



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

THE RELEVANCE OF 'DENIAL' IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S PLAYS

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.74.156](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.74.156)



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ABSTRACT

Caryl Churchill is a famous playwright for her works dealing with gender issues, political issues and contemporary social topics. Apart from these, her plays are also famous for the experimentation of dramatic form and style. Her denial of contemporary female inequality within the existing patriarchal society suggests gender and cultural reversal. She rejected the men and women inequality in the society and tried to present equal status to both.

Keyword: Defense Mechanism, Denial, Gay, Lesbianism, Sublimation, Gender politics, Oppression Patriarchy, Superwoman, etc.

Sigmund Freud has systematically referred ego defences in his works. Later, his daughter Anna developed these ideas in 1936. This defense mechanism, used to protect person from anxiety. There are number of other defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, displacement, regression and sublimation, etc. Denial is one of the defense mechanism proposed by Anna Freud which involves a refusal of reality. To avoid painful situation or feelings of everyday lives, people use denial in their life. Caryl Churchill also used denial in her plays.

During Thatcher's rule, Churchill wrote *Top Girls* and critically responded to the policies of Margaret Thatcher. Churchill visited America before writing *Top Girls*. The play exposes the extreme individualism and hyper professionalism. The character of Merlene concerned with financial and professional successes. Churchill totally denied the cultural differences of men and women. The celebration party of Merlene's promotion is nothing but the equal rank of women in the society. Women have been devalued and projected secondary role

due to their dependency. But Merlene's economic independence shows the 1970s Britain. It was the time when Margaret Thatcher rises to the position of British Prime Minister. Thatcher's ascending on that position of inspired Churchill for writing the plays Like *Top Girls*. As a woman Prime Minister, her policies were deeply conservative and anti-feminist. Joyce considers Thatcher's policies are suffocating for the working class.

Churchill referred Nell, Win and Merlene as "toughbird" or successful in the professional world of patriarchy. Yet there is competition between Nell and Merlene. Women are professional rivals in the play. Men like Howard Kidd depend upon women to secure their private lives.

In *Top Girls*, Act I take place at London restaurant to celebrate Merlene's Promotion as Managing Director of Top Girls. Merlene's five female guests are unique in the play. They all represent different historical eras. Isabella Bird, a 19th century writer and traveller, Lady Nijo, a 13th century courtesan and later Buddhist Nun. Dull Gret

the subject of a Brughel painting who led an army of women into hell to fight the devils, Pope Joan, a 9th century woman who disguised herself as a man and become Pope and Patient Griselda, the obedient wife from *The Clerk's Tale* in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Churchill's projection of all female characters suggests her refusal of male dominancy, patriarchy and oppression.

In *Cloud 9*, the characters are with sexual relationships in the play. The characters engaged in sexual activities in Act II in the play. They denies the traditional society and their practices exist in the contemporary world. Caryl Churchill legitimates the different gender construction of female hetero sexuality, lesbianism and biosexuality. Churchill denies the conventional firmly structured and male dominated society. Many social movements were active for equal rights during the 1960s and 1970s decade. They are gay movement, lesbian movement generally opposed by religious people considering as an immoral activity. In II, leaving aside the gender construction Churchill is successful in representing new social context.

Merlene's family advocates that you are creator of your destiny. You have to create your opportunities. Her refusal of the responsibility of motherhood, rejection of the domestic role shows Caryl Churchill's denial of such type of dominancy in the society. In general, there are male characters as a hero. But in this play Churchill took the collection of dead women drawn from history paintings and literature. These characters selected from past and applied into modern context. These characters reminds us that in the past, revolutionary women who ignored or disregarded the past bondages of the society. The woman in the play represents their era or historical periods.

All Women represented in the play *Top Girls* have one common story that story of how they gave up some aspect of their womanhood in order to fulfil their destiny. The presentation of three women exposes the autonomous decision of the all female characters. The womanly traits have been forced upon them by the society. All women have their own heroic quality and revolted their

contemporary uncontrollable existence in the society.

Caryl Churchill was well aware of sexual liberation in British society. The legalisation of abortion, the Family Planning Act and Divorce Reform Act stand as the important reforms passed under the government of Harold Wilson. These reforms boosts toward recognising woman as independent individuals. The traditional representation of woman by men writers have been overthrown in the *Top Girls*. Churchill shown those women have chances to get to the top as they stand against the patriarchal values and bondages loaded by men. Churchill took the women from different periods of time.

Caryl Churchill intends to display the women in power. Churchill attributed these women masculine traits. Merlene distanced herself from other women suggests the distance from womanhood. Margaret Thatcher was called the "Iron Lady". Her maintaining distance from woman clarifies more about women's too much dependence on men.

The play *Cloud 9* performed in 1979. The plays first act is set in British colony in Africa And the second Act takes place in London in 1970s. Churchill used unconventional style in the play. She analyzes the patriarchal hegemonic construction of the notion of gender and sexuality and adopted the cross-gender, cross-racial and cross –generational theatrical devices.

Caryl Churchill does not share the common traditional gender roles. Churchill portrayed characters with unconventional values. Caryl represented woman on much higher positions that is liberal position. Woman should be free and equal agents to men. She tried to highlight two categories of categories of women they are superwomen and motherhood. Caryl's denied woman as inferior and weak passive and projected as a Superwoman. The projection of Superwoman in the play is supposed to dethroned male supremacy. In *Owners*, The values and attributes Marion holds is manly. Her gaining power and accepting male models of success is an example of superwoman.

Marion is shown as a real estate developer and her husband as unsuccessful builder. Marion treated her husband as a tool and offers a girl for her husband Clegg. In *Top Girls*, Merlene is shown as promoted the Managing Director of Employment Agency which is traditionally a male position. Thus, projecting Superwoman position as in many of her play shows that her denial of any differences in the case of gender in the society. Churchill attributed passive role to male characters in her plays like Alec (in *Cloud 9*). Kate Millet argued that the domination of male over female has been the fundamental priority in our social order. All superficial concept or thoughts of male supremacy has been totally overthrown in Churchill's plays. Her rejection of patriarchal value such as patriarchal values such as patriarchal marriage and family, denial of sexual freedom to women, tendency toward making female and sexual object than a person and the conviction that woman entertain, satisfy or please men with their sexuality are some of them.

The play *Owners* explores the unique style of the subversion of traditional roles of women. The play centres on a successful businesswomen Marion. Social weaknesses prevented Churchill to reach her goals. Churchill created a unique character like Marion who is inspired by the ideals of the progressive woman's movement, successful and independent life style. The rejection of common and traditional age old women's role shows the revolutionary or independent women in her plays. One has power to choose their own path of life. Churchill shows that there is not any allotment of work in the society.

In *Far Away* Churchill demonstrates the strengthening of the political order. Increasing global conflicts as well the removal of restraints on maturity interventions are clearly important contexts in *Far Away*. Many writers turn toward the political in British theatre. The writer ignites by the event of 9/11. The play was performed at Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in Nov.2000. Many ordinary people were dissatisfied with the contemporary political system.

Churchill not only escaped the traditional norms but also tried to deconstruct the traditional

system s of representation based on Aristotles ideas in writing the plays. Many writers have been acknowledges the Aristotlian ideal including structural and stylistic unity throughout its history. But Churchill's complete denial or rejection of dramatic pattern indirectly challenges the traditional systems of representation in theatrical gamut. Her innovative approach in writing theatre positioned her Britain's leading women dramatist. She followed her individual pattern to reveals inequality os social order. She is distinctive in her own way. Her plays dismantle the tradition of theatre and differentiate her from male stream canon of playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Sam Sheperd. In *Vineger Tom*, Churchill attempt to manipulate the time frame in order to reveal that the personal is political. Her plays emphasized episodic structure non-linear frame and a history which is rearranged and reinterpreted. Thus, Churchill's Chronological disruption, lack of linearity of time, subverting the traditional dramatic norms etc. establishes the denial of the patriarchal – capitalist Authoritarian ideology.

In form and structure also, Caryl Churchill broke from the traditional dramatic art after 1970s and took to experiments on historical grounds. Her plays focuses on heightened language, political analysis, articulation of injustice, gender roles. Churchill not opted set patterns of conventions and followed a new pattern of experiment, innovation and unpredictability. The combination of surreal fantasy, documentary, case histories and naturalistic domestic drama is explored in her plays. The combinations and literary historical references and uses of non-traditional casting characterization reveals Churchill's world of feminine.

Churchill showed economic security, social standard and professional successes for women in a male dominated world in her plays. Women's are given low wages and poor work conditions in a male domination. But Churchill's concern is to represent independent women. Many writers have shown women as secondary role. But Churchill denies the age old practice of the writers. Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, *Fen* and *Cloud Nine* are about the autonomy of women. She deliberately breaks the dominant ideology of patriarchal capitalist culture. But in plays

like *Top Girls*, *Serious Money* and *Fen*, he raise questions about economic independence of women. Women have been still underprivileged in patriarchal system due to their dependent on their male counterpart.

The situations have been projected partly from the present world and partly from her own imaginative realizations. She has imagined a society in which women have their own voice and expressing their own freedom from the male dominated structure. Churchill conceived an unusual feminine intellect. Churchill achieved an international fame during 1960s and 1980s decades. Her innovative theatrical recreations changed the shape and direction of theatre through her plays. Her Projection of social status and professional success of women challenged the dominant social and cultural conventions.

Thus, Caryl Churchill systematically applies the concept of 'Denial' in her plays. Churchill's total rejection of contemporary patriarchal ideology Aristotlian pattern, Gender politics suggest her acceptance of reality and represents independent high achievers and superwoman type of characters in her plays.

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