented by one participant:

As the play aptly reflects, nothing happens, nobody comes, and nobody goes; similarly, in our context, we, collectively as a society, are happy in our comfort zones, happy with complaining, but not playing any positive and productive role to make things better. It is awful.

The participants also deliberated on the relevance of Vladimir and Estragon's state to Pakistani people by relating the former's *Waiting for Godot*'s grace for salvation to waiting for peace and security, which appears precarious to them, like Godot never comes. In addition, participants feel that, like Vladimir and Estragon, the general public is also helpless and has no "choice other than looking up towards the heavens, only to find out that their time belongs to Godot." It is commented by a participant as,

Their wait is both literal and figurative, rendering them powerless in setting forth any action in their lives. This scenario reflects the Pakistani situation,

whereby their every social and economic choice is straddled with the invisible arms of a persistent Godot.

Participants further connected hunger, political turmoil, law and order situation, and lack of education and health facilities. Delving deep into the discussion, participants connected the attributes of Vladimir and Estragon with the masses having frustration, anxiety, disappointment, and hopelessness, which, according to the participants, are the direct results of unequal distribution of resources, political instability, lawlessness, corruption, social anxiety, societal fragmentation, and lack of control over situations in Pakistan. One of the arguments came from a participant who, with textual reference, added,

Like Vladimir, we are all tied down, all of us, and we cannot move; we are bound to suffer in the chains of economic crisis, where we have high debts, political insecurities where we are manipulated by our masters, and the social unrest where we have to face poverty, inflation, high taxes, and lack of opportunities. Hence, with such hopelessness and dissatisfaction, we are passing our days like Estragon and Vladimir.

Moreover, in drawing connections, a few participants also drew parallels between the characters to the deprived class of the country. As it is reflected, 'Estragon represents the people barely hand to mouth, instinctual, whimsical, and concerned with their lives only, working enough to fulfill their basic needs and necessities like food, medicines, clothes, and sleep.' Some participants also reflected on other striking similarities between the two main characters of the play and the general public by saying that like the characters, our people also go through phases of futile search for meaning in their lives with mere hope for better survival in Pakistan, but hopes and efforts go in vain and 'ultimately they realize that they have been part of cobweb which keeps trapping them intellectually, economically, academically, politically, socially, and culturally to serve only few heads in the society.' One of the participants, in his dialogic exchange, reflected,

Vladimir rightly puts it, "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" We have the same situations where we exist and pass our days, rather than living the moments. Our social crisis has put us in a battle for the survival of the fittest. The one who will stand, fight for the basic needs, and put in efforts, will survive; and the one who will just sit and wait will end up like Estragon and Vladimir.

Spotlighting the textual evidence of Pozzo and Lucky's relation, participants also drew closer connections with the power structure in Pakistan. Three of the

participants discussed that, like Pozzo's abuse of power in the play, Pakistan's society is also filled with so many Pozzos who misuse their power in their own selfish interests, manipulate and exploit laws and the constitution, even the entire system of politics and jurisprudence, for the sake of their material gains. One participant, in response to her peer's argument, added that these Pozzos, like Pozzo in the play, have all the cords of politics and education to brainwash the minds of the people. Similarly, Lucky in the play reflects the lack of agency, freedom, independence, and opportunities. Currently, the masses are in a state of unquestioned obedience, dependence, submission, and reliance under the mercy of Pozzos in the system. In the text, Vladimir highlights, and the participants, in their dialogic exchange, confirm the theme of hopeless waiting as 'They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, and then it is night once more.'

The Theme of Existentialism: Drawing Parallels between Characters' Disillusionment with the Masses' Dissatisfaction with the Current Political Capitalism

For this theme, mentions were coded from the participants' excerpts of how they perceived the play, relating the theme of dissatisfaction and disillusionment to real-world issues in Pakistan. Participants' dialogues demonstrated that the themes of existential crisis, searching for life's meaning, boredom, chaos, anarchy, dissatisfaction, and disillusion are comparable to those of contemporary society.

Three participants compared the barren setting of the plot with the country's unproductive socio-political landscape. The participants reflected that, as the play is staged on a barren, infertile landscape with a single tree, the barrenness and infertility signify the lack of opportunities and jobs. The setting ultimately stuffs a sense of isolation, barrenness, and emptiness, along with the feelings of a lack of fertility, productivity, utility, and opportunities. Furthermore, the presence of a tree in the play's setting metaphorically points out the passage of time and physical support or reliance by characters, adding to *Much Ado about Nothing*. One of the participants added that the road in the plot setting symbolizes the life journey that characters make and refers to the only passage through which somebody would come to resurrect, rehabilitate, assist, and guide them to change their lives or situations. Moreover, repetitive actions in cyclic form on the road contribute to the absurdity of waiting for someone to come down to change their situation.

The participants argued in their discussion that the main characters in the play, who represent different aspects of human conditions and the journey of life, both exemplify two broader aspects of humans: intellectual vs. instinctual,

contemplative vs. whimsical, brooding vs. practical; one tries to understand the situation, vs. one concerned with basic needs of life like food and sleep. All the characters in the play are not just individual sketches, narrating their own accounts, but they weigh more than just symbolic representation and caricature. Estragon reflects the futile endeavors for survival amidst hopelessness, barrenness, and lack of opportunities; Pozzo reflects how the power is manipulated in society; Lucky shows the loss of agency, freedom, and independence, along with obedience and dependence. One of the participants commented:

The play shows an unexpected resemblance to Pakistan. Similar to the barren landscape, Pakistan has turned into a nightmare for skilled workers, businessmen, talented, skillful people, academicians, doctors/engineers, and students as well. Pakistan has been taken as a land without any promise of a comfortable life, opportunities, merit-based jobs, a suitable environment for business and farming lands, etc.

To elaborate further, a participant added that the land of Pakistan resembles the barren land staged in the play. The symbol of the tree used in the play is again matching with the material reliance on things like a government job, a little business, family inheritance, etc., that people possess in Pakistan to survive the critical situations bombarded frequently with heavy taxations, unprecedented increase in price hike, unexpected unemployment, overproduction of graduates, decreasing value of merit and talent, etc. The road used in the play again symbolizes the bizarre journey of the lives of Pakistani people, going through the same robotic performance, creating nothing new, circling the pole like a sheep, blinded by the actions of hectic routine, making no efforts to change their lives, and still looking for someone to come down and change their situations.

In line with the existential crisis, seven of the participants connected the theme with the masses' sense of isolation, alienation, and detachment from social life. In evidence of the statement, four participants quoted examples of alienated and isolated beings and the factors contributing to the rise of social media. Such an existential crisis makes one inactive and isolated. One of the participants commented:

I think we are sent into this world to make our lives meaningful. If we just sit aimlessly and say life has no meaning, it is skeptical. To remove such thoughts, we need to occupy ourselves with something significant. We are required to struggle against all odds to remain attached to life.

Moreover, six of the participants mentioned the media hype and the sensitive social issues like women harassment and other gender-related cases, the struggle of our youth towards blue-collar jobs, to get a luxurious lifestyle, and to ensure life security in such socio-political turmoil, result in the growing dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and detachment from society. Another participant unveiled that the themes of the play are being epitomized in the form of rising capitalism and feudalism in Pakistan. According to him, Pakistani people are entirely dissatisfied with the feudal system and the involvement of feudal lords in politics. Their continuous presence, corrupt practices, and exploitation of the Middle class create a sense of alienation and frustration among the masses. They, in turn, lose themselves in the abode of absurdism and the existential crisis. In favor of this statement, another participant added that this is the reason we are having an increased percentage of suicidal cases in the country and worldwide.

Moreover, the brain drain, the exodus of youth, was also connected to the theme of dissatisfaction and disillusionment of the masses. One of the participants commented that,

Similar to the barren landscape, Pakistan has turned into a nightmare for skilled workers, businessmen, talented, skillful people, academicians, doctors/engineers, and students as well. Pakistan has commonly been taken as a land without any promise of a comfortable life, opportunities, merit-based jobs, a suitable environment for business and farming lands, etc.

To elaborate further, the participant added facts and figures of people who moved to countries like Europe, the USA, Canada, and others to pursue a settled life, business, and education. This reveals that the land of Pakistan resembles the barren land staged in the play. Four of the participants discussed the reasons for brain drain these days by pointing out the theme of dissatisfaction and disillusionment among Pakistani youth because of a corrupt political regime, nepotism, a weak law and order situation, inadequate distribution of resources, dearth of employment opportunities, and, above all, an uncertain future. As commented by a participant, "Hence, *Waiting for Godot* is a mirror of Pakistani society where most of the people blacken the faces, future, and fate of an individual who is before the mirror."

Furthermore, two of the dialogues reflected that boredom in *Waiting for Godot* represents the contemporary situation in Pakistan, where people try different activities to kill boredom, but those futile activities widen the boredom that leads them into absurdity. In evidence of this statement, the participants elaborated by highlighting illustrations of using social media, increased trends of Vlogging, and TikTok entertainment platforms. People, especially the youth,

engage themselves in such futile and meaningless activities. On the contrary, three of the participants completely negated the idea and argued that Pakistani society does not relate to the theme of boredom in the play due to its different cultural dynamics in urban and rural settings. The participants discussed the theme of existentialism as finding one's purpose in life and shaping one's destiny, and its prevalence in Pakistani society is evident. The participants elaborated that many young talents are now emerging and contributing to the betterment of their society. One of the participants highlighted that the country has creative and critical youngsters who focus on striving for better options, exploring better living standards, hence working hard towards shaping and refining their fortunes, and finding their real purpose of living amidst the chaotic environment in Pakistan.

The participants also supported the similarities that co-exist between the Pakistani society and the play by pointing out the trickle-down effect of "socio-eco-politico-religious chaotic situation" in Pakistan, which led the people to start questioning their very existence perceived as meaningless, and they are living a purposeless life here in Pakistan as tramps in the play. The participant in the dialogic exchange says, *Waiting for Godot* bears a striking resemblance to the current chaotic, uncertain, and existentialist issues that are easily detectable in the prevalent Pakistani people's situation." But in reaction to this statement, another participant argued that the characters of *Waiting for Godot* show more resilience to absurdity and show more contentment with their existential crisis, but people seem more active in resolving these issues of illness, waiting, and exploitation despite all odds, and not waiting blindly or more enthusiastically for a savior as Vladimir and Estragon did.

State of Inaction: Relating the Characters' Futile Actions with the Youth's Social Engagements

The participants' dialogic exchange spotlighted that the play's repetitive actions in cyclic form on the road contribute to the absurdity of waiting for someone to come down to change their situation. Participants had diverse views on this prompt, and they engaged in vital conversation with each other, reflecting that Pakistani youth are also involved in absurd and futile activities like using social media, monotonous morning shows, and playing online games, etc., to avoid their actual state of boredom while waiting for someone to resolve their issues. These activities have no meaningful output and are just a time pass, like the tramps in the play doing "nothing" but passing time in *Waiting for Godot*.

Four participants highlighted the negative use of social media and entertainment platforms. One of the participants commented, "Pakistani youth resembles the characters in *Waiting for Godot* in futility, boredom, absurdity,

uncertainty, waiting, and many other ways; however, their intensity is lower than the chaos faced by the characters in this drama.” Another participant also says that Pakistani youth are involved in futile, meaningless activities on social media platforms, trying to find meaning in their lives. This is also reflected in the actions of the two tramps in the play. Other participants also supported the notions as explored by their peers, saying that Pakistani youth have “nothing to be done” like the characters of the play. In counter-argument, three of the participants completely negated the aforementioned idea and argued that Pakistani youth do not have much similarity with the characters’ state of inaction. The participants elaborated that young talent is now emerging and contributing to the betterment of their society, and social media sites are playing a positive role in raising a voice towards socio-political injustices. One of the participants highlighted that Pakistan is home to a lot of talent. One of the participants added the example of Arfa Karim, the youngest Microsoft Certified professional in the world. Another participant added an example of Haris Khan, the youngest smartphone app developer, who developed his first football game app, which was launched in 2014.

The discussion was summed up by the participant saying that uncertain political and economic conditions, unemployment, and other dark prospects of this country led the Pakistani youth to behave in pointless actions, “ just like Vladimir and Estragon have the same conversation multiple times and perform various pointless actions, the Pakistani youth is always stuck between hope and disillusionment”. However, the participant shared his hope, saying that, unlike Beckett’s play, the Pakistani youth is not static and has been involved in various educational, political, and social activities as well, which create a sense of purpose and connection in their lives.

Discussion

The participants identified and related to the concepts of dialogism and hopeless waiting in relation to the play, *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett. The participants linked the thematic lines of hopeless waiting, existentialism, and life’s meaning to the present socio-political realities of their surroundings. Participants’ dialogic exchange and discussion suggest a space for resistance against established socio-political ideologies and motivate them to struggle to give meaning to their lives. In the same vein, the play offers a narrative space to participants to problematize notions of politics and social realities and expectations. Hence, this study suggests that a discussion on the play and its contextual understanding leads to a better understanding of dialogism among its readers (Bakhtin 279).

As Bakhtin (278) suggests, a novel is a narrative space that allows multiple perspectives and their encounter with one another; the participants in this study were able to establish a dialogic encounter with the given question prompts. Participants closely connected the different dimensions of Pakistani people and their contextual realities with the play and the characters. In their dialogic exchange, participants showed that, similar to Vladimir and Estragon, people also rely on external sources and wait for help that would save them from all the socio-political issues. Like the characters, people are also trapped in a hidden power domain, fatalism, and the fear of deprivation, and their hopes have also faded.

Participants significantly related to the social crisis of Pakistan through Bakhtin's dialogic relation between 'Self and Other' (Bakhtin 02). As Bakhtin talks about surveillance of the Other on the Self, participants analyzed current situations in Pakistan by reflecting on issues like hunger, political turmoil, law and order situation, and lack of education and health facilities. Delving deep into the discussion, participants connected the attributes of Vladimir and Estragon with the masses having frustration, anxiety, disappointment, and hopelessness, which, according to the participants, are direct results of unequal distribution of resources, political instability, lawlessness, and corrupt practices in Pakistan. Hence, the results of the study are endorsed and strengthened by the reviewed literature (Bakhtin 10; Javaid, Shaikh & Malik 01).

Conclusion

Art and Literature have always served humanity by depicting a realistic picture of its age, social issues, political turmoils, and intellectual dilemmas, all been widely illustrated through the works of literature. *Waiting for Godot* is one such example, which has become universal in its depiction of suffering humanity and its conviction of human existence.

The themes of boredom, chaos, anarchy, and the human predicament, among these, are highly relatable. The insightful dialogic exchange among the participants revealed that the themes of waiting, hopelessness, and chaos in the play are the most relatable states in Pakistani society. However, the dialogues and actions of trams are also quite similar to futile social media activities and useless debates and discussions among Pakistani Youth these days. This research opens new doors to studying literature in relation to life in general, while human agency, socio-political dilemma of a certain age in particular. Most importantly, the approach of dialogism gives this study a unique format; the static book of literature becomes alive through the exchange of ideas on its relation to contemporary Pakistan. *Waiting for Godot* thus reaches the height of

sublimity and universality by passing the corridors of time and space, and this may apply to any piece of literature.

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