

## Chapter 1

### Revolt against Patriarchy in Forman's *Leave Me*

In the novel *Leave Me*, Gayle Forman's elementary concern is to revolt against male domination in order to liberate women. She has delved into women's psycho-social realities and examined their bodies, souls and minds through her fictitious female character Maribeth Klein in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's American society. In this young adult novel, Forman tells the story of a middle aged working woman, Maribeth Klein and her struggles to discover herself. She is a hardworking editor in a famous women's magazine and mother of two children. She is over burdened by the domestic chores and other familial responsibilities. It makes her feel that she has no identity of her own; there is no meaning to her life. Therefore, she abandons her home and loved ones, but she cannot abstain from them any longer, so she comes back home. Here, she fails to gain her desired identity as she is hard pressed by the realization of her responsibility, so she gets back home renouncing her search for identity. The argument of the thesis is that Maribeth suffers a failure to attain desired life as she feels that her responsibility towards the family is more important than her identity.

Forman is remarkable for her advocacy for females' freedom and against the social rigid and cultural limitations that prevent women's quest for self-identity. She is able to initiate a new discussion on attitude towards women's status in American male dominated society. Her major issue is focuses on the question of sexuality and women's role. Can't are find our identity while one is still at home? She voices for women's search for freedom in the repressive American society of the 21st century as depicted in the novel.

Forman tells the story of a middle aged working woman, Maribeth Klein, who makes different types of revolt against patriarchal conventions that are responsible for

her subjugation. Questioning the marginalization of females, she holds a profound longing for an absolute freedom that she lacks in her society. To attain her longing, she revolts against the limitation by violating the modes and codes imposed upon contemporary American women's behavior. She abandons her home as a token of revolt against unjust domination on a woman.

The main problem that appeared in the research is what drives the protagonist to go crazy about her identity; what consequences has she noticed of her decision and actions and why she leaves home and family. The primary objective of the research is to explain the helplessness of modern women's busy and hectic life in American society, their objection to the injustice and the consequences of their revolt. Similarly it tries to explain the reasons why she leaves home and to point out the consequences of Maribeth's decision and actions as well.

The main protagonist of the novel Maribeth Klein is a married working mother who is so busy looking after her husband, children and domestic chores. She is so busy that she does not even realize that she's had a heart attack. Afterwards, surprised to discover that her recovery seems to be not for her happiness home but for those who rely on her, Maribeth does the unthinkable: she packs a bag and leaves. After leaving her home she finds a new woman inside her. A woman, who wants to learn new things, make new friends, to love and to be loved passionately in a new way.

She is an active working woman and has active involvement in each and every household chore along with her office work. Maribeth faces something different and uneasiness regarding the patriarchal designations because of her gender. Besides great wealth, she has everything in her life to be happy. She has a husband, two loving children, parents who never made her feel like she was adopted, a job with good position but she feels incomplete and something lacking in her.

Maribeth has to work in a hectic schedule, but her husband, for being a male, takes advantage of her obedience. She feels empty and her emptiness is the result of hectic schedule. It is the result of her daily routine lifestyle. She manages time for everything from work to family but she never makes time for herself. The void inside her is the result of not being true to herself. She always finds a way to make her near and dear happy, but she never tries to make herself happy. To make everyone happy she forgets how to feel special about herself.

She is busy in her day to day life of office and home, cooking for husband and children and again home to office. In this process, she has lost her inner self. She feels she has been extremely exploited only because she is female. This feeling pushes her to make a decision of escaping home and family in search of her self.

In this regard, this paper aims to discuss Maribeth's fleeing from home and family, her finding of her inner self after meeting different types of people and her realization of family responsibility. Like Maribeth, another female character Janice Pickering also abandons her child to avoid upcoming ups and downs.

Working women in modern days are much more pressurized than men. They are experiencing an exhausted lifestyle. They have to manage their work and family. If they lose a grip between work and family, they will lose both. Regarding the issue Autumn Markus writes, "Gayle Foreman's *Leave Me* is an urban fairytale for the exhausted modern woman. Maribeth is married, employed, and the mother of feisty four-year-old twins. She is solely responsible for scheduling her family and upkeep of their home and lives. Her mother is an irritant and a worry" (3). Apart from office and house hold work, modern women have responsibility for their family members too. Time of feeding children and taking care of their homework, even making sure they are wearing uniform properly, all the responsibility falls into a woman's part. Even

though they are working women, they do not have any weekends or vacation.

### **Literature Review**

After the publication of *Leave Me*, many readers have cast their opinions as the novel deals with the situation of females in the then American society. It seems to speak about the unequal situation of women in contemporary American society.

Atumn Markus writes:

Her escape seems logical in the face of how cavalierly her family treats her medical condition. Foreman finds both pathos and humor in Maribeth's gradual transition to single woman. From letters to her children, written but not sent, to really learning to swim, Maribeth rediscovers the woman behind the mother and wife. (10)

According to Markus, Meribeth's escaping from family helps her to discover herself beyond her position as a mother and wife. She learns swimming, makes some friends and tries to find her biological mother to find out whether her illness is genetically transferred to her or not.

Maribeth has got enough funds in her bank to escape from her home.

Fortunately, she finds an apartment with a landlord who accepts cash. If she had not had enough money to withdraw from the bank for a trip and had not found a landlord who accepted cash, discovery of her other aspects would not have been that easier?

Lauri Hertzell in her book review asserts, "Fortunately, she has money in the bank.

Fortunately, she finds an apartment with a landlord who will accept cash. Fortunately, she finds a cardiologist who is working off the insurance grid. And fortunately, he is widowed and handsome" (6). She is lucky enough to visit a widowed, handsome cardiologist who accepts cash for her treatment in new place. Again, without all these variables her self rediscovery would have been impossible.

Even in today's generation this type of literature will be considered as an adult novel in which one can find enough ingredients to attract the young generation. But this is far more than a 'chick lit' which only can attract those youth who are after only pop-culture. Shyam K. Sriram writes about the novel:

I imagine that three-fourths of book reviewers and critics will issue the summary judgment that *Leave Me* somehow qualifies as "chick lit" and should be lumped into that category, but that does a disservice to that genre, and to this author. This is a novel about a woman, but one whose choice to free herself from the constraints of her family life to gain the peace she feels that she deserves (and rightfully so) should hit home for all readers. (4)

The story is about Maribeth who does not go for romantic problems but for real pragmatic problems and makes a bold choice to free herself from the constraints of her family life to gain peace and solace. Therefore, the novel cannot be labelled as pure chick lit though it has features of this type. Her struggle is especially for a break. She feels that she rightfully deserves a break. Finally, her choice pays off as she finds her inner self.

In this era, there are lots of women who want to escape from home and their professional duty. In the novel, Maribeth runs from home after a serious medical situation. Theresha Smith asserts, "This is a quietly powerful story about a woman's inner search after going through a serious medical situation. I highly doubt there would be many women who wouldn't be able to relate to Maribeth's life on some level" (6). It is not only Maribeth, who wants to run away from home but there would also be many women who wouldn't be able to relate to Maribeth's life on some level. Women of this generation might have been given so many rights compared to those of the previous century but they are still oppressed psychologically. To feel free from

that kind of oppression, one must take a break.

Fulfilling the demands of her children, husband, family and society is what a woman's life has become days. But Maribeth wants to become more than a mother and wife. Adriana Delgado writes, "Maribeth, not being able to stand her situation and the disregard shown to her, makes a decision. She decides to pack a bag and leave without telling her husband or children where she's going in an extreme attempt to try and discover herself again and decide once and for all, what she truly wants" (2). These are Maribeth's attempts to discover herself again. She starts a journey for a quest of what she truly wants and desires for. This novel is not only about Maribeth's struggling but every individual in this society at least who to go for the same quest as Beauvoir imagines in her famous book *The Second Sex*.

Beauvoir's book raises the feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that freedom for women is freedom for men too. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is a wide ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as negative object or the "other". She calls men as the dominating subject who is assumed to represent humanity in general. The book also deals with the great collective myths of women in the works of many male writers:

We have seen women as flesh; the flesh of the male is produced and the mother's body and re-created in the embraces of the woman in love . . . She is doomed to immanence, and through her passivity she bestows peace and harmony-but if she declines this role, she is seen forth with as a praying mantic, an ogress. (994)

According to Beauvoir, every man asserts his freedom and transcends and considers women doomed. Man's immense dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliances and subordinate position of women in the society. Until and unless

women take an active role in order to retrieve their lost identity, they would play a subservient role all their lives.

Maribeth surrenders to the person she once was; a perfectionist in both office and home. She leaves home to try something new and to feel less burdened by responsibilities. Mana Anvar writes in a review about Maribeth's condition and her intentions behind leaving home:

Delving into a hard-hitting plot that thickens and intensifies with every page, the novel sheds light onto the power of forgiveness and self growth. Maribeth surrenders the person she once was — a perfectionist whose life revolved around lists and planning months in advance — in the hopes of finding something better. By confronting the new tangled elements of a former time, she freely lets her life take its course in the aspiration of learning a way to start again. (5)

Maribeth's leaving home is not only her intention of escaping away from her responsibilities, it is also her new way to discover her new self. She frees herself from her duties to find different aspects of life.

As imagined by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, Maribeth tries to retrieve her lost identity by violating patriarchal ideologies. Hence, the concept of Beauvoir in the book *The Second Sex* has been applied as a major theoretical insight. Additionally, the ideas of Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elaine Showalter, Kate Millet have also been applied for the analysis in this thesis.

## Chapter 2

### Moves against Exploitation upon Women in *Leave Me*

Exploitation upon women is one of the major features of male supremacy that sees females as the others. In patriarchal society, males treat women inhumanly. Before the twentieth century, women's voices for their rights and freedom used to be suppressed, but after that their voices started to be heard and come out with significant consequences. These were the voices of feminist movement that encouraged the females to fight for their rights and freedom. In the novel "Leave Me", too, the protagonist combats patriarchy being a feminist. Therefore, the theory of feminism seems pertinent for the discussion. The following sections deal with radical feminism.

#### Feminism and Its Significance in Literary Analysis

Feminism is a doctrine related on image and ideas advocating rights for the equality of the sexes, identity and freedom. Feminism tries to redefine activities and goals from a woman centered point of view. It refuses to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to a sex object, a second sex or a submissive other. It seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices. Women suffer because of their sex and defend equal rights for them in political, economic, social, psychological, personal and aesthetic sense.

The nineteenth and twentieth century women had to pass through various challenges as the writer in society. Feminism became a dominant approach in literature only in late nineteenth century. It had, however, two centuries of struggle for the recognition of women's cultural role and achievements. The campaign was earlier started formally through the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792). Wollstonecraft, in her book, claims for the political and social



rights of women and goes beyond the notion of patriarchal society. She advocates "the mind does not know sex" (7). She blames that society views woman in "the role of convenient domestic slaves and alluring mistress by denying their economic independence and encouraging them to be 'docile' and attentive to their looks to the exclusion of all else" (98). Wollstonecraft blames the patriarchy as it takes women as the plaything. That deals with their feelings and emotions. They are deprived of economic as well as social privileges which consequently turn them as submissive.

The period's existing ideas concerning women's rights were fully set forth by Mary Wollstonecraft's in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Wollstonecraft, in her writing, challenges the idea that women exist only for the males. She proposed that women should receive the same opportunities as men in education, work and politics. In the nineteenth century, however, the awareness of women's need for equality with men crystallized in the movement to obtain women's suffrage. It creates no change in any fundamental or far reaching reevaluation of women's social status, roles in the economy. A few women began to work as professionals, and women as a whole achieved the right to vote in the first half of the twentieth century. But there were still distinct limits on women's participation in the workplace. Society followed a set of prevailing notions that tend to confine women to their traditional role as wives, mothers and homemakers.

In *A Vindication of the Right of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft calls for women and men to be educated equally. This work was unique in suggesting that the betterment of women's status has been affected through such political change on the radical reform of national educational systems. Wollstonecraft states, "The reading of novel makes women, and particularly ladies of fashion, very fond of using strong impassions and superlatives in conversation" (399). According to her, due to the

traditional educational system, women are compelled to study such novels, which aren't intellectual but are sentimental. Due to the impact of those novels, women cannot exercise their intellectuality but are trapped in the sentimentality. This leads them to a concept that a knowledgeable man is nothing in comparison to brave rake.

A woman chases a rake that easily rouses her emotion which she learns from the sentimental novels:

Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feeling and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice. (Wollnschaft 398)

They read such novels and make an ideal picture of male and female in their mind.

They are not taught how to appreciate or how to tackle society. So, they cannot make good decisions and choose a rake, luxury and brave person.

She concludes that the patriarchal society, the traditional education system, and the sentimental novels teach females to be sentimental and beautiful, but not intellectual. Wollnschaft further states:

I have looked into various books on education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but all this has given me is a deep conviction that the neglected education of my fellow creatures is the main source of the misery I deplore, and that women in particular are made weak and wretched by a number of co-operating causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. (397)

Females are not affected by the misinterpretation and they are not taught how to tackle society. Instead they learn to remain passive as the object of male. In fact,

women are equally intellectual but their intellect is suppressed. This is not the fault of women but it is the bias attitude of patriarchal society which intentionally makes them weak, submissive and inferior. Wollstonecraft sows the seeds of revolution in the mind of women for their identity through her advocacy.

Virginia Woolf belongs to such an era which was the era of growth. There was unrest, upheavals and regular changes in every step of life. Her book, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), has proved to be influential in the domain of literary feminism. In this book, she discusses directly the situation of female writers through the lens of modernity. Woolf wrote a good deal about females' writing. Though she never adopted a feminist stance, she continually examined the problems faced by female writers. She believed that women always face social and economic obstacles in their literary ambitions. Rejecting a feminist consciousness, she hoped to achieve a balance between a male 'self-realization' and female's 'self-annihilation'. Her ultimate belief was that women could freely develop their artistic talents if they achieved social and economic equality with men.

Woolf's struggle was aimed against the restricted and shuttered life of women where they were compelled to give up language and were tamed to remain silent, "Her concerns were deeper as any novelists would be - men's anger at women, misunderstanding between the sexes and above all the psychological condition under which women . . . and men . . . were brought up" (817). Woolf sometimes imagined a society in which men and women would come together with a purpose and desire. She focuses on women's development of independence from men. Woolf was an important precursor of feminist critics. Her book *A Room of One's Own* has raised the issue that patriarchal society has hindered and prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities.

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* a wide ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as negative object or "other". She calls man as the dominating subject who is assumed to represent humanity in general. The book also deals with the great collective myths of women in the works of many male writers. While talking about the myth, she has uttered transcendence and immanence.

As defined by Beauvoir, the patriarchal institutions of twenty first century American society required women to be objects in marriage and in motherhood existing as vessels of maternity and sexuality. They have little opportunity for individuality. They were supposed to be good daughters, wives and mothers moving only from the protection of their father's roof to the protection of their husband's. Moreover, the strictly conventional American society had confined women within the narrow boundaries of domesticity. They are expected to be chaste and obedient to their husbands, and motherly and protective to their children.

Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. Despite differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control. The nature of this control may differ. So, it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to unravel its workings in order to work for women's development in a systematic way. "When women's rights activists gradually realized that disenfranchisement severely hampered reformatory efforts, they became determined to rectify this obvious injustice" (Krolokke & Sorensen 4). According to Krolokke and Sorensen, women should be aware about the way of domination and try to revolt against it in order to defy and dismantle its limitations.

Maribeth Klein as a married woman lives with her husband and two children in the same society. So, she is foreseen to be a devoted wife and nursing mother

maintaining the sole happiness of her family and "the property of her husband" (Woolf 36). Maribeth and Janice raise their voices and go against what the society thinks of women's existence. The research shows female struggle for making self identity in the society. They have to face problems of being females. They are guided by their husbands' interest and intense desires but social understanding about women makes their situation problematic.

Moreover, this research tries to find women struggling in order to establish their position in society because the pre-occupied concept about women manipulates women and throws them within social limits. The next chapter focuses on the efforts made by women characters of the novel to go against patriarchy and their ultimate failure in doing so due to deeply rooted patriarchal norms and values

### **Maribeth's Moves against Patriarchy**

The novel *Leave Me* revolves around the periphery of the American way of life, its social and religious codes and conducts. It tries to show that the twenty-first century's modern American society still imagines women as the matter of flesh and bones. When women try to make their identity, or they move as per their opinion, or they exercise in order to establish themselves on their foot; the respective society takes it as the matter of stigma. This is one of the reasons why females are dominated.

Women are imagined as a second class citizen, subservient, docile and fragile, therefore, they have to be kept under control of male gauze. The novel *Leave Me* also shows the domination upon women as they are discriminated against socially, politically and economically. Due to the extremity of American patriarchal society, the situation of Maribeth Klein is quite heart-rending. From early in the morning she delves into heavy workload as "a powerhouse working mother and wife who is 100 percent dedicated to fulfilling her responsibilities" (1), but her husband, including her

whole family takes it as her responsibility which degenerates pain and pangs in her life. It compels to think her situation as imagined by Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*.

In her popular work *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir aptly argues that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295). She elaborates how a boy child is treated differently from a girl child from the very beginning although “The world is at first represented in the newborn infant only by immanent sensation” (296). As a girl child grows she is taught by the behaviour of her parents that she is an ‘Other’. The boy on the other hand is given to learn his hardships of independence and told that “more is demanded of boys because they are superior” (299). So, right from the beginning they are trained to realize their different roles and responsibilities.

As claimed by Beauvoir, Maribeth is taught her responsibilities assigned by the then patriarchal society which she takes as if they are universal truth and follows accordingly. While doing so, she loses her personal self for the betterment of her family, husband and children. She works like a machine. The contemporary American patriarchal society has dehumanized her by assigning heavy work load upon her. As Sylvia Walby defines “patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (20). Patriarchy is a social system which rejects the notion that men and women are naturally different because of their biology or bodies, rather it idolizes by birth that men are superior and women are inferior.

Sylvia Walby's claim seems true in the case of Maribeth Klein. Forman intentionally has shown the unequal position of women in American patriarchal society by portraying the problems of modern women and their struggles through Maribeth. The pressure of family duty and her professional duty are heavy that, main protagonist

of the novel, Maribeth Klein, can not realise that she has a heart attack. In very first line and paragraph, Forman describes the nature of attack and Maribeth's hectic life:

Maribeth Klein was working late, waiting to sign off on the final page proofs of the December issue, when she had a heart attack. Those first twinges in her chest, however, were more a heaviness than a pain, and she did not immediately think heart . . . She thought anxiety, brought on by the length of tomorrow's to-do list. She thought irritation, brought on by the conversations with her husband, Jason, who when she'd called earlier was having a dance party with Oscar and Liv, even though their downstairs neighbour Earl Jablonski would complain and even though keeping the twins up past eight upped the odds that one of them would wake in the night. (3)

Even though she was having a heart attack, she could only think of her work and her family members. She thinks her chest pain was nothing but the cause of anxiety. Like almost every modern working woman, Maribeth too manages both professional and personal life by herself. In fact, she never gets a day off from her outside job and domestic responsibility as mother and wife. Her husband, the representative of patriarchy, does not take any notice even if she has had a heart attack. This is one of the examples of patriarchal hegemony.

Maribeth is admitted to hospital after her heart attack. Even in that condition, she worries about her family duty. She was working in the office when she first felt chest pain. She did not take it as a heart attack but just a chest pain or effect of what she had eaten but it really was a symptom of heart attack. Even when she was in hospital as a heart attack patient she was worried about her children's Halloween costumes and flu shots. She is not just a perfect white collar worker but also a perfect mother and wife. Story narrates her situation and chatting with her husband:

Someone had to get the kids to their ballet classes, their soccer clinics, their speech therapy sessions, their play dates, their birthday parties. To take them shopping for their Halloween costumes, to the pediatrician for their flu shots, to the dentist for their cleanings. Someone had to plan the meals, pay the bills, and balance the checkbook.

Maribeth sighed. "It's just that I have a house full of four-year-olds and a very busy weekend." Maribeth looked back, disliking him already and that was before he said, "You do realize you've had a heart attack?" (18)

After her admission to hospital and finding out about her heart attack her first thought is about her children's necessity. She is not thinking about her health or how serious is her heart attack, instead she thinks about house bill, meals for kids and what will happen to her pre-planned busy weekend because patriarchal society has instilled the duties and responsibilities in her mind that she has to perform in any circumstances which is unjust and the traits of inequality.

Maribeth's lifestyle of home to office and office to home makes her no more than a machine. She works for her employer and she fulfills her motherly duty too. In this situation, her dream once she had before marriage has shattered. Atumn Markus writes about Maribeth and her condition after emergency bypass:

After an emergency bypass, the fabled hospital stay turns out to be just a couple of days, and the help her doctor says is essential is nowhere to be found. Husband is still helpless, mother is worse than ever, and kids are clueless. It's only a matter of time until Maribeth's physical and mental breakdown will be complete. (5)

Maribeth being a working mother and wife she had to put on more weight than usual woman. Apart from managing her professional life she has to maintain her home and



family duty too. She is so busy in her personal and professional life that she can not get a minute or two to spend or think about herself. The modern day, working women are freer in comparison to women of the 80s or before but they still have their problems in life, they are pressurized more.

After her discharge from hospital, Maribeth never thought she must take more care of her health. Instead she thought her health issue troubled her family relation.

Maribeth Klein and her husband had brief talk over her health issue after checkups:

She had already given him a rundown of the checkup in the elevator. “Yep. All good.”

Jason paused. “So you think it’s okay if I go back to the office tomorrow? They’re really in crunch mode now.”

“I’m sorry my heart attack came at such an inconvenient time.”

“No one said that.” The cab lurched to a stop as a jaywalker, eyes glued to his phone, stepped into traffic. The pressure of the seatbelt sent a cascade of pain through Maribeth. (43)

She was thinking her health issue came as an obstacle in her family and professional life. Even her husband denied her worries of her health being an obstacle in her family routine. He ignores her health problems, giving priority to his job. What an irony to be seen in patriarchy! However, Maribeth could not stop worrying about her family and professional duty. Even in her critical health condition she could not think only about her.

Maribeth’s worries are also guided by the actions of her family members. She used to do every household activity alongside her professional duty by herself. Her husband Jason even could not pay the taxes on time. The story of her taking care of everything at house and office goes:

A state? She was dancing on a surfboard, juggling knives, while they all went about business as usual. But it wasn't business as usual. She'd had open-heart surgery. And in spite of what Jason and Dr. Sterling thought, she wasn't getting better. And if she didn't get better...How would they manage? When Jason couldn't even pay the goddan taxes on time. "I hate you!" she yelled. Then turned off the phone and threw it across the room, burying her head under the pillow and crying herself to sleep. (59)

Maribeth is a working mother and wife who, despite her illness, sacrifices everything to fulfill her responsibilities. She does not even make the time to think about her symptoms while fulfilling her duties. Shyam K. Sriram writes about Maribeth Klein's day to day lifestyle:

Klein, an editor at a popular women's magazine, is a powerhouse working mother and wife who is 100 percent dedicated to fulfilling her responsibilities. She's simply too busy to let illness slow her down, so when she starts going through myocardial infarction, she doesn't even make the time to think about her symptoms. She invents excuses for the various things that are ailing her, and when she finally visits a doctor, she's confronted with the reality that she is more than just sick; her heart is dying. (2)

With her busy schedule, Maribeth has forgotten other things apart from her duties she has in her own life. In a sense it is a type of negligence towards her health when she ignores strange pain in her chest, taking it otherwise.

Suffocated by being mechanized, Maribeth finds a way to escape from it. Her family members do not care about her treatment even after her serious health issue, which makes her escape from her family and responsibility. She risks following her instinct, so she packs her bag and leaves home as she is guided by the pursuit of self-

discovery. The story unfolds:

Maribeth had walked downstairs and hailed a cab, carrying only a hastily packed duffle bag with a few changes of clothing and her medications. She'd left her cell phone, her computer-pretty much everything else-at home. None of that felt necessary anymore. She had e-mailed Jason. An apology? An explanation? She wasn't sure. By the time she was in the cab, the details of her note had already begun to fade. (73)

She left her cell phone, her computer and pretty much every gadget at home before leaving home. She withdraws cash money from her account as much as she needs. She walks out as if she is not going to come back. Before her leaving she had e-mailed an apology and explanation of why she was leaving her husband. The cause behind her departure from there is due to her longing for freedom from all sorts of domination created by latent patriarchal ideologies as Silvia Walby writes, "In this system women's labour power, women's reproduction, women's sexuality, women's mobility and property and other economic resources – are under patriarchal control" (20). According to Sylvia Walby, each and every thing is under control of patriarchal ideology which is the root cause of female suffering. After knowing all these things, Maribeth wants to get released from all sorts of domination. That's why she abandons her family and moves ahead in search of self-identity.

After leaving house Maribeth goes to Pittsburgh. In Pittsburgh, Maribeth hides her identity and start living as M. B. which is a shortened form of her original name 'Maribeth'. She continues her treatment by paying cash. The cash payment process in her treatment goes with the conversation:

"You're paying cash?" She looked at Maribeth as if she'd just announced she would be paying with pokemon cards.

“Yes,” Maribeth said.

“Don’t you have Insurance?”

“I’ll be paying cash,” Maribeth said.

“If you can’t afford insurance,” the receptionist replied, “we can help you apply for it. It’s very reasonable if you qualify for Medicaid. And we also offer discounts for the indigent.” (78)

To hide her identity, Maribeth even declines the offer of Medicaid. She goes for paying cash rather than Insurance. Hospital receptionist suggests that she apply for health insurance but Maribeth turns her offer down.

Maribeth leaves her children and husband behind and flees to Pittsburgh like a hippie woman. She neglects all her responsibilities and runs. Her fleeing from home is not just her desire to go far away from home but also her intention to be cut off from all the connections with her family members. But she could not let all her emotions go away. Her strong emotions towards her family members go on:

"Dear Oscar and Live, Mommy has had a very busy few days."

She wrote them the kind of letter she imagined the woman on a business trip might. No tortured explanations of iffy timelines, just postcard details about her day. She wrote about the puppy in a trench coat she’d seen out on her walk. How it had reminded her of the time back home when they’d seen an elderly woman pushing a poodle in a toy stroller. "Do you remember, Liv, how after that, you gave up your spot in the stroller for your Clifford doll? And how you wouldn’t ride in the stroller anymore because you said Clifford needed the seat"? (96-97)

She left her home with a strong mindset but her emotional part continuously struggles with her mindset with the memories of her children. Maribeth writes the letter to her

children. Instead of enjoying her freedom from her responsibilities, she started to write to her children.

Maribeth is anxious to know about whether her heart attack is genetic, so she tries to find her biological mother so that she can ask her about it. She fears If her heart attack is genetic it would hamper her children too. While walking away silently from her home, she had into her mind that she would find out her biological mother and find out about her health.

Maribeth finds out Janice Pickering, a woman who runs a website to find biological parents and children for those who were adopted. The discussion between Maribeth and Janice about the process of finding biological parents goes on:

“Can you explain how the process works,” Maribeth asked Janice. “I read the laws have changed.”

“They have and they now favour the adopted child’s right to know her background. That doesn’t mean your birth parents will want contact, or even be alive, I’m afraid, but we can almost always find the trail, find out where you came from.” (136)

Maribeth gathers every possible ways to meet with her biological mother. Janice provides how Maribeth can meet with her biological mother. Janice and she investigate Maribeth's real identity. Janice tells her even if she finds her real mother, she cannot meet her without her mother’s consent.

Maribeth always wants to communicate with her children. Even she is far from them, she is seeking ways to talk to them. She wants to tell her children that she is a good mother. Maribeth wants to make excuses to her children about why she is not coming home. Her condition is more of a timid protective mother who is seeking an apology than a rebellion one. The story unfolds:

She had no idea what she was going to say to her children. She only knew that she had to say something, she had to communicate to them that she wasn't that mother. She was one of the good mothers, the one who fought her way back to her children. Only how could she tell them that and explain why she wasn't coming home? If walking to and from the library had been her barometer of health, she had reached that. She could climb that hill. But now that she could, she had seen all the other peaks beyond it. And she knew she wasn't ready to go back. (181)

Even though Maribeth feels guilty, she is not ready to go back. She has her own reason for not returning home but still she cannot explain to her children.

After her escape, Maribeth tries to discover herself. She learns swimming to show that she has got the ability to do things not done yet, and to remain healthy afterwards.

Initially, she enjoys her escape as vacation. She is not a good swimmer, but Janice teaches her. Maribeth discusses with Janice about swimming:

“Perfect,” Janice said. “As for your swimming, I was thinking, I could give you some tips.”

“Tips?” Maribeth began to suspect that the meeting at the pool had not been a matter of convenience. She had been played.

“I was a lifeguard for years. I'm not certified anymore but I've taught more than my share of children to swim.”

“I'm not exactly a child,” she said.

“I know,” Janice said. “But I'm sure I can teach you, too.” (220)

Maribeth learns swimming to decrease upcoming health problems. But at her age, learning new things increases her confidence in learning new things. Maribeth, at first, does not think that she can learn swimming but she gathers her confidence after

Janice convinces her.

Maribeth even goes further with some romantic lifestyle. She becomes so close to the doctor that she kisses him. A married woman, in a new place and in new circumstances with a man whom she had been in touch as a patient does everything that is a taboo for a married individual. Her kissing scene with her doctor unfolds:

He pushed away his plate of eggs. “Perhaps it was for the best. Medicine requires a certain level of delusion, a belief in one’s invincibility. But watching Felicity die, being right there and not being able to do a goddamn thing to stop it, well, it robbed me of that, too.”

Stephen was quiet now but his hands were shaking. Maribeth cupped them in hers, held them firm until the shaking stopped. Then she kissed him. (231)

At the moment she fully enjoys her freedom. Her frustration with her husband and her emotional attachment towards her doctor made her kiss him. The widower doctor and his tragic back-story of his wife get the attention of Maribeth.

One of the reasons Maribeth ran away from home is that she might rest her family burden over her husband and she will feel free after leaving home. But somehow she is emotionally attached towards her family members even she is away from home. Even until this time, her husband does not seem to be disturbed due to her absence as his response is always “fine”, and it hurts her ego:

*Fine?* How could she trust such an insubstantial word? How could she trust such and insubstantial man? Who never said what he really meant. Did he mean fine as opposed to drowning, or fine as in thriving?

But then a jolt of understanding hit her like a fist to the gut. What if Jason was saying something else entirely? That they were doing fine. Without her. (234-35)

Maribeth does not feel fully secured in her new place. This feeling of insecurity leads her to feel more responsible towards her family and children. She doubts whether her appearance and disappearance make any impact on her family?

The mistakes and courage Maribeth has made is something unexpected. One can believe that Maribeth is weak enough to take the courageous step she has taken. But somehow she does not expect things by leaving her family and children behind and goes totally out of contact.

### **Ease for Her Revolt and Realization to Go Back**

Maribeth writes in guilt to her children. She convinces herself that her escaping from home was not her choice but it was necessary. She tells them she could not take care of her children and herself at the same time in her e-mail. Her e-mail reads: “But how can I do both? Protect them and me. Protect them from me. So I have to go away. To take care of me. You take care of them. I’m sorry. Don’t hate me. Let me do this. Leave me be. You said you’d give me a bubble. I need it to be bigger” (287). Protect them and herself is something she could not do at the same time. She convinces herself that her leaving is something necessary to do. Maribeth tells her children not to hate her in her e-mail. It seems she is trying to convince them but in fact she is consoling herself.

Maribeth realises sometimes letting go is better than holding up. Janice explains to Maribeth about her child whom she has abandoned once for the betterment of the child and herself. Janice convinces Maribeth sometimes sacrificing is much more beautiful than all the things. Maribeth asks Janice about her feelings towards her child:

“Do you regret it?” Maribeth asked. “Giving her up?”

“Every single day,” Janice replied. “And yet, I would still do it again.”



... But Janice face was firm, resolute, and peaceful. “It was not a good situation, where I was. Abusive. Keeping her would’ve sentenced both of us to that.” She turned to look out the window. The parking lot was busy, full of holiday shoppers. Any one of them could’ve been Janice’s daughter. Or Maribeth’s mother. “Sometimes leaving someone is the most loving thing you can do. (300-301)

Janice explains everyday she regrets her decision of giving up her child still she would do the same again and again. That was the only option for the good of both Janice herself and her child. Maribeth realises sometimes leaving someone is the most loving thing through the story of Janice Pickering.

Maribeth gets shocked after knowing the real intention of her mother’s abandoning her. Maribeth finds out that her mother never stops loving her instead she has given up on her because she wanted Maribeth to be happy. Maribeth’s story of finding real reason of letting her go by her mother unfolds:

*She won’t be mine. But part of her will. I’ve decided to name her for me and Mary for my mother. Even though she’s going to a new family and won’t ever know her name, it will still be her first name. In that way she’ll belong to me. First and forever. She’ll be Mary Beth.*

“I’m confused. Mary Beth? Is that her? Is that my mother?”

“No, Beth is your mother,” Janice replied. “Mary Beth was what she named you.” (319)

She finds out that her birth mother let her go because she was unwanted. Her birth named Maribeth after her mother Mary and her name Beth. She had named her knowing that Maribeth might never know her first name because new family might change it to some other suitable name.

Maribeth thinks she is in the control of her own destiny. She feels as if no one understands her. She reacts on her impulses. The novel also reveals that this lady often acts on impulses, so her decision not to get back home does not sound rigid, and finally she changes her mind.

At last, Maribeth returns home after knowing the reason behind her biological mother giving her up. Moreover, she realizes that sometimes it is okay to leave something behind rather than holding it for the betterment. Maribeth calls her husband and let him know that she is coming back, which is her surrender to patriarchy. She could not continue her journey for self-identity because wherever she goes patriarchal norms and values are there. The following lines are worthy to quote here:

“Jason, listen. I’m coming home. Elizabeth’s already on her way to pick me up. I’ll be back tonight.”

“Daddy, why are we stopping?” Oscar’s little voice travelled through the line bright and clear. “Who are you talking to?”

And then it was her daughter who she heard. “Mommy?” Liv asked. As if it was the most normal thing in the world for Maribeth to be calling. “Is that Mommy?” (340)

She wants to describe her run with greater purpose, but as an impulsive woman she fails to do so. After knowing the value of family happiness and realizing that being with a loving one makes life better, she returns home. It is a type of her surrender, but unlike her mother and Janice Pickering she never wants to regret her decision of leaving her family behind.

Maribeth finally realizes her responsibility as mother. She realizes she was not escaping from her irresponsible family members instead she was escaping from her responsibility. Maribeth’s decision to leave home became useless after her decision to

return. She had taken a step of revolutionary woman by choosing to stay free and live a happy go lucky life than bounded by family burden and professional burden, but as a product of patriarchy, she could not remain rigid in her decision. She has failed to maintain her desired identity.

Maribeth, who initially sounds as if she is the representative of feminist revolt in the novel has aggressive perspective towards patriarchal domination on women in support to modern working woman's struggles. She strongly rejects their forces and ignores consequences that force them to confine women within boundaries. She faces a lot of challenges while going against those social norms. Because of established social norms and values, her rebellion action cannot defeat those boundaries rather than attempts end in a failure. Her rebellion nature is engulfed by emotions and become helpless and vulnerable. The objectives of her live are shattered due to her sudden realization of responsibility. She fails to gain her identity as a revolutionary feminist.

## Chapter 3

### Failure of Self-identity

Gayle Forman shows the subordinate position of women in 21<sup>st</sup> century America that delimits women's fundamental rights perpetuating different types of male-centric ideologies. Primarily patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development as it has maintained different types of codes and conducts so as to delimit women within the confinement of male gauze.

Meribeth Klein, who has been overburdened by domestic chores and her officiated work. She is with her husband and children. The children are too young to help her, but her husband completely ignores her. His treatment towards her is almost inhumane. She feels alone among many; she feels empty in fulness, as she is not in any physical scarcity except her freedom. She takes all these measures of her confinement the product of patriarchy, and as a bold woman she prepares herself to revolt against the system.

She tries her best to escape from patriarchal confinement in order to get self-identity and freedom. She leaves each and everything that is related to her husband, gets away from home and temporarily enjoys her free, romantic life. She feels relieved while remaining in Petersburg. It is like her dream come true. But she cannot remain rigid in her decision.

Maribeth fails to remain detached from her children and home due to the complex nature of social or her affection towards her children? The American society where she lives is quite modern patriarchal system of US. Male heroism and its domination, oppression and male centric ideology is everywhere which she cannot not defy. Finally, she fails to her mission of forming self-identity and surrenders to what she has been fighting against.

The research has well answered the research questions: Her hectic, overburdened life and her husband's negligence towards her are the major causes that force her to leave home and the family. She takes a radical step of renouncing family and home as a form of her revolt, but the consequences have not turned up in line of her expectation. She runs away but finally changes her mind and comes back to the same situation that annoyed her so much.

The novel depicts the identity crisis of modern day working woman because of the remnants of patriarchal system that imposes stereotyped subjugation upon females, creating hopeless condition for women. It pictures the reality of American society and also the story of relationship in modern developed America. It is based on reason and sensibilities and the exposure of hectic world and its pressure on woman. For modern working women like Maribeth, life is like Sisyfus in terms of household work and professional work. Modern women have to work in office at duty hour and after her office they have to take care of their family members too. Maribeth tries to release herself from the Sisyfus like world. It offers a situation with the conflict between female of this generation and their freedom, society and culture which creatively and critically concede the resistance, power struggle, and raising consciousness against the corrupted nature of society.

The modern working woman, Maribeth Klein, is living with her husband Jason and twins Liv and Oscar. After experiencing her first heart attack, Maribeth tries to figure out difference between her responsibility and individual self. But she cannot extract time for her because of family and professional duties. Thus female protagonists, even if they are free in comparison to women of 80s or before they are still under certain boundaries. To escape from that kind of boundaries Maribeth leaves home and goes totally contactless with family members. Even though her intention

was to remain away from home and family for a life with great freedom, her sentiments haunt her and she finally returns home.

The novel does not only talk about the individual story of Maribeth's characters but of all the women in the World, who are doomed to suffer misfortune, separation, frustration, and failures. It reveals that Forman likes to unveil the realities of the women of this time by arguing contentious and enterprising spirit within the point of gender and representation.

To sum up, the novel successfully expresses the need for a change in the social system to upgrade and uplift feminine instincts. It advocates for feminine potentialities and independence. Forman sends a message that the condition of women has improved and transformed but the improvement is still not enough. Maribeth surrenders to the system despite her firm decision to remain away from home. This is because the remains of patriarchy are still strong enough to counter the feminist movements. Along with this point, Forman also shows that modern women have still failed to give female identity even today.

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