



## Subverting Patriarchy as Gender Politics: A Feminist Perspective on the Narrative of Women's Performativity

Ganga Ram Paudyal 

Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara, Nepal

### Article History:

Submitted 04 July 2025

Reviewed 25 September 2025

Revised 01 October 2025

Accepted 10 October 2025

### Corresponding Author:

Ganga Ram Paudyal

[grampoudel@gmail.com](mailto:grampoudel@gmail.com)

### Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/ajhss.v2i1.85245>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the perspective of gender subversion for the liberation and the independence of women. The issue concerning constructed gender trouble and identity is discussed and analyzed, using the insights of Judith Butler whose performativity has been considered the theoretical lens that gender is not an inherent identity and can be subverted. To discuss this issue, Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* has been undertaken as a primary source of information for textual analysis. The play is performed by all female cast where female characters play multiple roles to contrast and show the transition in gender roles. The objective of this paper is to portray the subversive character of women who have undergone repression, suffering, sacrifice, and compromise in a capitalist and individualist society. Their resistance to patriarchal norms has made them independent rather than obeying the supremacy of males. For instance, the celebration organized by Marlene with historical and legendary women reflects both the challenges faced by women and their success as career and independent women. As a qualitative approach of study, it reviews some articles and books concerning Churchill and her play as secondary sources of information. The play as a primary source has

provided data and information how the gender roles are challenged and independence of female characters is reflected. The findings of this study indicate that the play attempts to subvert the traditional gender role by reflecting Marlene as a successful and independent female character.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender roles, gender trouble, gender subversion, female autonomy, performativity

## INTRODUCTION

Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* opens with a dreamlike party held by Marlene who works in Top Girls Employment Agency. In the party, women from history, art, fiction, literature, and legend narrate their sacrifices and suffering, repression, endurance, and compromise. The group apparently represents women of outstanding courage and achievement. As being a play performed only by the female cast, it attempts to shed light on the issue of women. As a modern feminist writer, Churchill has attempted to liberate women through her plays. In this connection, Marohl (1987) states, "*Top Girls* a 'women's play' because all of its actors and characters are women, and, at least initially, gender appears to be the dramatic focal point. Gender, however, is de-centered as the real subject of the play almost as soon as the performance begins" (p. 382). As being a cultural and social construct, the gender role can be revised taking it not as a real subject. The play also examines the issue of what it means to be a successful women using the historical characters at first to explore the different aspects of the achievements of women. Sharma (2024) argues that the play deals with the loss of the humanity of women to attain power featuring all female and focusing on Marlene who relinquished home and family for achieving success. For the upliftment of the status of women, Marlene is featured as a career woman who avoids societal and familial commitments. Her success can be related as the example of the independence and liberation of women and her role in the play that attempts to subvert the traditional gender role reflecting her own identity as an independent woman.

The play was published during the time of feminist movement and the focus of the author is also on the feminist issues. In this connection, Tyser (2011) states, "Churchill wrote *Top Girls* at a time when these feminisms were at a crucial point, and her play provided a timely critique of the bourgeois feminist trends that were especially prominent in the USA" (p. 15). There are many different types of feminisms and the play examines and criticizes bourgeois which seeks equality between men and women within the existing social structure by minimizing the gender differences. Churchill as being a socialist feminist emphasizes on the materialistic view. In the play, Marlene is portrayed as a representative of women who can compete with males. The play is a call for change by reflecting the women and their sufferings from a different era. The contrasting role of Marlene demands for change because the existing practices cannot liberate women. Butler (1990) says that the notion of original gender identity is parodied within the cultural practices of drag, sexual stylization, and cross dressing of identities, but the real identity comes from the performance of the performer. Thus, the roles of male and female can be changed as it is no fixed idea. Marlene changes the role and acts as a male not being attached to the conventional norms of gender. She represents the risk of societies ongoing emphasis on the financial gain over the societal and familial responsibilities. She may be the role model for women in the future as she has shown a way for the upliftment of the status of women. She appears as glamorous by debunking the images fostered in the media. In this sense, the play attempts to educate audience to be aware of the current situations of women not just in terms of historical events.

The play depicts the social problems, highlighting the activities of women and the sufferings they have faced in the society. The differences women have felt in terms of gender are constructed by society and culture. Thomas (1992) argues, "*Top Girls* also dismisses socialism as yet another misguided version of revolutionary politics - one which has little or no validity for women" (p. 183). The claim of the author is to portray the deviance of socialism for not giving value to women. He talks about the revolt of women but does not challenge the male supremacy for equality. The play attempts to

open a new path for the liberation of female by reflecting their courage. Churchill presents the impressive female figures to set an example in the feminist revolution. Ammen (1996) states that the play is a utopia as it explores the negative consequences of the system and dystopia in the sense of the women who have obeyed all the rules. By reflecting the negative practices of the society, it seems as a utopia and by the submissive role of women it seems as dystopia. It examines the flaws of the patriarchy and its structure of the society, but it does not talk about how can female act as male by challenging the set of patterns. Muhammad (2020) examines *Top Girls* as a history play that relates past to the present and criticizes a regime of Thatcher and her policies. The critic analyzes the play from the perspective of history and the influence of the first female prime minister of England, but misses the issues like the liberation and empowerment of women.

By the illustration of subjugated and oppressed female characters, Churchill draws the attention of the audience to criticize the established cultural and social norms. She also uses some revolutionary female characters along with oppressed and submissive women to defy the conventional patterns and challenge for rights. Ravari and Naidu (2011) state that Churchill tends to highlight the role of outstanding women who have struggled throughout the history to break the silence of women. They emphasize on the issue of marginalized voice of women but they have missed how the gender role can be redefined to subvert the patriarchy. In addition, the play presents the legendary characters for emphasizing on history. Kritzer (1989) reports, “*Top Girls* as the socialist-feminist hero of the play, Churchill's point is the lack of satisfactory models and the need to imagine new alternatives and construct new models” (p. 130). She criticizes the existing model of social structure and seeks for the alternative to create a new model but misses the issue of the alternative role of female for creating strong women. Portraying the experience of these six women, Djundjung and Yong (2002) argue that the play exemplifies the marginalization of women since centuries which is supported by sacred institutions and the individual achievement of these women is not possible due to the rooted social practice. These critics show how the prevailing practices have made women limited and the difficulties they have faced for their independence but misses the possible change that can be achieved by changing the gender role and new identity of female can be formed.

Due to upbringing in the male-dominated values and norms, overprotected from their childhood, women tend to feel secured under the pseudo-protection of the male figure and in absence of such figure they feel themselves lost. They are indoctrinated as in such a way that their identity is tied with the identity of male being indecisive. They unconsciously begin to feel themselves being independent and liberated by obeying the traditional gender rules. In case of Marlene, the central character of the play and a career woman, there is no attachment of male and no encouragement and support from any male in her success. The success and independence achieved by Marlene, Win, and Nell in a system created by men shows them as strong women and different from their generation. They expect everything men do and to do it better. Emphasizing the success of Marlene, Naismith (2013) on the commentary of the play states, “She has a different style, she’s a new kind ... a kind of woman who is thirty now who grew up in a different climate. How did this climate come about? What produced the new woman?” (p. 43). The success of Marlene is a good example for the whole women race. It is regarded as a great transformation. A patriarchal construct that creates barrier for women to get full-fledged confidence does not apply in her case as she stands independently. Millett (2000) states that in the name of socialization family, education, society, literature, religion, and

the state function according to sexual politics to conform to the inferiority of women. Women practise the gender roles as natural due to their inability to distinguish between the right and wrong practices. Thus, patriarchy has granted the male figure to have total ownership over wife and children. In this context, it is significant to explore how the gender differences can be revised for the autonomy of women. This paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How is gender difference reflected in the play *Top Girls*?
2. In what ways does the play portray the role of all female cast?
3. How do Marlene and other female characters act for gender subversion?

To answer the above research questions, this paper aims to show how the gender roles are challenged in the play for the autonomy of women. It also intends to reflect the techniques applied by the female characters to be independent and career women. There are other female characters who stand against the male-dominated values to uproot the gender roles. To discuss the issues of women's performativity in the play, this paper draws on Butler's (1990) theory of gender trouble and Millett's (2000) to show gender subversion. Analyzing the play from the perspective of feminism, the play has been regarded as a primary source of information, and scholarly papers, critical books, and websites have been used as the secondary sources of information. Before investigating this vast arena of the problems of women, it is significant to know the evils of the patriarchy and the construction of the gender roles.

Many attempts have been made to subvert the gender role and the liberation of women. Many movements concerning the freedom and the empowerment of women have been organized to create gender equality. However, with the complexities of uprooting the existing gender roles, women are still discriminated and marginalized in all societies. Many women are still deprived of various rights including the property rights that males enjoy as guaranteed. For the career women like Marlene, it is difficult to cope up with the various roles assigned to them like the role of mother, housewife, domestic servant, and so on.

There is no significant progress in the status of many women. Very few women have become as competent as males and majority of them are still suffering from patriarchal norms and values that are constructed for the supremacy of males. In such a context, it is rationale to explore the issues how women are marginalized due to gender role and how their identity can be constructed. The main argument of this paper is that some women by subverting gender trouble in their lives have become independent, bold, competitive, and strong women. By clinging to the traditional norms and values, many women are still living the miserable lives. In such a context, it is significant to analyze the play *Top Girls* from the feminist lens, such as the concept of gender trouble to make women aware about their rights. In doing so, women can raise a collective voice for the reformation of the traditional values and norms.

## **GENDER-ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK**

Gender is neither a biological difference nor sex amid men and women. It is constructed by the power relations, culture, and social relations. As an unnatural reality, it can be reconsidered and gender subversion that is the desire to cross the set boundaries. The gender binary oppositions as female and male reflects that gender is a performative social construction that people are not born belonging to sexed bodies or identities. As Butler (1990) argues, the binary opposition of masculine/feminine has also constructed other differences of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations constituting the false identities in the society. The gender roles emphasize on the

limitations of women and the subversion provides them space, liberation, and independence. Butler (1990) further claims that gender is performative rather than having a fixed identity on the basis of that identity is constructed by promoting a hegemonic discourse of the masculine, phallogocentrism, silencing the feminine as a site of subversive multiplicity. Gender is not a process but a set of repeated acts. No one is one's gender forever but gender is indicated by the condition of doing actions. The repeated actions, behavior, and performance create the illusion of stable gender. Many of the roles women are following are not the results of their sex. They are made to play the certain roles by the male-oriented values and norms. Instead of being the submissive women need to be conscious and organized to defy the conventional norms for their rights. Many of the theorists of the feminist movements emphasize on gender subversion for the equal identity of male and female.

People are not born as men and women but they are taught how to become men and women by learning what is expected of the roles socially and culturally constructed. The idea of the social construction of gender is introduced by Simone de Beauvoir that the biological distinction as male/female does not automatically determine the identity rather it is socially and culturally constructed. By not defining a woman as an autonomous being, she is defined as relative to male. Her identity and role depends on the declaration of male as she appears to the male as a sexual being or the sex. She is also treated as the other and male as the one or supreme. In this connection, Beauvoir (1953) says, "The category of the *Other* is primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient anthologies, one finds the expression of duality—that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical fact" (p. 16). When the gender roles are not natural or inherited, the concept of gender inequality can be transformed by teaching different ideas like the gender neutralized practices. For the subversion of the gender roles, Akram et al. (2020) argue that the factors like modification, variation, revision, reconsideration, and improvement of prevailing set of practices play a significant role and by the promise of new individuality and act, which can be enhanced and rearranged. They emphasize on the amendment of practices for equality or subversion. This awareness plays a significant role; such practices can be improved; and the process can take a new course. Some believe that individualism can also help to revise such practices and while others emphasize on capitalism.

Having the variant opinions of disagreement among the feminists, there is a point of agreement among them that all are ready to challenge and uproot the orthodox practices regarding the gender differences. The progress they have achieved so far by their various liberation movements is to enlighten the readers about the sexual stereotyping and marginalization of women. They emphasize that how various means have been used to keep women alienated from the mainstream by denying their voices. Similarly, the patriarchal norms, religion, mythical teaching, and socialization frame them to be in the subordinated positions in all domains of the society. Tolan (2006) opines that, during the second wave of feminism, biological, psychological, historical, religious, and cultural explanations have been examined for the marginalization of women to a second and lesser sex and it is found that the culture of male supremacy is deep-rooted, which has made women fail to recognize the system as corrupted that even after being worshipped as a goddess or deity, they have no recognition as a rational being. The socially and culturally constructed norms have always reduced the confidence and capabilities of women as they have been ill-equipped to grasp the opportunities for their own advancement.

Women have never attempted to find the system was founded on the male principles and values that were destructive and alien to women. There is no such thing as feminine in nature and also there is no physical and psychological reason for women to be inferior to men but throughout the history women have always been the second class citizens. All the attempts of feminist critics are for the autonomy and recognition as an independent and rational being.

The problems of gender differences cannot be conceptualized within a limited boundary being a broad issue. For a thorough analysis, the views of various critics need to be examined. Critics have diversified their views regarding the gender roles. Being acquainted with the patriarchal culture, most feminists believe that a culture is organized in favor of the interests of men. Nayar (2010) opines that the gender roles are predetermined and women are imposed to follow them as natural. This indicates that women have been taught to follow a secondary position by the patriarchal norms and values. Throughout human history, women are identified a submissive, nurturant, passive, acquiescent, emotional, timid, and docile that is in subordinate to the adventurous, dominating, strong, and determined males. In some literary texts, the use of cross-dress complicates a gender identity and shows its fluidity.

Thus, feminists have been struggling for equality, independence, and freedom. They attempt to uproot the gender roles and women are indoctrinated to fit into them. The differences existing in the societies are not natural but culturally or socially constructed to reflect the role of male as supreme. The representation of women as innocent, weak, seductive, and irrational-sentimental is rooted in influencing through the cultural texts. The stereotypical representation of women is instrumental in continuing the women's oppression. Gender is a subject of analysis for all feminists. Throughout human history, women were forced to repress their desires and emotions due to their social expectations. They were not free to express their feelings and emotions as they were indoctrinated to play the role of good girl, respectable woman, and so on. Such expectations made women limited in many spheres and they could not explore their potentials. Emotional and social constraints imposed on women have played a prime role in making women inferior.

For the subversion of gender roles, Butler (1990) recommends to disrupt the binary assessment of sex and gender. She questions the norms that obstruct the autonomy of female that empower both limits and permits of actions and subversion contests as the opposing oppressive structure of respect, diversity, and dignity value of each person in the society. Thus, it is not a recipe for making life good but it is a transformative force which transforms the rigid expectations through the demonstrations that can increase exclusion, pain, and violence. By subverting the gender norms and refuting the values socially and culturally constructed, the gender differences can be deconstructed. Then, the multiple possible gender positions can be created. Millet (2000) points out the inferiority of women as they are not aware of the male institutionalized power over women and the devised plan of male to place women in the secondary positions. She opines that every avenue of power like politics, economy, universities, army, science, technology, industry, and finance are in male hands and the realization of such internal demarcation fails to bring changes and gender subversion is needed. Due to the sexual politics, women are indoctrinated to internalize their own inferiority without realizing how the power dynamics have played the roles to make women dependent. Through gender subversion, the idea of self and gender fluidity can be promoted which is applied as the theoretical lens to analyze the play by Churchill.

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHURCHILL'S *TOP GIRLS*

### *Top Girls* as a Play of Female Problem

The context of the play by Churchill is the transitional phase in the postmodern era that emphasized on the change in the social structure. The top girl model depicted in the play is found across the pop culture both as real women and fictional characters and are labelled as girlboss. Many of the social practices have been questioned for the revolution. In regard to the change in the commentary of the book, Churchill (2013) states,

Britain in the 1970s witnessed a profound change in the consciousness of women as a group. For the first time changes in law, in publishing and the media, in the arts, in attitudes to public morality and in social habits combined in a relatively short period to alter radically the base from which women viewed their lives. *Top Girls*, which carries a sense and a mood of driving fast into the 1980s, assumes this change of consciousness. Marlene, Win and Nell – the young women executives of the ‘Top Girls’ Agency – do not discuss radical feminism; for them, apparently, there is no need. They are not intimidated by men. Far from it. They expect to do everything that men do, and to do it better. (pp. 42-43)

There were many issues in social and political scenario during the time the play was published. Various feminist movements also contributed for making women aware and some women became executives like Marlene by emphasizing on their self-autonomy. That time some women made revolt doing activities like males and can be reflected in the case of Thatcher in reality and some female characters in the play.

In the play, the main character Marlene remembers her complicated childhood that her father was so cruel who used to abuse her mother and herself. Her father is a male figure who holds power to control the family. She hates him taking him as an obstacle for her success. In the play, she presents a bitter situation how her father misbehaves with her mother in such a way, “She was hungry because he drank the money./ He used to hit her. ... She didn’t hit him. ... I knew when I was thirteen, out of their house, out of them, never let that happen to me,/ never let him, make my own way out” (pp. 230-231). Her father was a drunkard person but her mother was so tolerant and accepted the male dominated values and norms. Her abusive father pushed her to adopt the role of a career woman because she left her house at the age of thirteen. At the age of seventeen, she becomes pregnant and thinks that it would hinder her career. Then, she hands over her daughter Angie to her sister Joyce. Since three years of marriage, Joyce does not have any child. Her decision to give priority to career over motherhood can also be taken as a pressure women face while balancing both personal as well as professional aspirations. The play challenges patriarchy and motherhood through the character of Marlene. It also portrays the sacrifices and obstacles women face while navigating the path of ambition and power.

Marlene is promoted as a managing director in an employment agency. She celebrates it by a dinner party in which five women from history are invited. Each of them symbolizes the exploitation of women throughout the ages, providing the perspective of evaluating the success Marlene has achieved in the modern era. She shows her power towards the working class women behaving as a boss. In this sense, Marlene is conscious of the exclusion from the male cultural, political, social, political, and intellectual discourses as feminists begin from the keen observance of their subservience to men. She does not like children taking them as barrier in her career. As she says, “I’ve had two abortions, are you interested? Shall I tell you about them? Well I won’t, it’s boring, it wasn’t a problem. I don’t like messy talk about blood/and what a bad . . . time



we all had. I don't want a baby. I don't want to talk about gynecology" (pp. 224-225). She hates getting pregnant and has to abort it. It is an example of the lack of motherhood but it can also be taken as a protest against the unfairness of the whole system, which only binds women in a messy business after the relationship. The consequence of the sexual relationship falls only on the shoulder of women but men are free from such burden. Even marriage is taken as a limitation for the top girls that marriage will trap them and limit their freedom. In the beginning, the women who share their experiences as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, and mistresses reveal their lifetime achievement with the lack of common ground interlocutory exchange, exposing the contrasting characters and attitudes and feminist critics have. The celebratory beginning turns to a bitter result as each deplores something in their struggle to survive and become successful.

In Churchill's play, the voice of women is not depicted as unanimous group by presenting the women of various time whereas it reflects plural feminism in which the problems of various women are introduced. The play simply records the voices of different women who have performed the different roles with their own historical, social, cultural, political, economic background, and different contexts of oppression, their struggle for survival in patriarchy. The play reflects the sufferings of the women of different era rather than the causes and the solutions. Despite being iconic, they have struggled and achieved the great stature in a man's world at a great cost. The women from history disguised as a man and to survive and suffered bitterly to attain their goals. In the play, regarding their experiences that women have made in history, Marlene says, "We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements" (p. 117). She narrates in the dinner party that women have struggled a lot in history to transcend a gender identity. They have changed their status not as the traditional women but as the career women.

### **Marlene as a Strong Woman**

Marlene is a career woman who works in Top Girls Employment Agency. She is conscious of the oppressive tactics of male superiority. She is aware of the fact that she is performing the male view, norms, and behavior to be successful. In this connection, Bastan (2018) reports, "Marlene is the focus character of *Top Girls* in the middle of the 1980s, and the events in the play are portrayed in the context of her lifestyle. In a male-dominated world, she achieved great success with her female identity and became a manager in the "Top Girls" job and employment agency" (p. 162). Being an executive, Marlene performs the role of an independent woman who does not like to cling to male for identity. She can act as male and sets an example for the women to be self-reliant. As a complex and ambitious woman whose character symbolizes the personal sacrifice, feminism, and capitalism. She is confident, assertive, and goal oriented who become achievers of the material success by her dedication and effort in the male-dominated world. Similarly, the emphasis of Thatcherism on individualism and capitalism has created a new environment in Britain and women like Marlene utilized it. They have concerned on themselves and targeted to earn money as much as possible resulting in the new classicism known as the career women or strong women. Due to the competitiveness of market and the success of Thatcher the term of superwoman emerged, referring to the excellence of women in life aspects. In this regard, Alkhafaji (2021) opines that Thatcher as a politician has built her career as the superwomen from a daughter of a grocer and Marlene in the play is embodied as the main personality in the text being a role model for other female characters. Marlene has become a top woman by representing the ideologies



of Thatcher. She refuses to turn into a man's little woman but she always longs for high-flying status, freedom, and adventure.

The three acts of the play show the different environments of Marlene that she has to deal with. In this regard, Meix (2018) reports that the first act is a celebration with women from history; the second is her aggressiveness with work where she interviews women and encourages to be independent; and the third is about the abandonment of her daughter in care of her sister for her career. She urges other women to struggle in their lives to be successful like her. She does not like the passive women whom she calls foolish and shows her aggressive nature in her work:

Marlene: I hate working class / which is what you're going

Joyce: Yes you do.

Marlene: to go on about now, it doesn't exist anymore, it means lazy and stupid.  
/ I don't like the way they talk. I don't. (pp. 231-32)

Marlene does not like to be passive, dependent and nurturant. She hates the women who are poor and also blames her sister Joyce for clinging to the domestic affairs. Similarly, she hates marriage and says so:

Marlene: Of course I couldn't get out of here fast enough. What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed? / Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch.

Joyce: Christ.

Marlene: fucking tell me what to fucking do fucking.

Joyce: I don't know how you could leave your own child. (p. 221)

The above lines reflect that how Marlene is determined to be a career woman; for this, she sacrificed motherhood and left her daughter with her sister. Her expressions indicate that she is acting as the male-subverting gender role. She is very strong like males. Beauvoir (1953) reports the idea of Monsieur Benda that males think being independent or without relating to women but women do not think without men and women do not exist without a male decision as they are differentiated in relation to men referring as inessential in front of the essential. The thoughts and actions of Marlene show that she can stand herself. She does not reflect her as inferior as she attempts to uproot the socially constructed norms.

Marlene is guided by the idea of capitalism and thinks that money can help to achieve independence in life. By money they can do anything they like without being dependent on males. Her remarks in the play reflect her intention in this way: "I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money" (p. 222). She has followed the women who have power or who do highly paid jobs. She hates women who are idle. She wants to use the identity of the iron lady that is the title for Thatcher. She is in competition with a male to achieve the topmost post. She turns the patriarchal table upside down by toppling a coworker Mr. Howard Kidd. Thus, Yang (2019) says that Marlene is making a struggle in the gaps of patriarchy by adopting the masculine values and norms to identify selfhood and success. She gains the most and achieves the rare position in the field run by men. She has given up the role of a mother for seeking power and success. She has erased her gender features and advantages when she enters the world of competitiveness and independence. She refuses to accept the inequalities between men and women and as feminists do as naturally inevitable and should be questioned. In the world of capitalism, there is no distinction in which the emphasis is on production, labor, and wages. Both men and women can receive wages and accumulate

capital. As being an ambitious person, she chooses to take risk for power, attainment, and superiority. She is a model of individualism-driven women who are empowered to create the icons. She is the image of the girlboss of the 1980s that everyone wishes to be these days. Therefore, the play illustrates and categorizes a female archetype or a trope even with her character.

### Gender Subversion and New Identity

Gender subversion emphasizes on the reconstruction of the reality of natural gender by uprooting the trespassed cultural and social premises. It highlights the peculiar restriction imposed on an individual. Gender reconsideration can break up such hegemony set up in any sector of life. The subversive actions and identities occur when there is a realization of the constructed notion of gender. It depends on the understanding and subversive action of individuals. In the play, Marlene internalizes such actions through her dialogue, thoughts, and activities, dealing with other women and outlook. It is neither political nor economic but a personal defense or rebellion for survival and existence. It is a transformational process which requires realization and acceptance. The characters in the play make numerous efforts for their identity, survival, and transformation. Here, Win says, "It's not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it's not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something" (p. 176). It means women need to transcend the boundary of gender. She says so by their experiences of the various women who spent their entire life as handicapped clinging to the traditional norms and values. By acting as handicapped, gender subversion is not possible. Many people are not ready for the transformation adhering to the traditional norms taking them as natural or constructed by God. Those who make an effort can get a new identity as Marlene has formed in the play. For the change, the women in the play are at work which is the essential fact for their lives. Marlene, embracing the enterprise culture, is an example of the subversive action and her new identity despite her dispute with her sister and daughter.

For the subversive action and identity of women as a new or strong woman, the process like modification, variation, redefinition, improvement, awareness, revision, and reconsideration of the prevailing practices need to be made constant rather than stern rejection. This process continuously leads to success as it is sustainable. The subversive actions can provide extra space for women as suggested by Butler (1990) as she emphasizes on a new sort of feminist politics to contest the rectifications of gender and identity, which can be applied in the play regarding the actions, dialogue, and thought of Marlene, Win, and Neil. These characters in the play are inclined to transcend the prevailing practices and identity and their activities have been observed as the subversive action and the formation of a new identity. Butler (1990) encourages women to subvert a normative gender role as this opens up space and resistance for identity. There is no single identity or experience that define women. The categories like race, class, sexuality, religion, and values that limit the role of women, which need to be dismantled for the new identity of women who are not regarded as inferior to males. In comparison with Marlene, her sister Joyce who is taking care of Marlene's daughter Angie behaves as a subverted character by rejecting the offer of money from Marlene. Joyce reveals as an aggressive character while talking with Marlene as she defies the oppressive character of Marlene. Her revolt with Marlene is an expression of the whole women race who are muted and need to be subversive.

To sum up, the characters in the play have made a struggle for equal opportunities and attempted to improve their positions. In this sense, the play is an

emblematic of women's struggle and subversive identity. They also highlight a lesson to make something of oneself as many characters including Marlene, Nell, and Win do in the play. Top Girls Employment Agency is also an organization to reflect the voice, superiority, and empowerment of women. Similar to the idea of Marlene to be independent, Win prefers not to get married and spends her time with a married man. She confesses with Neil that she has to hide many things: "I had to lie down in the back of the car so the neighbors wouldn't see me go in" (p. 169). Neil also works behaving in a bold way as executive. Marlene also advises Jeanine not to tell others that she is getting married for getting the job with better prospects.

## CONCLUSION

Churchill's play presents the issues concerning the identity of female and the problems they have undergone during their lives. Marlene's decision to be independent is motivated by her need to feel equal. Additionally, she is motivated to assert her role as gender subversion through her success. For the reconstruction of gender identity, she does everything for reflecting her potential for resistance. Marlene, the top career woman, is portrayed as soleless, exploiting other women and suppressing her own caring side. This reflects the celebration of an individualistic woman who is guided by her personal achievement believing in free market capitalism (Thatcherism). By contrasting the role of Marlene with the historical, fictional, and mythical women who faced adversity and suffered bitterly to attain their goals, the play reflects gender subversion. Highlighting the women who have long been forgotten throughout history, Churchill strikes the attention of the audience to emphasize on the new identity and gender subversion. She stresses on defying the norms by challenging for the rights and identity. The way they celebrate her promotion also posits women in a different role than the male-oriented norms have assigned. Presenting the women from different cultures, attempts are made to contrast the role of Marlene to subvert her identity not as a docile woman but as a career, strong, and high-flying woman. They reflect the futility of the female protagonists as they have achieved independence by conforming to male superiority. On the other hand, Marlene stands on her own as she challenges the gender role being decisive as well as independent. The depiction of the host of female characters in the play tends to reinforce the oppressive tactics of the patriarchal societies. By portraying the suffering of the female from history, the play manages to shift the audience's role from the passive recipient to the active participant. By the depiction of a strong and decisive woman like Marlene, it can be implicated to liberate women making them free from the bondages of gender roles. Future research can be conducted in the area of gender equality by erasing the existing gender differences.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

*I hereby wish to declare that I do not have any conflict of interests to disclose. However, I declare that the manuscript has not been published before and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.*

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

*I declare that this manuscript is originally produced by me.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has contributed valuable information and advice, both directly and indirectly, during my work on this paper. In*

particular, I am thankful to the Department of English at Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

**Ganga Ram Paudyal** holds an M.Phil in English from Nepal Open University and is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara, Nepal. His research interests include drama, digital education and higher education.

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**To cite this article [APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition style]:**

Paudyal, G.R. (2025). Subverting patriarchy as gender politics: A feminist perspective on the narrative of women's performativity. *Academia Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2, 358-370. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ajhss.v2i1.85245>