

The Interplay between Freedom and Confinement in *No Exit* by Taimur Kayani

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ABSTRACT:

The present study explores the interplay between freedom and confinement in the play *No Exit* by Dr. Taimur Kayani. The researchers have analyzed the character of Mujtaba from the perspective of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of being-in-itself to being-for-itself, which Sartre describes in his book *Being and Nothingness*. Moreover, this study aims to consider the ideas of freedom vs. confinement, how Mujtaba's erratic actions are harming his freedom, and how Mujtaba's thinking is constrained by his culture, traditions, religion, and memories from his past. The researchers have utilized qualitative type of research and analyzed it descriptively. It shows that Mujtaba's absurd thoughts and inner desires transform when he accepts the concept of 'being for itself' by Sartre. Kayani's play bears the touches of Sartre's theory of existentialism. It symbolizes that many Mujtabas in society have fallen into this situation in distant lands. It discusses various issues like injustice, family crises, and financial issues. The objective of the study is to explore the hard and grim conditions of illegal immigrants who remain empty-handed at the end of their journey, but still, they can get freedom by opting for the right choices. Furthermore, it concludes that Kayani wants his audience to get freedom before it is too late to lose their existence.

Keywords: No Exit, Taimur Kayani, Existentialism, Freedom and confinement, Sartre, illegal immigration, Being and Nothingness

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to assert that two plus two equals four is a sign of freedom. If that is permitted, everything else happens (McWilliams, 2011). Man can do whatever he wants if willing to live with the results. Freedom is the capacity or right to do, say, or think as one pleases, obstruct- or restrain-free. While confinement is to keep within the bound restrict (Eltink, 2013). Since confinement is unquestionably limiting, confinement bears the Latin root *finis*, “*end, and limit.*” Being imprisoned is one thing, but not grasping what it means to be imprisoned, not understanding its rules, and never realizing that resistance is futile must be what the hell must be like (Sedaris, n.d.). Like every Pakistani, Mujtaba wanted to be free from the system of Pakistan. He considered that he could go out and make more money. He is so impressed with the West’s system that he goes illegally and becomes completely independent. Mujtaba considers himself lucky that he does not need any visa anymore, no political borders can limit him, and he can fly in the sky wherever he wants.

However, Mujtaba repeatedly goes to Malaysia and remembers his past; he remembers his mother, village, and girlfriends. Mujtaba wants to make girlfriends in Malaysia and hang out with friends, but when he remembers his mother, he says no, he is here to earn money so he will not do anything wrong. His double attitude is shown throughout the play as he cannot exit from the memories of the past. Mujtaba is completely free physically in Malaysia. However, mentally, he is still in captivity because his conscience (Laali) and his mother’s thoughts do not allow him to do anything wrong, and even after ultimately going free, he is still mentally imprisoned. Despite his freedom, he has kept his mind in confinement. He spends most of his time together with Laali, reminiscing.

Most Pakistanis continue to have the misconception that in other countries, money grows on trees. All you have to do is pluck it and plug, ultimately going on through the character of Mujtaba, who is struggling to find his true identity despite being caught in the cycle of illegal immigration; Pakistani’s thinking has been proven wrong. The inner journey is very difficult; Pakistan still lives in him, in his taste and blood. He does not see any exit from this situation. In this research, we see that the Mujtaba who went out to get freedom from this system of Pakistan remains imprisoned in his past even after going there. With the help of this title, we want to create awareness among the people about how people have to suffer in foreign

countries. Like Mujtaba, many other illegal immigrants have gone there and are still confined in memories. The current research address the following research questions:

1. How does Mujtaba's unexpected behavior affect his freedom in Taimur Kayani's *No Exit*?
2. How the interplay between confinement and freedom is exhibited in Dr. Taimur Kayani's *No Exit*?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of Ibrahim (2018) was conducted on **Tennessee Williams'** portrayal of a sample of a person suffering from imprisonment in their fictitious expectations, which can be as varied as their fantasies. Williams attempts to help people overcome their self-deception by returning to spiritual principles so they might find happiness and relief in their lives, even if the play's protagonists cannot do so. The man was born in anguish and must endure life's challenges.

Maduwanthi (2020) focuses on Ariel's persona in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, whether or not it escaped the never-ending power struggle and broke free from its enslavement. This study critically assesses Ariel, who longs for freedom throughout the story, where the main themes revolve around the use of "freedom" over other people. Another research, Babbi Mishra (2021), explores the topic of *Freedom and Responsibility to Define Human Essence in Sartre's Philosophy*. Man is free, in Sartre' originated freedom (p.29). Man must first exist, according to Sartre, before he can define himself. Man "is not what he is, but he is what he is not," paradoxically states Sartre. According to Sartre, everything is allowed because there is no God. If God existed, freedom would be limited. Based on an initial assumption, we cannot determine what should be done since "man produces himself; he does not enter the world fully formed; he makes himself by selecting his morality" (2021, p. 46).

Olatunji Alabi Oyeshil (2015) deals with Freedom and human value in Sartre's Existentialism: An Appraisal, in which his consideration of human freedom, Sartre emphasizes freedom's role in advancing society's most treasured ideals. Despite the existence of causal laws, man can nevertheless use his understanding of these phenomena to develop appropriate values. Therefore, moral responsibility is made feasible by the fact that people have free will, and as a

result, a man is held accountable for both his actions and the results of those actions. This is what enables a civilized human civilization.

Sarfraz and Sajid (2020) consider legal or irregular migration as a global phenomenon involving migrations both within countries and across borders. The paper, Case Study of Irregular Migration from Pakistan to Europe, examines the prevalence of illegal migration from Pakistan to Europe and the key players responsible for this dreadful disorder. According to the most recent figures of the Ministry of Interior, from 1999 to 2008, a total of 313,513 Pakistani nationals were deported from the EU region, according to the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

Moreover, the research of Wahab, Khan, and Ullah (2021), *CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF ILLEGAL EMIGRATION*, is being done to learn more about the reasons behind and effects of illegal emigration from successful and unsuccessful immigrants. The study's findings revealed that various factors, including unemployment and poverty brought on by a dearth of economic possibilities in the nation of origin, drive people to emigrate illegally. The survey also found that illegal immigration has negative effects, including a lack of food and water, family problems (both financial and emotional), a lack of employment options in the destination country, and difficulty with asylum.

Aisa and Larramona (2012) present a review of the current research on "Illegal immigration from an economic point of view: a review." The unlawful status is typically less advantageous for immigrants because they are restricted in their employment options, forced to take lesser compensation for the same position, and forced to pay greater immigration charges. This article also discusses the economic impacts of illegal immigration on the native workforce, social services, income distribution, and welfare in the host countries.

Real freedom is not a matter of collective control over government; it includes enjoying one's private life and property. From this perspective, retaining freedom has little to do with making authorities responsible to the people. Freedom, according to Sartre, "means by oneself to determine oneself to wish. In other words, freedom does not depend on achievement (Dijn, 2020, p. 483). Understanding the distinction between a choice, a want, and a dream is crucial. There are many people in the world who, despite attaining physical freedom, remain mainly imprisoned.

“being-in-itself and “being-for-itself in Sartre Philosophy

Being and Nothingness, the author Jean-Paul Sartre’s most recent work of philosophy, is viewed as a “phenomenological essay on ontology.” The aphorism existence precedes essence, coined by Jean-Paul Sartre, and has come to be recognized as a classic and even defining expression of the core of existentialist philosophy Sartre (23). According to Sartre, the notion that being precedes essence denotes that a person first exists before deciding who he wants to be. According to his ontology, a person is described by the things they decide to say and do. It is a concept that contradicts conventional metaphysics (Cline, 2019). The first concept Sartre examines in his pair of essays, “*Being and Nothingness*,” is “**being-in-itself**. Something is fixed, complete, and existing without external cause. This is how the world of outside things is described. Sartre believed that the for-defining itself quality is emptiness. A tree cannot alter or create itself; it is just a tree. In contrast, man creates himself via action in the world. Man must actuate his own being since he is an object-for-itself and cannot simply be, as the object-in-itself does (Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), n.d.).

According to Sartre, the second kind of existence is “**being for itself**,” which is defined as something that depends on the first for its existence. It lacks an unchanging, everlasting, or absolute nature. This, in Sartre’s opinion, properly captures the condition of humanity. The for-itself is a situational creature that has some control over the outside world and shapes itself. Sartre says “being for itself” is a “project.” “Being-for-itself is not determined because it is nothingness, i.e., a being that differentiates itself by not being the world or that of which it is conscious. According to Sartre, this implies that “being for itself” is completely free to become by its deeds (Mittal, 2019).

2.3. Bad Faith

“Being-in-itself is explained as bad faith. Sartre admits that people often use bad faith to conceal their freedom. In Sartre’s opinion, people who persuade themselves that they must carry out a specific type of employment or reside in a specific location are acting in bad faith. He argues that while the conditions of our birth and upbringing are beyond our control, once we become self-aware, we must make decisions that define our fundamental “essence” (Mittal, 2019). Sartre illustrates the idea of bad faith by using the example of a waiter so preoccupied with his job that he views himself first and foremost as a server rather than a free human being

in *Being and Nothingness*, his renowned discourse on phenomenological ontology. This writer is so certain that his current position is all he can accomplish and all he was supposed to do that he never considers doing anything else. According to Sartre, we are solely to blame for everything that makes us who we are, and we are the ones who limit our freedom by refusing to take advantage of all the opportunities life has to offer. He remarked that we are left alone without an explanation (Mittal, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes qualitative research to examine Dr. Kayani's play, *NO EXIT*. Two resources are used for this research: Primary and Secondary. The primary source this study has used is reading *NO EXIT* play itself; on the other hand, the secondary source of knowledge is extracted from websites, journals, articles, philosophical books by different authors, etc. Researchers and data do a descriptive qualitative analysis of data taken into consideration by note taking and doing intensive reading as library-based research. The research design carries several steps for analyzing the text, such as finding quotes showing freedom and confinement. Secondly, how and where the theme of freedom and confinement is shown in this play, and later on, we interpreted those findings according to the approaches of existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre.

4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

People are not the same; we differ in emotional reactions, preferred careers, physical appeal, and outward appearance. These variables ultimately result from our acceptance of our consciousness and use of free will-based decision-making. Before we meet them, the characters in *No Exit* demonstrate their reactions and distinguishing traits as they progress. However, as the play goes on, we are gradually made aware of the qualities that they possess. A handsome young man of South Asian descent, **Mujtaba** is the first and main character introduced in the play. The play's protagonist has several names and identities. A young, active man living illegally in Malaysia, he uses several aliases to conceal his true identity. He is a playboy figure who is constantly seeking out lusty occasions. When Mujtaba goes to Malaysia illegally and remembers his past repeatedly, he remembers his mother, village, and girlfriends. The second major character is Laali. A racing red pigeon, Mujtaba's inner yet conflicted self, is a self-appointed advisor who continuously criticizes the playboy's protagonist's outlook on life while offering moral support at trying times. The third important character is Maa. The severe, elderly

mother of Mujtaba symbolizes Mujtaba's distant past while preaching moral principles. His mother is the major character in this play that I, completely in *being-in-itself*. She is shown to be very strict about her religion and principles, as quoted in the text,

MAA: [in a sermon Style] Do not make fun of any religion, race, or gender, Mujtaba Khan. All religions are sacred. Religion is a relevant, enduring, and universal fact of life. It sustains humans from the cradle to the grave is not a game either, my son. Do not go on that path! Do not change your religion, and do not mock others' religion. Understand! (2021, p. 72-75)

Introducing all these characters, we examine their inner journey, especially Mujtaba, who has illegally moved to Malaysia as per his wish. However, even after going there, we see in the play that he is living in his memories. He keeps running from one place to another and changes his name to hide his identity from people, but his Bad Faith still surrounds him. He cannot go back. Many of the elements of Mujtaba lead to being-in-itself, such as, at first, when he comes to Malaysia, he is unable to get rid of his memories; he considers that all this was written in his destiny, even though he has hope, he has a way to go back to him, but he still prefers to stay "being-in-itself. This research will show how the interplay between confinement and freedom is exhibited. The researcher finds the act of mental confinement at the start of the act one line where Mujtaba says,

HARDEV: [mockingly] Ah! Making fresh for me! Are you my beloved mother? These bastards are playing with me as usual.....Oh, my ma, yours little Laali misses you! [Suddenly remembers something and stands up] Sorry, Mother, I will wash my hands immediately! (2021, p. 30)

The text above represents Mujtaba's reminiscence of his mother's hand-made fresh food in Malaysia. Even when he starts eating in a restaurant, he immediately remembers what his mother told him, and he stands up and washes his hands before eating, which is what his mother taught him. By looking at washing hands before eating, we can say that he remembers his mother in his little things and is useless in gaining mental freedom because he still lives in being-in-itself. While Mujtaba, if he wants, he can bring himself out of mental slavery and bring him to real freedom. Since genuine existence is a consciousness of and a living of a person's essence, existentialism concerns the principle of structure or essence of the self.

“MUJTABA: Oh, my mother’s white-marbled, open courtyard! Does she still water it? Do migrating birds still sing there in the autumn breeze? What about my mango tree?” (2021, p. 44)

These textual lines above clearly demonstrate that Mujtaba reflects on his history. He recalled the large courtyard and white marble home of his mother. Sometimes, he seems to remember the birds that come to his house; he thinks they will still be singing in the autumn air like they used to sing when I was there. I do not know what would have happened to my mango trees or whether my mother would have watered them. Through the lines given above, we can see how much the memories of his past surround Mujtaba that he remembers the birds of his village, even the mango trees, and sometimes the yard of his house. All of these characteristics demonstrate that Mujtaba is still psychologically imprisoned in Malaysia. These elements lead him to be in himself.

“HARDEV: The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy! But now it is your turn! Why are you here? Thousands of miles away from our village!” (Kayani, 2021, p. 39)

These above-referred textual lines demonstrate that Mujtaba frequently makes justifications while recalling events from his past. If he continues to live in his past like this, he will never be able to move forward. He has to get freedom from his mental slavery; he needs to change himself to succeed in life. After enduring the separation from his family and home country, once he has arrived at his destination, he should work hard to climb the success ladder rather than squandering his time by staying by himself.

“MUJTABA [proudly]: Well! He is a crowned champion of the All-Pakistan pigeon race! My funky friend, big belly, the rock star, Sheeda Teli!” (2021, p. 42)

A better description of bad faith could not be imagined short of Sartre’s original work. Sartre argues that freedom is a natural part of life; thus, bad faith is an attempt to avoid it. The above textual lines show that the play’s protagonist, Mujtaba, remembers his homeland, Pakistan, again. He proudly mentions his friend Sheeda Teli, Pakistan’s top pigeon racer. All these things tell us that Mujtaba still does not forget his village friends, even his friend’s pigeons. All these elements also lead him to be in himself. According to Sartre, the man initially exists, then

experiences rising in the world, and defines himself later. He should explain himself, considering his family's needs and circumstances.

MUJTABA: I am sorry LaaLi! No doubt, there is no greater pain than living with a lie when the truth is buried deep inside you. [Pause] God always forgives us, but we humans do not practice the law of forgiveness. What happened to Noori and Jamali, the star pigeons of Sheeda Teli's club? I remember that white, tall, and well-built Jamali that won Kasur's pigeon racing festival when I left Kasur. Sheeda Teli used to call him geo Jamali, my son! (2021, p. 43-44)

Free Will, in Sartre's view, entails action. No matter what they face or how they are made up, people always have a choice in how they react and behave. Man spends his life attempting to change his essence. There is no objective truth; rather, truth is formed through personal choice. What is important in existentialism is that the human being is free to choose his nature. In other words, we have already made our decision. The best person is the one who fights for his life. Similarly, free in his every action, Mujtaba must do everything for himself because no one else knows what conditions he is facing. He will have to work on himself to prove himself.

MUJTABA: [raises eyebrows with forehead wrinkles] Oh, my beloved distant Kasur... Oh, I miss my Bulleh Shah's Mazar! Green and white! Peaceful! (2021, p. 45)

As stated in the being-in-itself and being-for-itself philosophy, these textual lines clearly show that Mujtaba is still confused about himself. As shown in the above lines, he remembers the shrine of Bulleh Shah's Mazar in Pakistan. Our freedom is the ultimate value of our existence, which we seek earnestly, and each individual is free to create their values and universe, free of any moral order to guide individuals. For him, there is no human nature when there is no God. Our anxiety stems from the realization that we are the only ones who can decide our fate. Therefore, Mujtaba can adapt to whatever habit he wants or wants to do, but unfortunately, he has kept himself imprisoned in the memories of the past.

MUJTABA: I lost her when I could not return after five years. Laali, as I have said, the memory of Noor Bano's walks brings a smile to my face. [He closes his eyes]. I can see it now: an easy-going loop, nice and steady. Not too fast and not too slow. Fast enough to get somewhere, but not too fast to miss anything. Bouncy! Alert! Resolute

without any concern and vanity. A walk that both belonged to and was remote from everything about it! (2021, p. 48)

These mentioned textual lines also indicate that Mujtaba cannot free himself from the memories of the past. Frequently, he gets depressed remembering his five-year-old girlfriend. This element also leads him to be in himself. Sartre explains this situation in his philosophy: each person is in control of who they are, and they are solely responsible for their existence. Moreover, when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is accountable for himself but for all other men. As for “despair,” it has a very straightforward definition. It only implies that we restrict our dependence to that under our control or within the totality of the probabilities that allow us to carry out our activity. We should disengage once the potential outcomes stop impacting our actions beyond that stage. Similarly, the play’s character can get whomever he wants and adapt to the situations he wants. However, all this will only be possible when he takes away from memories and disappointment.

MUJTABA: (Shocked with terror): Oh God! Oh, my Maa, you are here! Oh, Laali, you are also here. What a coincidence! What a horrible awakening! What a nightmare, yaar! (2021, p.72)

In the above lines, it is clear that Mujtaba still needs to remember the purpose of coming to Malaysia. Mujtaba’s mother is repeatedly shown in the play to remind him of his purpose and religion, Islam. As Sartre says, Man is nothing more than his purposes; he only exists as much as he knows them. As a result, he is nothing more than the sum of his deeds, his existence. On the other hand, it positions everyone in a position to realize that only reality is trustworthy. In the same way, we see the mutual interaction of freedom and imprisonment as a whole, how mental imprisonment deprives a person of real freedom, and a person does not see any way to get out of all of them.

Sartre’s “Existence precedes essence” theory holds in Mujtaba’s case because he arrived in Malaysia after gaining his freedom and is currently residing there, allowing him to adapt to any environment. He can come out from being in himself to ‘being-for-itself’. After attaining freedom, he is the autonomous self of his every action. He can write his fate with his own hands because he exists in Malaysia so he will decide his actions. Mujtaba, unable to free himself from the memories of his past, decides to strengthen himself with time by giving the

circumstances of his family. Existentialism is the absolute nature of every man's free commitment to realize a certain kind of humanity. There is no distinction between absolute being and free being, existence choosing its essence or being as self-committed.

MUJTABA: [firmly but tired] Listen, Mujtaba, you are a fighter; you will rebuild your life and create new hope. Forget about them! You have no obligation to them! When one is re-inventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Find a new place, new friends, and a new family. Here is my fresh hope! Here is my new burning desire! I will rebuild my life! Genius is a place, not a person. (2021, p. 89)

These lines mentioned above are taken from the play *No Exit*, where the protagonist, Mujtaba, tries to persuade himself to change. At the end of the play, in acknowledging and owning up to his actions, we see that Mujtaba has transformed. He selected the path of being for himself. Since "being for itself" is changeable, Mujtaba accepted the concept of "being for itself" by Sartre. In the end, "being-for-itself is dominant on being-in-itself. Men's historical circumstances have varied: a guy may be born a proletarian, a feudal baron, or an enslaved person in a pagan culture. However, the necessities of living in the world and having to work and die there never change. These restrictions have both an objective and a subjective character; therefore, they are neither subjective nor objective. In this sense, it is possible to assert that there is universality inherent to humans, though this universality is always being created. Although we ultimately determine our nature, according to Sartre, this prerogative is violated when we are with another "being-for-itself. When another person is present, humans get so influenced by them that they become instantly aware of all gestures, expressions, acts, and conducts (Sartre, 1943, p. 307).

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The present study is the interplay between the theme of freedom and confinement in Dr. Kayani's masterpiece *No Exit* (2021). The writer has debated various issues relating to human lives, such as Lack of access to services, Slavery, Sexual exploitation, family crises, food, water, transportation, Injury and illness, their struggle, and economic problems. A person has to face many difficulties to maintain his existence. Similarly, the aphorism's existence precedes essence, coined by Jean-Paul Sartre. It has come to be recognized as a classic and even defining expression of the core of existentialist philosophy, which is all about the human existence

and economy of society. Mujtaba is the main character of the play *NO EXIT*. This play has many themes, but this research has been conducted only on two major themes: freedom and confinement. The title *No Exit* itself represents that there is no way to get away from the situation. *No Exit* addresses the notion of extreme personal freedom as one could anticipate. Man can do whatever he wants if willing to live with the results. Freedom and confinement are interlinked. These are not separate from one another. Mujtaba's double attitude is shown throughout the play as he cannot remember the past. Despite his freedom, he has kept his mind in confinement. In the above textual analysis, we can see how Mujtaba repeatedly recalls his past, and all these elements draw him to "being-in-itself. In addition to the role of the Mujtaba, other characters in the play illustrate the elements of being-in-itself, of which the Mujtaba is the most special. However, in the end, we see what is related to Sartre's philosophy is present in Mujtaba; he decides to strengthen himself to maintain his existence in Malaysia. He decided to change himself to expose himself to the world. That is the turning point and findings of the study. Because 'being-for-itself' is malleable, Mujtaba accepted Sartre's concept of 'being-for-itself.' Man spends most of his life working, constantly striving to improve. He sacrificed his time with his family, his sleep, and frequently even his delight while working to pursue an ideal that was frequently never realized. The play is a great lesson for Pakistani society. Moreover, this play reflects the society of Pakistan in which we find Many Mujtabas leading such a difficult life in a distant land.

All the above discussion concludes that Man is not what he is, but rather what he is not, according to Sartre. It implies that a man's circumstances do not reflect his true self. He is his future possibility, and as future possibilities cannot already exist, he is what he is not rather than what he is. Man is nothing apart from himself. There is nothing between a man's present and his past, as well as his present and future. His interpretation of the past and outlook on the future are products of several decisions. So, a man is not fundamentally what he might be called now. Dr. Kayani presents a masterpiece addressing these issues with the name of the play *No Exit*; he beautifully explains the situations illegal immigrants face in a distant land. Among many foreign Pakistanis, Mujtaba is also one of the illegal immigrants we see fighting with his conscience throughout the play. Alone by his desires and memories of the past, Mujtaba fights with his conscience day and night and suffers from mental imprisonment. Dr. Kayani masterfully explores the interplay of freedom and imprisonment in the play, which shows Mujtaba's journey from "being in itself" to "being for itself." Man changes with time;

therefore, Sartre prefers to “being for itself” as Mujtaba’s role transforms at the end of the play, he frees himself from mental imprisonment to move forward in life better. Sartre was a humanist who wanted us to overcome our self-imposed limitations and realize our enormous potential. He longed for us to recognize our freedom, not be constrained by the accepted concept of reality, and conduct our lives as we saw fit. Moreover, even though his principles were expressed in several ways with shortcomings, his ideals are unquestionably important.

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