Chapter One

Post-war British Theatre and Caryl Churchill

The Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century Volume I (1999) hails Caryl Churchill as an uncompromising playwright: “Recognized from her earliest plays as an important feminist voice, Churchill has become unquestionably one of Britain’s most important playwrights, without ever softening her message or moderating the strength and passion of her ideas” (Strand 499). In this dissertation I intend to explore the challenging theatrical experiments of Caryl Churchill that in turn raise the consciousness of women about their roles and position in the society. Churchill’s objective as a dramatist can be expressed by Betty’s words in Cloud Nine: “If there isn’t a right way to do things you have to invent one” (2.4). Churchill takes pride in her ‘otherness’ as a woman, whose power to create a space for women and also to subvert the masculine dominance in theatre and society has been acknowledged by the modern world.

Theatre has always played a vital role in depicting the radical socio-cultural changes in Britain. Theatre is a domain that has been influenced by the changing social and political scenario of that particular period. Feminist theatre did not flourish in Britain in the 1930s and 1940, though theatre movements were organized and theatre companies were formed. There were only occasional plays about the issues of women. It was only after the Second World War that women achieved success in establishing a theatrical space of their own.

The socio-political changes after the Second World War provided greater freedom to women. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the New Left, comprising left-liberal intelligentsia challenged the social conventions and bourgeois ideologies. The Labour
Government (1945-1951) that established the Welfare State brought about some changes in the lives of women. The Education Act of 1944 provided higher education opportunities for both men and women. Moreover, the Abortion Act of 1967, Divorce Reform Act of 1969 and Equal Pay Act of 1970 provided better living conditions for women. The conditions for divorce had been simplified. Equal pay for both men and women opened up an environment for emancipation of women. The liberalization of Britain’s attitude towards women and other social issues resulted in the Abolition of Censorship in 1968. Sexual liberty had been celebrated. In this climate of social change theatre tried to liberate itself from the shackles of censorship.

The new socio-political consciousness of the 1960s and 1970s added new impetus to the feminist and gay movements. The feminist political philosophy of the 1960s that aimed at equality of men and women, economic independence and women enfranchisement did not keep up to the expectations of women. Though the feminist movement was assumed to be a successful endeavour on the part of women, there was hardly any progress or change in their personal lives. Politics did not seem to address problematic issues of gender, such as, reproduction, domestic violence and sexuality. The Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain held its first national conference at Ruskin College in Oxford in the Spring of 1970.

Over 500 women came from all over the country, and by the end of the weekend four basic ‘demands’ had been formulated: (1) Equal Pay. (2) Equal Education and Opportunity. (3) 24-Hour Nurseries. (4) Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand. The demands were a simple expression of desires for material change to improve the position of women. The demands also made a clear link between women’s relationship to (a) material social production; (b) the family; (c) individual sexual choice. This new wave of feminism aimed to embrace all areas of experience, and to draw attention in a new way
to the relationship between the social and sexual division of labour (Wandor, *Carry on Understudies* 13).

The movement encouraged 'consciousness-raising' of women. Women forming small groups discussed their personal experiences of oppression as well as their economic and social exploitation. In groups women developed a sense of solidarity and 'sisterhood' being free from the constraints of patriarchy. Such 'separatism', though contradicted, brought about changes in the situation of women. They focused on individualism and self-determination to assert their strength. 'The personal is political' became the slogan of the new wave feminists. This axiom means that the distinctive experiences of women within the social sphere are personal, emotional and interiorized: to know the politics of women’s situation is to know the lives of women. Moreover, women find a political gesture in the social set-up—a gesture determined by a complex set of assumptions about male-female relations, assumptions that may be also called a version of 'sexual politics'. The second wave feminist activity or Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain originated from the proceedings of the Conferences at Ruskin College from 1970-1978. Though the movement was ridiculed as the 'Women's Lib', it expanded. It celebrated International Women's Day in 1971. In 1972 four journals were initiated—*Spare Rib*, *Women's Report*, *Women's Voice* and *Red Rag*. Socialist-feminist conferences were held in different parts of Britain during 1973-1974. In 1974 a Working Women’s Charter was drawn up that elaborated the Ruskin Conference demands. In 1975 the charter for Women at Work revived by Trade Union Congress targeted at the improvement of the women’s position in the trade Union movement. The final conference of the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1978 resulted in the controversial debates between heterosexual and lesbian feminists. The Women’s Liberation Movement emphasized anti-authoritarian working conditions. Women from different
social classes took active part in it. They challenged the socio-political conditions that had oppressed them. Sexuality and domestic labour, including child-bearing and rearing were the major concerns of the new wave feminists. Thus, feminism gained much prominence through its diverse perspectives during the 1970s.

The feminist movement with multiple tendencies can be categorized as liberal or bourgeois, radical and socialist. These three feminist groups challenge male dominance and try to bring about changes in the position of women by encouraging them to assert their self-identity and self-determination. The primary argument of liberal feminism consists of the natural equality and freedom of men and women. The group advocates the formation of a social structure that gives importance to individuals and provides them with equal opportunities. But liberal feminism is in favour of acceptance of the ideology of liberal individualism and personal freedom only for men. Women should ‘equal up’ with men, i.e., masculinity is regarded as the norm. Radical feminism focuses on the fact that women are a separate class and there exists a distinct ‘women culture’ and women’s language. This group holds the view that in some respects women are even superior to men. Women are strong and powerful, not weak and feminine. Thus, there is a shift from the liberal attitudes as it stresses on the creation of separate female systems and celebration of the superiority of female attributes. Socialist feminism reveals the impact of capitalism and patriarchy on the position and identity of women. It focuses on “the ways in which power relations based on class interact with power relations based on gender—again, at both the individual and social level” (Wandor 136). Feminism has acquired the dimension of a political alternative for women. “The socialist feminist analysis of women’s oppression shows that women’s liberation requires totally new modes of organizing all forms of production and final abolition of ‘femininity’. Traditional Marxism has taken the abolition of class as its
explicit goal, but it has not committed itself to the abolition of gender. Socialist feminism makes an explicit commitment to the abolition of both class and gender" (Jagger 299). Socialist feminism proposes a change not only in the position of women, but also in the power relations of the society; its economic and material conditions of production such as history, political relations, race, class and gender are also the major areas of interest. Hence, it not only emphasizes the equality of men and women in the society, but also the necessity of their union in a progressive political action. Focusing on sexuality and motherhood, socialist feminists emphasize that reproductive freedom must be available to all women. It calls for economic security for women; child rearing being a social responsibility should be shared by the entire community—men as well as women. The concept of socialist feminism is the area of interest of the women playwrights. Their dramatic performances are a critique of the aggressive radical feminist approaches that overlook motherhood and housewifery for the sake of individual careerist triumphs. On the other hand, various other perspectives of feminism, in respect to the material conditions of production have also influenced the performances of the women playwrights. The miserable plight of the working-class women was made conspicuous in contemporary theatre. Moreover, the influence of French feminist theories and psychoanalysis connected female subjectivity to language—a male ordered sign-system. Such developments in socio-cultural fields favoured the environment for women writing and performance, calling women to speak and write with their bodies, in their own spontaneous rhythm. The outcome of such a confluence of female consciousness resulted in the staging of women-centered plays.

The socio-political scenario and the impact of ‘Thatcherism’ in Britain had also influenced feminist movement and feminist theatre. The socio-political atmosphere of Britain in the 1970s was that of pessimism, unemployment, unrest and decline that led to a tendency of
monetarism and power. A great change in the political scenario of Britain emerged when Margaret Thatcher became the Prime Minister of the Conservative government in 1979. As the Prime Minister in three administrations between 1979 and 1990, Thatcher challenged the post-war political consensus by encouraging gross capitalism and free trade. Throughout 1980s, British politics was dominated by Thatcher. “She imposed upon the Conservative government a monetarist policy which had been of marginal importance before she became Conservative leader. The basic philosophy was one of rolling back the state, reducing the burden of welfare and allowing unfettered industry access to more funds to develop and expand to meet the market requirements” (Collette 7). Thatcherism aimed at destroying trade unionism to assert Britain’s economic and political independence; it favoured a new individuality that will be related to social, political and economic competitiveness. The ‘New Right’ led to the promotion of free market and enterprise without the interference of the state. Under such political change, women achieved freedom in certain fields. The position of women improved due to the legislation of the employment law. The social condition provided women security from sexual and economic exploitation. Thatcher’s government provided employment facilities to women.

The percentage of women employed grew steadily so that by 1998, in the 25-44 age bracket, where employment rates were highest, 75 percent of women compared to 93 percent of men were economically active. Married women in particular increased their employment, 74 percent being economically active by 1998. It was not unconnected that much of the increase in women’s work was in part-time jobs, 44 percent of women working part-time in 1998, compared to 4 percent of men (qtd.in. Collette 216).

Along with more job opportunities for women, other social changes provided them greater freedom. Abortion laws had been relaxed in 1967; it led to the formation of National Abortion
Campaign (NAC) in 1975. The role played by feminism in the Greenham Common Protest grounded feminist movements more strongly in the British soil. Women took active role in the establishment of the peace camp as they vehemently protested against the stationing of cruise missiles at Greenham Common in 1981-1982. Thus, women came forward to undertake the greatest military power in the world with absolute determination. Moreover, the Conservative government passed the Housing Act in 1980 that indirectly headed towards radical capitalism. In 1988, the Education Reform Act encouraged privatization of schools in order to raise funds. Such socio-economic policies gradually led to vast expansion in the 1980s and 1990s. But Thatcherism had been a threat to peace, progression and liberty even in respect to feminist attitudes. Margaret Thatcher herself was the symbol of power, career and economic independence. Women in Thatcher’s Britain, inspired by such capitalist motives hankered after money, career and power. But such material gains proved banal to the progression of women community. Only a lot of privileged women benefitted from such social systems; the deprived section suffered as before. Such critical social issues were the target of the contemporary women playwrights.

Before discussing the contribution of the women playwrights, it is necessary to look into the dramatic developments of post-war Britain. The waste and disillusionment after the Second World War instilled a sense of discontentment and alienation in the minds of the young dramatists. They strongly opposed the establishment and its political attitudes. In this social milieu the post-war dramatists were preoccupied with the depiction of the barrenness and sterility of human life. The miserable plight of the alienated modern man and the bleak picture of the working-class life have been captured by the realist playwrights like John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Arnold Wesker and others. The dramatists did not seem to be much
concerned about the condition of women caught in the gyres of patriarchal economy and materialism. It was Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* that provided a tremendous jerk to the entire British theatre. Theatre historians point out that the first performance in 1956 “marks the real break-through of the new drama into the British theatre” (Innes 98). The central motif of Osborne’s play concerns the figure of an angry, hypersensitive personality, marginalized by the class-ridden society. The Angry Young Men became the symbol of a ‘lost generation’. John Russell Taylor in *Anger and After* (1962) says that *Look Back in Anger* “was not just another play by another young writer, staged in a fit of enterprise by a provincial rep and then forgotten; it was something much more, something suspiciously like big business, and for the first time the idea got around that there might be money in young dramatists and young drama” (9). But Jimmy’s verbal assaults and misogynistic attitude can hardly be ignored. Right from the very beginning, Osborne presents Alison as a dislocated figure controlled and tortured psychologically by hypersensitive Jimmy. His anger and class hatred get expressed through the venomous attacks on his wife. The final picture of Alison is a figure grovelling on the ground, pleading for mercy and Jimmy’s companionship. What is more shocking is to note that Jimmy feels desexed in the companionship of Alison. As a result he desires to destroy her sexuality and capacity for motherhood. He struggles to rediscover his potency, which he feels is threatened by Alison. Like a vindictive patriarch, he destroys the strength and independence of his wife. Thus, the experiences of women and female psychology remained almost unexplored up to the first half of the twentieth century; the male dramatists failed to fathom the depth of unfulfilled desires repressed within them. Arnold Wesker’s *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959) represent working-class lives, stressing on the importance of mass education for social progress. The new concept of ‘social realism’ reflected in the ‘kitchen-sink’ plays focused on the working-
class settings. Ironically enough, it ignored the struggles of the women confined to the household affairs, performing the roles of a submissive wife. The new plays of the post-war England moved its focus from the upper-class drawing room comedies to the working-class struggles; prominence was given to the anti-heroes of the plays. John Elsom says:

> It became impossible any longer just to dismiss politics as the uncouth squabbling over power from which a sensitive man would shrink. Politics hung over our lives in the threatening shape of a mushroom cloud. Men were either going to have to solve their problems or cease to be men (70).

Elsom seems to make explicit Jimmy’s desire for masculine power. Post-war men were eager to restore the lost glory of imperial Britain. The young men should be conscious enough to assert their masculinity and virility to bring about social harmony. Thus, the contents of the plays are patriarchal, where women are often subdued or made invisible. Therefore, women were not altogether satisfied with their reflections on stage. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (trans. 1954) exposes the existential crisis of man in an absurd world. Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* (1958) and Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966) deal with the anxieties of the post-war generation. The new technicalities introduced by these playwrights influenced contemporary theatre. The Theatre of the Absurd exposed the meaninglessness of human existence by negating the logical pattern of language. The fifties can be considered as a watershed for women playwrights as they too desired to create a theatre to reveal their experiences of subjugation and oppression. But a critical survey of the contemporary theatrical scenario will reveal that the contribution of women playwrights on the British stage has been scarce as theatre is a male domain. The most outstanding contribution has been made by Shelagh Delany. Her remarkable play *A Taste of Honey* (1958) makes John Elsom comment: “a startling
enough achievement from a nineteen-year-old girl from Salford, which reflected the merits of this careful, sensitive study of a girl eager for life and resolutely enduring the troubles of mere existence” (83). The play exposes the social politics that trap and marginalize working-class women. It deals with the issues of poverty, single parenthood, sexualities and oppression. To Osborne, ‘pregnancy’ is a threat to man’s potency, while, to a woman playwright like Delany, ‘pregnancy’ is a vital issue that challenges a woman’s struggle to come to terms with life. Shockingly, the play failed to gain much appreciation. “It was performed not at the Royal Court but by Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, and the fact that Osborne still tends to be thought the more radical playwright suggests much about male-dominated theatre-criticism and continuing critical prejudices that promote particular venues and marginalize plays by women” (Lennard and Luckhurst 248). Ann Jellicoe’s The Sport of My Mad Mother (1958) explores the suppressed desires of women. The play is revolutionary thematically as well as technically. It deviates from the Osbornian conventions of well-made plays. What is more surprising is the fact that “unlike Osborne’s retention of so many elements of the well-made play, Jellicoe’s drama is much more innovative in terms of both dramatic structure and language” (Bennett 40). Lesley Storm’s Black Chiffon (1949) and Roar Like a Dove (1957) reveal the anger latent in women. In spite of innovative techniques, the women playwrights could not come out of the shadows of Osborne and Pinter. The statistics of production of plays at the Royal Court Theatre as recorded by Lib Taylor in “Early Stages: Women Dramatists 1958-68” states that: “…between 1956 and 1968, out of over two hundred productions, only fifteen were plays written by women, six of which were single Sunday performances” (qtd. in Bennett 40). But gradual improvement in the status of women in the sixties brightened the prospect of feminist theatre, and the abolition of theatre censorship in 1968 in Britain was conducive to new experimentations.
Contemporary male playwrights have portrayed women in the present day world. Such portraits are of women passive and submissive to patriarchal control. The plays of Brecht have greatly influenced British dramatists. Though the Brechtian techniques are adopted by the women playwrights, the depiction of women in his plays is conventional. Brecht’s *The Mother* (1932) shows that a woman is an isolated being with her female weaknesses. She has no choice but to accept the norms of patriarchy even in the political sphere. Playwrights like Howard Brenton and Trevor Griffith deal with the theme of alienation of the individual in a capitalist society. John McGrath’s *Trees in the Wind* (1971) deals with the fragmented lives of middle-class women. *Lay By* (1971) is a strange outcome of collaborative writing. Seven male playwrights collaborated in framing this play that deals with women who are either victims of male sexual exploitation or male dominance. David Hare’s *Slag* (1970) is an attack on feminism. Though the central characters of his plays are women, he satirizes the new feminist movement. It can be inferred that in the plays of the male dramatists women are confined within the ‘feminine roles’. They are either portrayed as submissive characters corrected by men, or represented as the ‘other’ when they try to be independent and self-assertive.

Women playwrights in the 1970s boldly represent female experiences on stage. Pam Gem’s *Queen Christina* (1977) and *Piaf* (1978) reconstruct mythologized women. *Queen Christina*, as described by Pam Gems is a “uterine play” (Wandor 165), which deals with sexual autonomy and the issues of political feminism. Her plays are genuinely women centered that evaluate the social/sexual behaviour of women in relation to sex and gender. Mary O Malley’s play, *Once a Catholic* (1970), deals with the repressive strategies adopted by the society to victimize women. Nell Dunn’s *Steaming* (1981) makes use of female bodies to shatter the commodification of female body by the ‘male gaze’. Apart from these successful women
Among these women playwrights, the contribution of Caryl Churchill is perhaps most outstanding. She is concerned not only with the feminist issues but also with the very notions of progression in the capitalistic social set-up. Feminism has failed to improve the lives of women of all sections of the society; it has promoted a system within the capitalist economy where the fittest can only survive. Such trends of seeking economic freedom to the exclusion of marriage and motherhood have been severely attacked by Churchill. She strives to provide deprived women a potential public space where they can voice their experiences of repression and torture. Moreover, Churchill’s experimentation with theatre has dismantled the norms of conventional theatre where women were given a marginal status. She creates a theatre for women, a forum where they can encounter their own selves. Churchill’s semiotics of theatre challenges the ideologies that pervade the society and the stage. The audience and the actors are offered enough scope to justify social conventions and their roles that govern their identity. Thus Churchill’s dynamic theatre can generate social consciousness among playgoers to support programmes of social change for greater freedom and fulfilment.

In the 1970s theatre acquired the dimension of a field where multifarious perspectives like feminist theory, American popular culture and socio-political interactions got publicly interfused. Feminist approaches began to add new perspectives to those socio-cultural agencies regulated by male hegemony. This gave birth to a large number of theatre companies that encouraged the concept of writing plays on uniquely female topics. The Left Wing Agitprop
Theatre presented the working-class life with all its complexities. The Alternative Theatre or the Fringe Theatre aimed at focusing the marginalized and oppressed section of the society. The Women's Theatre Group, The Monstrous Regiment, Joint stock Theatre, Gay Sweatshop are exclusive companies that propagated the new trends of feminist theatre that tried to subvert the conventional theatre, its form and content. A company member of Monstrous Regiment, Gillian Hanna recollects:

To be a woman in 1975 and not to have felt that excitement of things starting to change, possibilities in the air, would have meant that you are only half alive...

...we wanted to change the world. At the time, this didn't seem like such an outrageous project. All around us, women in every area of the world we knew were doing the same thing. It seemed as natural as breathing.

But much more exciting than breathing. Exhilarating. The sense of being in the right place at the right time, in step with a great movement in the history, part of history, making history ourselves. We were part of a huge wave of women and we were going to remake everything. It gradually dawned on us that we didn't have to go out and join any movement. We were already in it. We were the Movement. (qtd. in Aston 17).

Such liberating experiences of women in theatre gradually gained support to prove that it is possible for a woman to write and direct plays. For the first time in the history of British theatre the new theatre companies began commissioning women to write for them. It was in the Royal Court Theatre that Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956) was performed for the first time, stirring the minds of the entire post-war generation of Britain. For Churchill also it was the venue of her first professional stage production, Owners, in 1972. Caryl Churchill is the first woman playwright in residence at Royal Court Theatre. According to the Director, Max Stafford Clark,
the percentage of plays by women rose from 8% in the 1970s to 30% in the 1980s. This gradual increase reflects that the plays by women were gradually gaining popularity. As the plays by women progress, the playwrights started directing their own plays. Jacqueline Rudet, a black feminist, even declared that it was a mistake having a man direct her play *Money to Live* on the ground that "what women create in life, men destroy" (qtd. In. Innes 450). The performance of Caryl Churchill’s *Vinegar Tom*, gathered much women audience who felt themselves a part of the new experience and struggle. In the late 1980s, several other women playwrights gained much importance. They are Sarah Kane, Sarah Daniels, Catherine Rebecca Prichard, Timberlake Wintenbaker and others. The originality of the women playwrights lies in the fact that they reconstruct the norms framed by traditional playwrights. They experiment with form and content of the plays capturing the spontaneous flow of the female unconscious. The spectators are provided enough scope to intervene in the stage performance to critically observe and understand the present conditions in respect to the past.

The theatre of women playwrights became a montage of various dramatic modes and conventions by assimilating new features of European plays. It imbibed the features of the Theatre of Cruelty (first introduced by the French dramatist Antonin Artaud), that emphasized the fact that theatre must disturb the spectator profoundly, pierce his heart to such an extent so as to free unconscious repressions. Brechtian ‘epic theatre’ and ‘alienation effect’ gain special significance in the theatre of women. Language itself is governed by patriarchal norms. The women playwrights have tried to create language of the theatre, a language which is abrupt, fluid, poetic and rhythmic, breaking through the phallogocentric discourse. Their theatre ‘semiotics’ which includes all verbal and non-verbal signs provides shock to the audience to disturb them thoroughly and disillusion them. These stage signs are instruments for social
interactions effecting social changes. Even the Theatre of Panic introduced by the Spanish dramatist Fernando Arrabal and the Theatre of Silence as proposed by Jean Jacques added new dimension to the theatre of women playwrights who utilized some of the features of these plays. Undoubtedly the seeds of the ‘Absurd Theatre’ also germinate in these plays of women following Beckettian and Pinteresque devices. The plays are without a traditional structure that ebb and flow from one time frame to another, often baffling the audience. Discontinuities, temporal dislocation along with overlapping dialogue reveal the anti-authoritarian perspectives. Such dialogue creates a polyphonic pattern, revealing the repetition of same stories of oppression in the lives of women irrespective of their culture, position and class. The feminist playwrights use disruptive strategies in theatre by capturing the open, irrational language of the unconscious. They are different in their modes of articulation, and also of viewing history. They celebrate their ‘otherness’ in their intellectual power.

II

Among the British playwrights of the New Feminist Theatre movements in the 1970s, Caryl Churchill is probably most innovative in combining social commitment with theatrical experimentation. In her interview with Geraldine Cousin, who questioned her about her identity as a ‘woman writer’, not just as a writer (Do you think of yourself not just as a writer, but as a ‘woman writer’?), she says:

Sometimes. Originally not. During seventies there was a context of thinking of myself as a woman writer...If... a critic refers to you as one of the best women writers, and you feel there’s any possibility that he thinks of that as a lesser category, you resent the use of
it as a term. If it means women themselves thinking about things that they thought about before, then you can actually feel very positive about the idea of being as a woman writer, and obviously this is attractive and powerful. Most of the time I don’t think about it either way, really (New Theatre Quarterly 5).

What is most prominent in her plays is her dedication to socialist-feminist politics coupled with her desire to give vent to her concerns about the damage done to the world by the engulfing power of global capitalism. Churchill defines the ideal society in her declaration:

[I know] quite well what kind of society I would like: decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, nonsexist -- a society in which people can be in touch with their feeling, and in control with their lives. But it always sounds both ridiculous and unattainable when you put it into words (qtd. in Aston 3).

Though, she adopts a socialist stance, her theatrical style is markedly different from the long tradition of contemporary social-realist playwrights.

The Royal Court writers in the 1960s and 1970s were almost exclusively men, dedicated on the whole to social realist theatre. From the post-war period onwards, social realist theatre aimed to represent issues of concern in society, to offer characters at odds with that society and to challenge that increasing mood towards capitalist economic and political systems. Churchill was greatly influenced by this school of thought. Her socialism intersects with her views on the status of women in society while her theatre provides a unique mixture of ‘realist’ scenes with mythical, even fantastic characters. In an interview with Linda Fitzsimmons Churchill asserts:

I’ve constantly said that I am both a socialist and a feminist. Constantly said it. If someone says ‘a socialist playwright’ or ‘a feminist playwright’ that can suggest to some
people something rather narrow which doesn’t cover as many things as you might be thinking about. I get asked if I mind being called a woman playwright or a feminist playwright, and again it depends entirely on what’s going on in the mind of the person who says it (*File on Churchill*, 89).

Churchill, in her plays lays bare the conventional social roles ordained for women. Churchill does not desire to be marked as a feminist, but, in an interview with Mc Ferran she speaks about the deep relation between feminism and her playwriting. Churchill asserts:

For years and years I thought of myself as a writer before I thought of myself as a woman, but recently I’ve found that I’d say I was a feminist writer as opposed to other people saying I was. I’ve found that as I go out more into the world and get into situations which involve women what I feel is quite strongly a feminist position and that inevitably comes into what I write (qtd. in Aston 18).

To encapsulate the tragic predicament of the future generation of women within the corpus of her plays, what is most remarkable is her “politics of style. . . . Churchill’s politics continues to be committed and to require a constantly evolving theatrical style adequate to the characteristics of life approaching the millennium” (Reinelt 189). Such a theatrical style has involved distortion and explosion of the language of performance.

Critical thinkers like Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, Mamet, Brecht, Beckett and others have greatly influenced Churchill, thereby making her plays theatrically stimulating and intellectually appealing. Churchill’s characters are constituted within a network of power relations which they unconsciously circulate within the society. “Churchill’s reading of Foucault in 1978 makes a major contribution to her next period of writing, including *Softcops* (1984)
which is a specific response to *Discipline and Punish*" (Reinelt 179). Churchill reconstructs Brechtian ‘epic theatre’ and even ventures to go beyond Brecht to provide a new map of woman’s space both in the society and in the realm of theatre. Women have always been presented as an absence, silence and docile in the master narratives. By fusing the past, present and future in a continuum, Churchill depicts woman as a repressed subject and the incarnation of archetypal suffering. Her involvement in the production of plays in collaboration with other Theatre Companies shatters the notion of the dominant authorial voice on stage. What is baffling about Churchill’s art is her manipulation of the most difficult and intractable issues of contemporary fragmented life in a playful, subversive and comic vein. Her theatre favours the process of open-ended questioning that prompts the audience to ask further questions and at the same time think more critically to find appropriate answers to such questions. In an essay on theatre she wrote “Playwrights don’t give answers, they ask questions.” She continues further: “We need to find new questions, which may help us answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subject and new form” (qtd. in Aston 80). By critical questioning she suggests the necessity for change and reforms. In this context, it is worth mentioning what Martin Esslin says: “It is not at all essential to know the answer to that question. It is sufficient that the play poses it and starts one on such trains of thinking.” (Fitzsimmons 20). Churchill’s theatre is a signifying process which is transgressive, disruptive, and also poetic to encourage the audience for new interpretations. Churchill’s theatre has the power to subvert the masculine dominance in theatre and society, because it is the woman who has to create new identities and begin new histories.

Caryl Churchill was born on September 3, 1938, in London. She is the daughter of Jan, a fashion model and Robert Churchill, a political cartoonist. Her family emigrated to Montreal,
Canada, after the World War II. There she got her education from Trafalgar School for Girls. She received her B.A degree in English Literature from Lady Margaret Hall, a college of the Oxford University in 1960. As a child she wrote stories and poems. In an interview with Geraldine Cousin in *New Theatre Quarterly* she says:

> Planning stories would be like solitary playing. I would invent a lot of characters, and descriptions of where they lived and maps, and it would be a whole game. So there was that sort of overlap, I also had a very close friend and we used to play a game which looking back, reached a point where it was more like improvising plays. We would work out in some detail what was going to happen, and we would play it, and if we hadn’t quite liked how it went, we would play it again. So it began to merge in that way. But I just wrote a lot, and I was also separately interested in the theatre. I liked going to plays. (3).

Her love for playwriting gets revealed in the immensity of plays written even as a student. Her unperformed plays written between 1960 and 1972 are: *The Finnsburg Fragment*, *The Swimming Club* (television play), *Lee*, *The Marriage of Toby’s Idea of Angela and Toby’s Idea of Angela’s Idea of Toby*, *The Loonies* (a television play), *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution*, *Comic Strips from the Chinese*, and *Angel*, a television play. As a student of the University she wrote three plays—*Downstairs* (1958), *You’ve No Need to be Frightened* (1959) and *Having a Wonderful Time* (1960). *Downstairs* was staged by Oriel College Dramatic Society in 1958. Later, in 1959 it was performed at National Union of Students / *Sunday Times* Student Drama Festival. In 1960, her play *Having a Wonderful Time* was staged at Questors Theatre, student production. *Easy Death* was staged at Oxford Playhouse by Oxford Experimental Theatre Club in 1961. In 1961 she married David Harter, a barrister. Subsequently, as a mother of three sons with the burden of a family, Churchill continued writing short radio plays and television plays.
for BBC. Her playwriting gains much maturity as revealed in her radio plays transmitted by
BBC. The *Ants* (1962) was her first play broadcast on radio. This was followed by *Lovesick*
(1967), *Identical Twins* (1968), *Abortive* (1971), *Not... Not... Not... Not... Not... Not Enough Oxygen*
(1971), *Schreber’s Nervous Illness* (1972), *The Judge’s Wife* (1972), a television play, and
*Henry’s Past* (1972). Such subsequent writing of radio and television plays constitutes the
formative stage of playwriting. In her radio plays she presents a bleak and depressing picture of
city life, a grave new world which is not far away. She unmask the operation of power politics
and power structures in the contemporary society.

Her play *Owners* (1972) was her first professional stage production in the Royal Court
Theatre, London. Later it was performed in New York due to immense popularity. With this play
Churchill’s dramatic career took a new turn. *Owners* established Churchill as a new
revolutionary playwright unmasking the operation of ‘sexual politics’ in the society and on stage.
By inverting gender roles and making Marion an aggressive property owner on one hand, and her
former lover Alex, a passive tenant on the other, Churchill defamiliarizes the sex roles into
which women fit themselves. In this play Churchill questions the concept of ownership, power
and motherhood. “*Owners* is a bleak vision of a society whose values are reduced to the level of
poverty and wealth creation, of a group of powerless people in the hand of a dominant woman,
and of absurd men plotting their own and others’ downfall” (Fitzsimmons 23). Her radio play,
*Schreber’s Nervous Illness* (1972) was produced on stage at the King’s Head Theatre, London.
*Perfect Happiness* (1973) a radio play, reveals her theatrical skill in modulating words, gestures
and mystery. In 1974, the play *Turkish Delight* was broadcast on B.B.C. It is in the same year
that Churchill became the first woman resident in the Royal Court Theatre. *Objections to Sex and
Violence* (1975) is about middle class women coming to political consciousness and trying to
shatter class discriminations. The concept of violence and anarchy links Churchill to Edward Bond. *Moving clocks Go Slow* (1975) is called a 'space-place', blending a Miltonic allegory and science fiction. The thirty-minute television play, *Save It for the Minister* (1975) concentrates on racial and gender discriminations in a surrealistic atmosphere.

A more advanced phase of Churchill’s playwriting begins from 1976 onwards, when she starts working with professional Theatre companies like Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment. Her two major plays, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom* were performed in 1976. The former play was first performed in Traverse Theatre, Edinburg in collaboration with Joint Stock Theatre Group. In an interview with Ronald Hayman, in *Sunday Times Magazine*, Churchill speaks about collaboration in performing plays: “… But then we [Churchill and Max Stafford - Clark] had the jointly--we suggested it jokingly, and then came back to it: ‘What we ought to do is let everybody play different parts, and not worry about characters going through’. That reduced the number of scenes it needed, and it made everybody’s experience seem shared. In a war or a revolution the same things happen to a lot of people.” (Fitzsimmons 31). The latter play was performed by Monstrous regiment at Humberside Theatre, Hull. This play concentrates on the commodification and oppression of women. Her next play *Traps* (1977) was performed at Royal Court Theatre, Upstairs, in London. The *Daily Telegraph* said that: “She traps her audience into thinking black is black and then blandly informs them it is white…. Nothing is explained: this is not a mystery story. It is a facile exercise in mystification, a pseudo-intellectual joke” (Fitzsimmons 36). She also wrote a touring cabaret piece, *Floorshow* (1978), in collaboration with Micheline Wando, Bryony Lavery and David Bradford. This reveals her renewed interest in music, song and dance, and thus crossing the boundaries of conventional drama. This was followed by the television plays -- *The After Dinner Joke* (1978) and *The
Legion Hall Bombing (1978). Untitled was written in 1978. Cloud Nine (1979) first performed by Joint Stock at Dartington College of Arts and then at the Royal Court Theatre, London, marked Churchill as one of the most prominent playwrights of Britain. The New York Times hailed it as the most rewarding surprise of that theatrical season. It is a play about sexual politics that signifies how sexual oppression like colonization subjugates the deprived in the society. This play finally won the Obie Award in 1982. Three More Sleepless Nights (1980) was staged at Soho Poly Theatre and also at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. The one-hour television play Crimes (1981) is a series of effective monologues involving minimum action. In 1982, her masterpiece Top Girls was performed at the Royal Court Theatre and Benedict Nightingale declared that it was ‘the play of the century’. In this play Churchill shows that the chances of being a ‘top girl’ in the existing society are not only difficult but ‘frightening’ and ‘ironic’ too. This is her second play to win the Obie Award in 1983. The exploitation of working-class women has been explored in Fen (1983) performed by Joint Stock at the University of Essex Theatre. Her next play, Midday Sun, was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1984. It is a surrealistic play set in the nineteenth century France representing the attempts of government to depoliticize illegal acts. Foucault’s concept of ‘surveillance’ seems to have a great impact on this play. Softcops, performed in 1984, also shows the influence of Foucault’s Discipline and Punish. The play depicts the development of softer penal methods which in turn create an abused social class. The next phase of her playwriting reveals her use of dance and music. A Mouthful of Birds (1986), co-written with David Lan, with choreography by Ian Spink, mystifies, perplexes and aggravates the norms of conventional dramatic art. “What counts is not the basic events, but the means by which the production... takes you inside the heads of the afflicted characters, either in nightmare or ecstasy, making you feel how easily you could act as
they do..." (Fitzsimmons 75). The award-winning city-comedy, *Serious Money* (1987) performed in the Royal Court Theatre, is a satirical look at the Stock Market and the excesses in the financial world. In the same year was performed *A Heart's Desire*. She worked with Ian Spink on *Fugue* (1988), a short play with dance broadcast on television. Her dark comedy *Icecream* (1989) portrays the cross-cultural encounters that arise out of the sense of alienation. This was followed by *Hot Fudge* (1989), performed in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. *Mad Forest* (1990) performed in collaboration with Second Stride was praised for the means used by the playwright to capture the chaos of the real life and the process of history making. This play was performed in New York in 1991. *Lives of the Great Poisners* (1991) was performed at the Riverside studios in London. Her dystopic play *The Skriker* (1994) subverts the real through the surreal and fairy logic. In 1994 she translated Seneca's *Thyestes* which was staged in the Royal Court Theatre, Upstairs. The episodic structure of the music-dance piece *Hotel* (1997) prefigures the sense of rootlessness, fragmentation and alienation in the contemporary world. *Blue Heart* (1997) performed by Out of Joint, adopts such as a stylized technique so as to make the real setting appear 'unreal'. The short play *This is a Chair* (1997) provides a contrasting glimpse of the microcosmic private lives against the macrocosmic political and cultural issues. These short plays are a montage of short scenes accompanied by music. They appear to be subversive in effect and discontinuous in their approach. The technique of chronological discontinuity and the fusion of past, present and future signify the absence of any strong bond of human relationship. The play *Far Away* (2000) directed by Daldry, a Royal Court production, focuses on the horrors of the twentieth century holocaust by overlapping reality with nightmarish fantasy. Her next play, *A Number* (2002) deals with human cloning and the damaged future towards which men are progressing through the medium of science and technology. This was followed by her version of
August Strindberg’s *A Dream Play*, premiered at the National Theatre in 2005. Churchill highlights the submissiveness of Britain to America in foreign policy in *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You* (2006). Her latest play *Seven Jewish Children -- a play about Gaza* (2009) is about the history of Israel and its attack on Gaza. Churchill has said that *Seven Jewish Children*, is not just a theatre event, it is a political event. Churchill’s experimentation with stage is still in progress, as she is unmaking and remaking theatrical norms both as a playwright and as a director. While speaking about Churchill’s plays, Mark Ravenhill, the director and playwright says:

Of course it is possible to trace recurring themes in Churchill’s work-- alienation between parent and child, the possibility and failure of revolution. But it is the variety of her work that is most striking. As Von Mayenburg says: “With each play, she discovers new genres and forms. She then discards them and moves on, opening up possibilities for other playwrights to explore. I think many people writing today don’t even realise they’ve been influenced by her. She’s changed the language of theatre. And very few playwrights do that” (Ravenhill 3).

Caryl Churchill’s new collaborative work with theatre groups has consolidated her position as a playwright.

Caryl Churchill has been awarded many prizes for her contribution to theatre. She has been awarded National Union of Students Drama Festival Award for *Downstairs* in 1958. In 1961 she has received Richard Hillary Memorial Prize. In 1981 and 1982 she has received Obie Awards for playwriting *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* respectively. Her most famous play *Top Girls* has been awarded Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (runner-up) in 1983. *Fen* has been awarded Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 1984. In 1987 *Serious Money* has been awarded Evening Standard Award for best comedy of the year, Obie Award for Best New Play and Susan Smith
Blackburn Prize. *Serious Money* has received BBC Award for Best New Play in 1988. In 2001 Churchill has achieved Obie Sustained Achievement Award. Not only in Britain, Churchill has been acknowledged as one of the leading dramatists in the contemporary world.

III

The study of semiotics in theatre primarily originated from the works of the Russian Formalists in the twentieth century. They tried to analyse critically the formal aspects of literary works. Otakar Zich’s *Aesthetics of the Art of Drama* (1931) and Jan Mukarovsky’s “An Attempted Structuralist Analysis of the Phenomenon of the Actor” (1931) are the pioneering works which brought about a radical change in the history of theatre studies. Such approaches provided a descriptive and scientific exploration of theatre performance. The articles produced by the Prague School Structuralists in the 1930s and 1940s contributed much to the development of dramatic theory. Attention was paid to all forms of theatrical arts, artistic perspectives, to elaborate the process of theatrical signification. Keir Elam proposes in his book *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*:

The first principle of the Prague School theatrical theory can best be termed that of the *semiotization of the object*. The very fact of their appearance on stage suppresses the practical function of phenomena in favour of a symbolic or signifying role, allowing them to participate in dramatic representation: ‘while in real life the utilitarian function of an object is usually more important than its signification, on a theatrical set the signification is all important.’ (6-7).
This process of signification encourages the spectator to penetrate deeper into the theatrical reality and understand that each object is an intentional sign which he should interpret on his own to decode the meaning underlying the performance.

Poststructuralist approach evolving in the 1960s problematized the simplified one-dimensional approach to semiotics. The versions of Roland Barthes, the postmodernist strategies of Derrida in a way critique the conventional Saussurean approach to semiotics. The French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva gave a new dimension to the concept of 'semiotic' by challenging all other structuralist approaches. Kristeva speaks of 'semanalysis', which conceives meaning as a signifying process that can subvert established authorial order. To Kristeva "semiotics is at once a re-evaluation of its object and/or of its models, a critique both of these models (and therefore of the sciences from which they are borrowed) and of itself (as a system of stable truths)" (Moi 77). Relating semiotic to the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis and language, she proposes that 'semiotic' has a subversive role as it dismantles the 'symbolic' ordered convention. Recent studies on semiotics even venture to go beyond signs and sign-functions and concentrate on theatrical communication and the rules underlying it. "Semiotics of culture draws upon aspects of all studies of particular sign systems that either underlie or are directly a part of culture, in order to investigate the function or correlation of different sign systems in culture, where a culture is seen as a changing hierarchy of semiotic systems which is never isolated from the systems of other culture." (Winner 181). Semiotics under the influence of Culture Studies developed a new approach called socio-semiotics.

Roland Barthes's influential books-- *Elements of Semiology* and *Mythologies* add new dimensions to semiotics. He relates signs to culturally determined implications or connotations. Barthes proposes that "the sign can itself become a signifier of another sign, a connotation or
second order, which signifies a cultural value, such as status. In this case the sign becomes a 'sign vehicle' for connotative aspects of culture, such as the status structure of society" (Gottdiener 15). Sign does not have only denotative function but also articulates connotative codes as second order signs. Barthes asserts, “The signifiers of connotation, which we shall call connotators, are made up of signs (signifiers and signifieds united) of the denoted system. Naturally, several denoted signs can be grouped together to form a single connotator” (Semiology 91). He further relates connotation to culture and knowledge:

As for the signified of connotation, its character is at once general, global and diffuse; it is, if you like, a fragment of ideology. . . . These signifieds have a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history and it is through them, so to speak, that the environmental world invades the system. (91-92).

Thus signs can also reveal hidden ideologies and the need for subversion. The denotative and connotative aspects of sign lead to higher order of signification which has been called myths. Myths function through codes and serve the ideological function of naturalization and at the same time can reveal hidden ideologies thereby suggesting change. Even Brechtian theatre is governed by such denotation-connotation dialectic that leads to higher order of signification. In this context Keir Elam asserts that:

In drawing upon these socially codified values, what is more, theatrical semiosis invariably, and above all, connotes itself. That is, the general connotative marker 'theatricality' attaches to the entire performance (Mukarovsky’s macro-sign) and to its every element -- as Brecht, Handke and many others have been anxious to underline-- permitting the audience to 'bracket off' what is presented to them from normal social praxis and so perceive the performance as a network of meaning, i.e. as a text (10).
Thus a semiotical approach to theatre creates a complex network of meanings that can reveal unexplored areas of social repression. The Saussurean model of semiology has been challenged by Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* (1976), on the ground that it ignored the volatility of meanings and representation. For Derrida, there are no one-to-one correspondences between the signifier and signifieds, and signifiers are always open to interpretation. Derrida’s concept of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ suggests that philosophy fallaciously assumed that reality could be captured by writing. But reality did not enter into writing as it is only a mode of representation. “Western philosophy failed to question the relation between mind, modes of representation, and the study of reality. Instead, it assumed that analytical texts can simply stand in for reality” (Gottdiener 19). Semiotics criticizes ‘logocentrism’. Jonathan Culler, while relating semiotics to logocentrism says: “Semiotics, thus takes up the problem of the sign, in a relational or differential interpretation which seems to not only make possible a new type of explanation—structural explanation in terms of underlying systems of relation—but also to displace logocentrism” (40). Barthes, too, by the concept of ‘polysemy’ (ambiguous nature of signifier and signified) analyzed that context and circumstance in communication lead to the volatility of meaning. Mikhail Bakhtin also focused on the multivocal aspect of signs. Meaning does not lie with the sign itself but in relation between the signs. So, signification is a social process involving polysemy. The concept of ‘hyperreality’ by the postmodern critic Baudrillard suggests that reality no longer exists; imitations assume the form of reality. Understanding of reality emanates from a culture based on images. The theorists like Barthes, Derrida and Baudrillard accept the fact that meaning arises from an endless play of signifiers, but the absolute object cannot be reached. But Eco disagrees with the deconstructionist view of semiotics and meanings. He proposes that the connotations of signs are understood only in specific relation to other signs within a definite semantic field, i.e. interpretations of signs depend on the context. Eco asserts, “I
propose to define as a sign *everything* that, on the grounds of previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*” (Semiotics 16). Another alternative approach to the study of semiotics is socio-semiotics as mentioned before.

Socio-semiotics, in the contrast, accounts for the articulation of the mental and the exo-semiotic, the articulation between the material context of daily life and the signifying practices within a social context (Gottdiener 26).

Socio-semiotics is thus not confined to the study of the sign alone; it includes the symbolic and material articulation. It is the study of signs but within a social context where the process of signification is constrained by the forces of power and knowledge in the society.

Thus, Semiotics, with its diverse fields of study can inevitably provide a better understanding of Churchill’s theatre by offering a kaleidoscopic vision of the world we live in. The stage performance connotes secondary meanings both for the audience and the actors in relation to the social, cultural and ideological codes operative in the society. To Churchill, the stage itself is a sign-system that focuses on the interrelationship among gender, culture and politics revealing the process of normalization of ideologies. The new theatrical strategies and their connotations as second order signs constitute the semiotics of Churchill’s theatre. Thus meaning is not simply transmitted to the spectators, rather it is constructed by them from the complex interplay of codes or conventions. Even the most realistic signs are not what they seem to be. Thinking in the line of Roland Barthes’s concept of semiology it can be said that Churchill’s theatre functions as a ‘sign vehicle’ for connotative aspects of culture, gender and politics where the connotation becomes more important than the signifiers. In challenging the traditional ways of interpretation, Churchill’s experimental style demanded a different reading of the staged world, one where rules are broken and meanings are constantly being made and
Churchill's plays appear to be a sort of revolutionary poetry, spontaneous and natural marked by volatility of meanings, thereby being 'polysemic'. In conformity with Barthes's notion of power and control of discourse by 'logotechniques', Churchill's language of the theatre deconstructs the mechanism of normalization of patriarchal discourse. The semiosis of her theatre creates a sense of defamiliarization by distancing the mechanics of theatrical style from their assumed codified functions. Such innovations subvert the normal expectations of the audience and render them thoroughly disturbed and unsettled by means of shock therapy. Writing and directing plays from the 1950s onwards, Churchill's language of the theatre is greatly influenced by the French feminist thinkers like Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. Both Kristeva and Churchill being contemporaries share certain common notions regarding identity of women and their emancipation. They conceive of a real woman, not an ideal one, a woman who has relationship with men, women and children, and such relationships vary from one woman to another. Thus, they focus on individual speaking subject, and the experiences of the subjects.

Language is a patriarchal norm. It is symbolic, masculine articulating a male ideology. Thus subjective woman does not exist in language. Even when she speaks, she places herself in the position of man. Women's desire is more repressed by patriarchy. So women have to speak in a different voice and write in a different language and rhythm releasing their repressed desires. Such creativity creates a sense of 'jouissance', which means a pleasure so intense that it is at once of the body and also outside it. Such writing effect has been termed as 'feminine writing' or 'écriture féminine' as Hélène Cixous terms it. In her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976), Cixous asserts, "Women must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away so violently as from their bodies (279)". Though critics like Kristeva believe that it is not possible to have a totally 'écriture feminine',
the dominance of instinctual drives in writing can rupture the ordered language of patriarchy. Such writing is characterized by disruptions in the texts, gaps, rhythms and incoherence. On the other hand masculine language is linear, logical and represents the symbolic.

Kristeva uses the term *semanalysis* that conceives of meaning not as a sign-system but as a signifying process. Following Lacan, Kristeva says that a speaking subject is a split between the conscious and the unconscious, the cultural and the natural thus making language plurisignificant and unfixed. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva deals with the split in the speaking subject. There are two modes of the signifying process bound together to frame the network of meanings. These two modes are the ‘Symbolic’ and the ‘Semiotic’. The symbolic is the ordered, mechanized language associated with the norms of patriarchy. On the contrary, semiotic is related to the instinctual drives and results in unrepessed writing.

In the temporal terms of psychoanalytic subject formation, the semiotic is associated with the infant’s bodily rhythms and instinctual drives, which will be repressed by so-called symbolic language. Even as this prelinguistic form of signification can only be known through symbolic language, it nevertheless has the power to “destroy the symbolic”. Thus, for Kristeva, the semiotic is the key to any change, any revolution in meaning (Weil 164).

The semiotic flux results in incoherent, disorganized and spontaneous writing prompted by the pre-oedipal drives of the child. The semiotic and the symbolic are inseparable in the signifying process. In the introduction to *Desire in Language* Julia Kristeva says:

*The symbolic process refers to the establishment of sign, and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law. In short, the signifying process, as increasingly manifest in “poetic language”, results from a particular articulation between*
symbolic and semiotic dispositions; [...] The speaking subject is engendered as belonging to both the semiotic *chora* and the symbolic device, and that accounts for its eventual split nature (6-7).

Kristeva’s concept of ‘semiotic’ is itself revolutionary as it varies from the normal codes of semiotics and resists any definite systematization of meanings. The ‘chora’ is the endless flow of pulsions that underlie the symbolic order. Kristeva aligns semiotic with the body of the mother. Thus the semiotic flux is associated with the feminine.

In the field of feminist theatre Churchill has assimilated the contributions of Barthes and Kristeva. Churchill’s dramatic works vehemently challenge the repressions of sex, class and gender. Her language of the theatre is poetic and revolutionary as the semiotic flux dominates over the symbolic, giving vent to repressed desires of women. Such language subverts and dismantles the conventional language of the theatre, where women have been silenced and made to perform certain stereotype roles assigned to them. Her plays defamiliarize the conventional codes of language, opening up new areas for exploration. The spontaneous, rhythmic language which springs from the unconscious releases the repressed and suppressed desires of women. Such poetic language leads to the possibilities of language beyond the conventional codes. Being alienated from the stage performance, the audience becomes conscious of the stage illusions. Her new theatric style encourages active participation of the spectators in deciphering the meanings underlying her plays. The disruptive strategies employed in Churchill’s plays which constitute her theatre semiotics have been discussed in the subsequent chapters. Churchill’s language of performance serves as a sign that criticizes the socio-political plight of women and at the same time provides them a space to articulate their hidden desires.
Notes

1. Hazel V. Carby in her essay “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of sisterhood”, in The Empire Strikes Back (1972), criticized white feminists for speaking about universal sisterhood which in fact silenced and ignored the history of Black women.

2. The slogan ‘the personal is political’ was taken up by the feminists to mean that there is no aspect of personal experience which cannot be analyzed, understood or changed. It asserts that personal female experience is not isolated or undetermined, rather, determined by socio-political conditions. “Catherine A. MacKinnon in her article “Feminism, Marxism, Method and State: An Agenda for Theory” says “It means that women’s distinctive experience as women occurs within the sphere that has been socially lived as the personal—private, emotional, interiorized, particular, individuated, intimate—so that what is to know the politics of women’s situation is to know women’s lives . . . . To feminism the personal is epistemologically the political, and its epistemology is its politics” (in Signs, 7.3. Spring 1982, 515-44).

3. The term ‘signification’ refers to the defining functions of signs; the process of signifying. Significance connotes the covert rather than ostensible meaning. To Kristeva, “it refers to the work performed in language (through the heterogenous articulation of semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say” (Desire 18). The two modalities, the ‘semiotic’ and the ‘symbolic’, are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language.

4. Jacques Derrida in Of Grammatology says that the history of metaphysics has “always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, the truth of truth, has always been . . . the debasement of writing, and its repression outside “full” speech”(3). The
‘metaphysics of presence’ is a logocentric belief. It is a belief in the extra-systemic validating presence or centre or authority that fixes linguistic meaning but is itself beyond scrutiny.

5. To Derrida ‘logocentrism’ of Western culture is the rationality which treats meanings as concepts or logical representations. It refers to systems of thought or habits which are reliant on what Derrida, following Heidegger, terms as ‘metaphysics of presence’. Logocentrism relies upon the extra-systemic point of authority.

6. The English word ‘jouissance’ in OED has been associated with pleasure, delight, mirth and enjoyment. The current use of the word loaned from French, relates it to sexual pleasure. Jacques Lacan in 1972-3 seminar speaks of sexual orgasm in jouissance. For Lacan, jouissance “is sexual, spiritual, physical conceptual at one and the same time” (qtd. in Hawthorn 186). But, to Kristeva, jouissance is total joy or ecstasy. In Roland Barthes The Pleasure of the Text jouissance is translated as bliss. There are two kinds of enjoyment in a writerly text—plaisir (pleasure); and jouissance (bliss). Plaisir in a text comes from straightforward processes of reading, while jouissance is a heightened form of pleasure that develops from a sense of interruption, when unconventional and unexpected ideas are expressed. Churchill’s plays have the connotations of heightened pleasure, ecstasy or bliss instigated by the anti-hierarchical, lucid style of performance.

7. The French-English dictionaries give ‘writing’ as the equivalent of ‘écriture’. Roland Barthes extends the meaning of the French word ‘écriture’ in Le Degré Zéro de l’écriture (1953). Barthes translators “note that although in everyday French ‘écriture’ normally means only ‘handwriting’, or ‘the art of writing’, ‘[i]t is used here in a strictly technical sense to denote a new concept” (Hawthorn 98). But the term ‘écriture féminine’, coined by the French feminists
represents the description of an ideal future form of writing. Hélène Cixous is most frequently associated with this term. In “The Laugh of Medusa” (1976), Cixous says: “[i]t is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system” (287). Virginia Woolf in “Women and Fiction” (1929) says that “a woman must ‘alter and adapt’ the current sentence until she can write one ‘that takes the shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it’ (qtd. in Hawthorn 98). Recent feminist connotations of this word suggest that the female body, desires and experiences may become the source from which new writing, free from patriarchal rules, will emanate.
Works Cited


