ABSTRACT

This dissertation entitled ‘Expressionism in the Selected Plays of Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Mahesh Elkunchwar’ deals with a comparative study of Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Mahesh Elkunchwar’s selected plays in the light of Expressionism. Expressionism as a movement initially began in painting. In the early decades of 20th century, it developed in Germany and then in Europe. It became a progressive avant-garde style before the World War I. It remained popular during the Weimar Republic particularly in Berlin. There are two alternate views about the origin of the term Expressionism. It is traced in paintings exhibited in 1901 in Paris by an obscure artist named Julien Auguste Herve. The term is believed to have been coined by the Czech art historian Antonin Matejcek in 1910. The plays selected for this study includes Eugene O’Neill’s Desire under the Elms (1924) and Long Day’s Journey into Night (1941), Tennessee Williams Glass Menagerie (1944), and A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) and Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Reflection (1987) and Old Stone Mansion (1985).

The soul of this thesis is to study these six plays born in different cultures and countries by different authors in the light of characteristics of Expressionism. The most striking characteristic of expressionistic drama is its weird, fantastic or unreal setting and atmosphere. Everything is distorted or oversimplified. The elements of conflict are presented in their bare essence rather than encumbered with detail. The dialogue is often spoken in a sort of telegraphic style. The dialogue, unlike conversation, was poetical, febrile, and rhapsodic. At one time, it might take the form of a long lyrical monologue. At some places, it made use of staccato telegraphic made up of phrases of one or two words or expletives. The dialogue is increasingly clipped, fragmented and unreal. It became known as ‘telegram style’. Expressionist play often dramatizes the spiritual awakening and sufferings of their protagonists. The struggle against bourgeois values and established authority is another key note of expressionist plays. In expressionist plays the speech is heightened, expansive and rhapsodic or telegraphic. Characters lost their individuality and are merely identified by nameless designations like The Man, The Father, The Son, etc. as in Reflection He, She, Girl, The Flags by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The plot and structure of the play tends to be disjointed and broken into episodes, incidents and tableaux. Instead of dramatic
conflict of the well made play, the emphasis is on a sequence of dramatic statements. It’s typical trait is to present the world solely from a subjective perspective distorting it radically for emotional effect in order the evoke moods or ideas. Expressionist artists sought to express meaning or emotional experience rather than physical reality. There is a rejection of materialism. Symbolism and dreamlike elements is another feature. Personal tragedies usually end in the destruction of the character, as presented in Garbo(1970), Reflection(1987) and Old Stone Mansion(1985) by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The expressionist play reflects the social protest in which representation of the outer world takes second place and the inner turmoil experienced by the main character takes the front, expressed through long monologues. Expressionism seeks to transform nature rather than imitate it, in hopes of showing a reality in process of transformation. Distortion of reality can be observed in expressionist play. Expressionism has a psychological or spiritual reality rather than the material or physical reality. In form, there is no logical sequence of events and haphazard sequencing is found in the presentation of episodes.

The first playwright undertaken in this research is Eugene Gladstone O’Neill (1888-1953) who was an Irish American playwright and Nobel laureate in literature. His poetically titled plays were among the first to introduce into American drama techniques of realism earlier associated with Russian playwright Anton Chekov, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and Swedish playwright August Strindberg. Eugene O’Neill wrote only one well-known comedy Ah, Wilderness! (1933) Nearly all of his other plays involve some degree of tragedy and personal pessimism. He received Nobel Prize in literature in 1936, Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1920, 1922, 1928, 1957.

The next imminent playwright Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) was an American writer who worked principally as playwright in the American theatre. He wrote short stories, novels, poetry, essays, screenplays and a volume of memories. His professional career lasted from the mid 1930’s until his death in 1983. He adopted much of his best known works for the cinema. He received Pulitzer Prize in 1959, New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, Donaldson Awards, and a Tony Award.

Mahesh Elkunchwar (Oct 9, 1939) is an Indian Marathi Playwright. He has written more than 15 plays. He is well-known for his theoretical writings, critical work in
India’s ‘Parallel Cinema’ as actor and screenwriter. Today along with Satish Alekar and Vijay Tendulkar he is one of the most influential progressive playwrights not just in modern Marathi theatre but also larger modern Indian theatre. He has been honored in India with the Homi Bhabha Fellowship (1976-78), the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Uuganta, annual award for best playwright given by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, National Academy of the Performing Arts, (1989). The prestigious Janasthan Puraskar is given in 2011 for his service to the theatre and so on.

Mahesh Elkunchwar began his theatrical career with experimental one-act plays like Sultan (1967), Zumber (1967), Kaifiyat (1967) and others. The actor’s body desires to express itself and to make a search of what mind searches is real experimentation in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s point of view. In Garbo(1970), Shrimant, Panzy, Intuc and Garbo are the main characters who represent types and present their perspectives of looking at Garbo. The ‘empty vacancy’ of life is shown in Garbo; Vasanakand (1972) presents the incestuous relationship between the sculptor Hemkant and his beautiful model Lalita who happens to be his sister. The play seeks to find out the original sources of lustful desire. Party (1976) is a static play in which the discussion centers on the gap between faces and their masks. Pratibimb exposes the rootless, faceless loss of identity which is central to the existentialist philosophy that is explored by Mahesh Elkunchwar. Sultan, and Zumber is the one act plays which deal with the same violence and exposure of the primal human impulses.

There are uncountable comparative points in the selected plays of Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Mahesh Elkunchwar. The major finding in this comparison is that all these playwrights have given voice to the immediate realities of their own times. The unique feature of these realities is they are applicable to the present day situation of people. There is universality in the themes, settings, characterizations and use of symbols of these plays. The first finding of the present study is the use of the archetypes and the myths which form the basis of the dramatic content and substantial matter of a play. Eugene O’Neill’s play Desire under the Elms makes use of classical and Biblical myths of Oedipus, Phaedra, Medea, Hyppolytus, Greek Abraham Rachel, Reuben, Abel and Cain (Bible). In Long Day’s Journey into Night the Faust, Mephistopheles, Jacob, Esau, Isaac, Rebekah, Abraham and Aleedah are the classical and Biblical myths which are significantly used. In Tennessee Williams’s Oedipus, Odysseus, Penelope, Narcissus myths from the Greek mythology and ‘unicorn’ are
used as an archetype. A Streetcar Named Desire has the Odyssey myth. In Reflection Penelope, Lady of Shalott, Narcissus myths are presented. Cain Abel, Adam Eve, Kauravas Pandavas and other myths are employed in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Old Stone Mansion an expressionist play.

The second finding shows how the presentation of psychological realism is made in these six plays, two each by Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Mahesh Elkunchwar. Expressionism is a reaction against material or social realism of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century plays of Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy. It is the inner core, it is the psychic undercurrents which are the springs of action and so these are presented in the selected six modern plays. The working of the mind in respect of Abbie and Eben, James and Mary, Blanche and Stanley, Amanda, and Laura, He and She and the members of the Family is presented in order to reflect the feature of psychological realism in these six expressionistic plays. The third finding is the use of symbolism as a dramatic technique in these plays. The elm trees, the farm and the baby in Desire under the Elms, the very title of the play, day, night, the unicorn, the glass menagerie in The Glass Menagerie, reflection and mirror in Reflection, the old mansion, the musical tunes, the dance steps and meat are the major symbols used in A Streetcar Named Desire.

The fourth finding concerns the feature of expressionism, which is psychological presentation; the triumph of reality over fantasy and the cyclical pattern of crime, guilty conscience, and expiation are presented through psychological presentation in A Streetcar Named Desire and Long Day’s Journey into Night respectively. Sigmund Freudian complexes are presented through oedipal complex and others in Desire under the Elms. The stream of consciousness technique is used in The Glass Menagerie. The psychological disturbances in Old Stone Mansion and the psychic division through alienation and rootlessness are projected in Reflection by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The fifth finding is that Pablo Picasso’s impact is clearly visible in the expressionistic technique used in modern drama. The abstract art forms are created by Picasso. The lusty embrace of Eben and Abbie is the visible crystallization of what the stagecraft through the sinister drooping of the two elm trees filtering lust through the walls. The abstract becomes concrete here. Reflection is lost and rootlessness is concretely presented by Mahesh Elkunchwar. His old walls crumbling down, the falling roof and the collapsing walls is the concrete presentation of the abstract,
psychological currents, undercurrents and cross-currents of relationships among the
members belonging to the four generations of the Deshpande family from
Dharangaon.

Abstract paintings, sculptures with the globe, the robot, the iron man made of various
raw materials from clay, plaster of Paris to steel and aluminum, the sky-scrappers and
twin-towers as architectural wonders, pop art, pop-music, jazz, blues, rock, twist,
cancan dances, and other fine and applied arts have their impact on Eugene O’Neill’s
plays like The Hairy Ape(1922), Desire under the Elms(1924), Long Day’s Journey
into Night,(1941) and The Iceman Cometh(1939), Tennessee Williams’ The Night of
Iguana(1961), Sweet Bird of Youth(1959), The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof(1955), A
Streetcar Named Desire(1947), and The Glass Menagerie(1944) and Mahesh
Elkunchwar’s Party(1976), Garbo(1970), Reflection(1987) and Old Stone
Mansion(1985). This is the sixth finding of the present study. The seventh finding of
the study is that expression is the mode of creation which is used in these six plays.
Expression means the unfolding of the inner recesses of the human psyche. Blanche’s
pretending gets expressed through what she speaks to Stanley and Stella and Stanley
is frankly outspoken and spares none. Blanche’s guilt and Stanley’s hurt pride get
revealed in the play. Bhaskar’s conspiracy, Sudhir’s selfishness, Chandu’s silence and
Ranju’s obsession is disclosed through the expressive mode of creation. The eighth
finding of the study directs the attention of the reader and indirectly that of the
spectator to the stage directions given by the dramatists. Eugene O’Neill brings out
the significance of the farm, the elms in Desire under the Elms and the Tyrone’s
house in Long Day’s into Night through the stage-directions in these plays. The same
device is very effectively employed by Tennessee Williams as well as Mahesh
Elkunchwar. The ninth finding of the present study brings out the fact that these plays
have dialogues which are clipped, telegraphic and rhapsodic. The terse, cryptic
dialogues have brought out the dramatic tensions very effectively and have presented
the dramatic conflicts in highly dramatic manner. The tenth finding reveals that the
characterization is such in expressionistic plays that presents characters rather types
such as just Father, Mother, Husband, Wife, He, She, Son, Daughter, Brother, Sister
and Sister-in-law, Grandmother and Grandson or Granddaughter. They have lost their
individuality in the contemporary scenario. In Desire under the Elms Husband, wife,
lover, in Long Day’s Journey into Night Father, Mother, Sons, Tennessee Williams’s
*The Glass Menagerie* presents Mother, Daughter and Son while Elder sister, Younger Sister and her husband and in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s play *Reflection;* He, She, Flags and Girl appear to represent types and the entire range of human relationships presented through the characters belonging to four generations of Dharangaonkar’s Deshpande family in *Old Stone Mansion.*

The use of light and sound effects is meaningful in all the six plays. These effects can be seen in the Mirror scene in *Reflection,* the box of ornaments scene in *Old Stone Mansion,* the rape scene in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the montage in *The Glass Menagerie* and the Eben –Abbie scenes in *Desire under the Elms* and the departures and arrivals of Mary in *Long Day’s Journey into Night.* This is the eleventh finding. The twelfth finding is that these plays present the rural culture in *Desire under the Elms,* the conflict between worker’s culture and the culture of the established in *A Streetcar Named Desire,* the clash of cultures in *The Glass Menagerie.* The contemporary culture in *Reflection* and the clash between rural and urban culture is noticeable in *Old Stone Mansion.* The thirteenth finding brings out the tensions and conflicts of Laura, and Amanda, Blanche and Stanley, Eben and Abbie, James and Mary, He and She, Bhaskar and Sudhir in these plays by Tennessee Williams’s Eugene O’Neill and Mahesh Elkunchwar. The fourteenth finding presents the social background that is different in each of the plays farmers social relationship, the actor’s life and his achievements, his failures and his family and social background, the social question of marriage in Williams’s plays, the social response to He in *Reflection* and traditional social set up in conflict with the metropolitan social background in *Old Stone Mansion.* The fifteenth finding shows that the dreams of Laura, Blanche, He, Bhaskar Vahini, Ranju-Parag, James, Mary and Abbie are shattered ruthlessly. The sixteenth finding shows that the characters put on masks, even then their degeneration cannot be hidden as noticed in the characters of Blanche, Jamie, Ephraim, He and Bhaskar from these six selected plays. All these characters try to escape from reality and this can be seen in our present society also where people hide their reality and pretend to show the things which they are not having. These characters are universal because they demonstrate the day to day problems of people which are common everywhere in the World. The seventeenth finding reveals the reflection of the social, cultural and other conditions as the backgrounds to the present times of the twentieth century world as reflected in the six modern plays.
The reflection of contemporary reality is psychologically presented in all these plays as its eighteenth finding discloses. The nineteenth finding shows that stylistic effects carry a great deal of significance in these plays. Eugene O’Neill’s comments on the lust in *Desire under the Elms* and on the patriarchy in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, the reflections on the family and marriage systems in the plays by Tennessee Williams and Mahesh Elkunchwar bring out their humanitarian philosophy of life based on the intricate network of relationships and kinships. This is the twentieth finding of the study. The psychological reality is visually presented in a photographic close-up of the contemporary world in order to offer the twenty first finding. The twenty second finding of the present study is the various practical and theoretical implications of the human condition in the present day reality as reflected in all the six selected plays two each by O’Neill, Williams and Elkunchwar. The twenty third finding is that the contemporary society of the current times is damaged by the rotten core of the social and family structures. The twenty fourth finding is a statement on the spirit of anti-establishment as noticed in the portrayals of Eben -Abbie, James -Mary, Laura -Amanda, Blanche- Stanley, He- She, Bhaskar- Sudhir Ranju-Parag and others.

The twenty fifth finding of this study comments on the lack of spirituality and the emergence of materialism due to the rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization. The twenty sixth finding presents the disjointed structure of episodes as what is to be presented is the psychological reality. Plot and structures relate differently to different characters. The twenty seventh finding discloses that the use of monologues is made in these six plays in order to express the destruction of family and social structure and depression among these characters. The twenty eighth finding reveals how figures and forces represented by characters and episodes are presented rather disjointed haphazardly with deliberate intentions. The twenty ninth finding shows that there is a lot of distortion of dramatic elements in the treatment of theme, the portrayal of the characters, the structural pattern and the dislocated settings and colloquial style of expression.

The thirtieth finding is that expressionism is a trend in literary writings that presents an anti-materialist rather psychologically charged situations as found illustrations in all the six selected plays, two each by Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Mahesh Elkunchwar.