ABSTRACT

The topic of my research is “A Study of Language Dramaturgy in the Major Plays of Samuel Beckett”. It aims to explore the inherent drama of Samuel Beckett’s language. This thesis is a close analysis of language techniques employed in his major plays. Language becomes an instrument and vehicle for the execution of drama. Beckett defies traditions and conventions of stagecraft by inventing his own personal, private and individualistic manner of manipulating and reorganising language patterns to shape dramas. The plays selected for textual analysis of Beckett’s language are *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Rockaby*, *That Time* and *Not I*. The study is divided into seven chapters, the opening chapter gives an insight into modern drama and its development and the remaining six chapters explore the variation in language dramaturgy in the individual plays.

In each of his plays, language is used to convey a different kind of dramaturgic presence on the proscenium. The incomunicable is communicated with language creatively ‘communicating its collapse’. This generated collapse of language situates the meaningless and irrational human condition in an oblique, concrete, intense and compelling manner. The post war period witnessed a marked resurgence in the material offered to the theatre-goers. The content offered for the stage consisted of display of fractured and disjuncted personalities, diseased psyche and an eerie meaninglessness of an irrational existential bind. The dramas were a post-war statement which reflects modern condition of humankind burdened with the non-belief of futility of religion. Beckett was of the same view as Nietzsche that God was dead and modern man was distressed because the edifice of human values and beliefs has collapsed. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* had robbed religion of its validity. Saddled with this content the theatre was in search for a construct which could deal with seriousness of life through dramatic and psychological motifs. The aforementioned content led drama to experiment with a variety of forms in order to probe the multiple depersonalized abstractions and severed psyches, persistently surfacing in society. Beckett therefore offered to his readers who are already disillusioned, battered and lonely familiar subjects. While dealing with such serious subjects, he gave new treatment to his plays. Beckett’s theatre was not dependent on
conventions of drama. He shaped a new stage for new readers who were startled and shocked to witness their own reflections on stage

_Waiting for Godot_ is one of the most influential European dramas of the post-war period. It is a play where nothing happens. Beckett presents a stage with minimal number of character, least stage artifice. The two sets of characters representing different human predicament are parallels as well as binaries of each other. The play examines and portrays the metaphysical anguish, the anxiety of being, the nature of time, the absurdity of human condition, the existence of doubt and despair, and many more such issues that plagued the anima of the human being.

The drama opens in a pessimistic world which unfolds the darker perceptions inside the psyche of mentally deranged and impotent people reacting against religion, crumbling institutions of the family, and the ethical fabric of society. The names inhabiting the world of the play are symbolic of four general human dilemmas. They are abbreviated and generic images of mankind that are interchangeable with each other. Throughout the play Beckett attempts to underscore the tedium involved in this process of suspended animation. Two individuals or character-disjuncts who have been named Didi and Gogo display this relentless wait for the unknown figure. During the course of waiting their conversations, moods, routines, activities and behaviour may differ but one thing which remains unvarying till the end is their endless wait for Godot.

_Endgame_ is a one-act play and the structure opted for the play is simple with a new dramatic dimension where the characters are immobile and few of them are confined within human-sized dust-bins. There is a creative exploitation of a language collapse and the dramatist succeeded in projecting the perfect image of Absurd drama into the psyches of the readers by this language exploitation. It is Beckett’s language and his precise selection of words which renders this play unique stripped as it is from traditional paraphernalia of host of characters, plot, and effective décor. The play is typically Beckettian; irrational, explicitly implicit, loose ended and (un)exhaustive in its meaning. Beckett undoubtedly emerges through _Endgame_ a playwright of extraordinary aptitude, especially the way in which he manipulates language to maximum dramaturgic effect. It demands special acumen to comprehend
the psycho-dynamics of the language he used, as it is highly suggestive, symbolic, and ambiguous.

Krapp’s Last Tape is regarded by Beckett himself as ‘a stage monologue’ and contains narratological paradoxes. Beckett experimented with new theatric style and stage device in which he highlights the predicament of an alienated man confronted with his multiple selves. A mechanical device creates drama with the help of tape dramaturgy. The tape employment demonstrates a ‘confrontation’ of the self with Krapp when he was twenty seven or twenty nine years, thirty nine years (39) and sixty nine years (69). The gadget reveals and interpolates Krapp’s past, present and future in his own voice.

This play is pre-eminently a novel experience, quite unique and experimental in its treatment. It is different from Waiting for Godot, That Time, and Endgame in its enactment. There is an apparent radical digression from the conventional style of writing drama. Beckett considers it an enactment ‘for one actor’. Not designed with innumerable characters, Beckett offers replacement through a mechanical device. The tape recorder serves as a character and becomes a companion of the ‘one actor’ who plays the spools. Here the tape dramaturgy assists the language dramaturgy by deconstructing one individual into different voice personae. The dramaturgy employed is the deconstruction of self through language experimentation. The tape separates the self into three distinct personae. Action is generated with the pressing of the switch-on and switch-off button of the tape recorder. And the recovery of recorded tapes creates a drama on a dark lit stage. It is yet another unique tool narration in Beckettian discourse.

The play Rockaby is the ‘minimalist piece’ of drama offering a new dimension to Beckett’s language. It is one among those three series in which Beckett places ‘one woman’ in entirety as the core of the drama. The play bears resemblance with Not I and Footfalls in its depiction of the existential void and encompasses the agonies of the principal female voices. They are portrayals of women who are cribbed and confined within their existential plight. Rockaby is an illustration of drama which actively employs ‘a rocking chair’ as a motif. The movement of this prop coincides with the sound of the ‘voice’ and together they constitute the drama of the play where
a woman slowly withdraws from the world, rocked to eternal sleep in her mother’s chair.

The uniqueness of *That Time* lies in reversing the conventional standards of drama, where characters are the main ingredient and provide space for the writer to create drama. But here the entire drama is of language—the drama of language created with queries, answers, descriptions and explanations. The drama appears much in the nature of a prose exercise. Here, Beckett has aimed to reveal the innate and inherent drama of language through three voices as A, B and C and the silence of listener. In the play, the voice of the single character has been intentionally muted in order to create three modulations. Thus the variation found in the same dialogue is basically intended to generate the sheer drama of language. For Beckett language is not a mere mode of communication but a vehement phenomenon which is highly dramatic in its nature. Samuel Beckett has tried to employ language as a new prototype for the unsaid in *That Time* by breaking all conventional norms of drama, dismantling the edifice of grammatical usages, re-orientating the concept of time and space. The playwright startles his audience by making the theme his language and language the theme. It is the language which moves the play and gives energy and momentum to it. At surface level Beckett has structured the text as simple babblings of voices about their times, but these babblings create nuisance and this nuisance is created through language, hence language becomes an apparatus to show the Absurd predicament.

The final textual analysis is conducted on *Not I* which opens with a note which is sub-headed by ‘movement’, the sub-text gives a profound yet brief description of physical movement. The description serves readers to envisage the unique stage image which the dramatist has distinctly designed. The image created at the onset is ‘disconcerting and disturbing’ to the psyches of readers as the actor is suspended in absolute darkness with a single bright spot which highlights only the mouth of the actor, covering the entire body “from head to foot in loose black djelleba”. The physical action on the stage is followed by an emotional gesture “in a gesture of helpless compassion”. The play begins almost ten seconds before the curtain rises as an unintelligible voice is heard and then the lips appear with a torrent of speech paving the way for an absolute impassiveness. The utterance of ‘Mouth’ is in the form of ‘disjointed staccato monologue’.
While contemplating the technique of Beckett’s theatre, one necessarily needs to understand his unique narrative tendencies in theatrical discourse. Not I, fosters an illusion for both readers and audience regarding the ‘she’ of the text/drama. Beckett registers the expressions and reactions of audience at two levels— one as being ‘another’ person and other at the level of multiple personalities of speaker. The note of Not I initially discourages identifying the ‘I’ of title with ‘She’ of text and auditor who remains at a distance (or placed at a distance) as either being an auditor only or audience.

Assessing Beckett, from the perspective of language his instrument for stagecraft seems chaotic, absurd with abundance of pauses, ellipses, parenthesis and clichés. But it reinforces the drama within the dramatic boundaries of grammar, punctuation and metrical units though it is designed by Beckett as debased and unstable. The drama of Beckett lies in this ‘debased and unstable’ language which is presented within the suitable linguistic framework. His language has a reputation for obscurity and difficulty but despite that it creates drama. Language is ‘multimedial’ in the sense that it functions both as an auditory as well as visual tool, therefore it gives a definite sense of completion to its dramas.

To sum up, this thesis is an attempt to explore Samuel Beckett’s language dramaturgy and brings forth the drama through a close textual exegesis. The analysis is conducted at the level of repetition, pause, sub-text, silence, and existence of structure within structural language units, words and sudden shift of thought, fragmented and broken sentences. Thus, the use of language and its application interweaves and mingles the idea and the expression. It is the intention of this study to probe the dramaturgic experiments accomplished by Beckett and discover how language has been creatively employed by the dramatist.