

**Female Solidarity in Select Plays of
Marsha Norman**

**Manjula K.V
(12PEN006)**

**Thesis submitted to
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education
for Women, Coimbatore – 641 043**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement

First the researcher would like to thank the Lord Almighty for the abundant blessings showered on her during the study period.

The researcher expresses her reverential gratitude to Dr. T.S.K. Meenakshisundaram, revered Chancellor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for all the good wishes towards the successful completion of the study.

The researcher expresses her heartfelt thanks to Dr. Sheela Ramachandran, Vice – Chancellor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for the help and motivation given during the time of study.

The researcher records her sincere thanks to Dr. Gowri Ramakrishnan, Registrar, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for extending all support for the completion of the study.

The researcher owes her profound sense of gratitude and sincere thanks to Dr. (Tmt). Saroja Prabhakaran, Director, Hall of Residence, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for

Women, Coimbatore, for extending all help towards the smooth conduct of the study.

The researcher offers her gratitude and sincere thanks to Dr. (Mrs.) B. Neelavathy, Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for her support and encouragement.

The researcher specially acknowledges her deep sense of gratitude to Dr. (Mrs.) Kalamani, Associate Professor and Head (i/c), Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for her guidance and support during the period of study.

The researcher specially acknowledges her sincere dedication to her guide Dr. (Mrs.) Raichel M. Sylus, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for her care and suggestions towards the successful execution of this study.

The researcher wishes to thank the Librarians of Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore;

SCILET, Madurai and The American Library (eLibrary), Chennai, for their great support.

The researcher thanks her beloved parents whole heartedly for their continuous encouragement and support in carrying out this modest work.

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Chapter - 1

Introduction

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you....

*I write woman: woman must write woman.... Now
women return from afar, from always: from without,
from the heath where witches are kept alive; from
below, from beyond culture.*

(qtd. in Chandra Nisha Singh 16)

American drama which began in the American colonies in the 17th century has continued to the present. Most American plays of the 18th and 19th centuries strongly reflected the influence of the British. Although the British repertory was dominating the American stage for a long time, American drama began to diverge from British drama through Andrew Jackson from 1828 to 1836. The earlier American drama was copied mostly from British drama but the subject matter came to be based specifically on American incidents and themes. For this reason some critics said that American drama was not born until the end of I World War (1914 – 1918).

By the end of the 19th century American drama was moving steadily towards realism, illuminating the rough or seamy side of life and creating more believable characters. Realism was the dominant trend in the 20th century in both comedies and tragedies. American drama achieved international recognition with psychological realism as in the plays of Eugene O'Neill and the extreme investigation of the characters' inner lives. As the century advanced, the number of topics considered suitable for drama broadened to encompass race, gender, sexuality and death.

The first American play written by a woman to reach the professional stage was in the 1700s. The melodramatic comedy *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) by Susanna Rawson reflects the troubles faced during those times with pirates along North Africa's Barbary Coast who interfered with shipping and ran a white slave trade that involved selling girls and women into prostitution. The conflict and resolution in this play indicated a move towards melodrama although the villain was treated comically. Melodrama had become extremely popular in the 19th century. A melodrama with its outpouring of emotion was the prevalent dramatic form in the 19th century.

Dunlap was an important figure in the drama of the eighteenth century. He is considered to be the father of American drama and the first prolific writer of melodramas. Dunlap has translated many German plays for production in the United States. He adopted Revolutionary war history in *Andre* (1798), a story of the final days of British spy Major John Andre. In 1803 he reshaped the play as a musical named *Glory of Columbia* which describes George Washington elevated to divine status. He took spectacle as a backdrop in *A Trip to Niagara* (1828) by making the play duplicate scenic wonders that the audience would recognize, such as the Niagara Falls.

Mordecai Noah's play *She Would Be a Soldier* (1819) which depicts the military spectacle of the war of 1812 between the United States and Britain, features a heroine who disguises herself as a soldier to help the American cause and join the man she loves. Many American plays explored the themes of isolation, bigotry and intolerance in the 18th century. The first professionally produced play Barker's *The Indian Princess* (1808) explores Native American characters and themes. It is the story of Pocahontas, a Native American who married an English colonist.

In the 19th century American drama followed European models but its subject matter came to be based on specific American situations. The most notable playwrights were Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, Swede August Strindberg and Russian Anton Chekhov. Henrik Ibsen's subjects such as guilt, sexuality and mental illness were never before been as realistically and disturbingly portrayed on stage as was done during that time. The playwrights Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg shifted the subject matter of drama from wildly theatrical displays of external action to inner action and emotion and concerns of everyday life. They presented characters and situations more or less realistically, in what has been called the "Slice-of-life" dramatic technique.

During the 20th century some most important plays were introduced in the American theater. American drama that was achieved between the Wars was cemented post World War II with the works of O'Neill and his generation being joined by towering figures like Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as well as by the maturation of the musical theatre form.

Eugene O'Neill is considered the first important figure in American drama. His first full length play is *Beyond the Horizon* and he is still regarded as the most important playwright in the United States. "Playwrights are either intuitively keen analytical psychologists – or they aren't good playwrights" (Rineheart 817). According to Eugene O'Neill, a playwright should have enough talent to write a play and should be a keen observer otherwise he is not a good playwright.

Eugene O'Neill's experimental flair, enormous output and high aspirations for theatre dominated American drama in his generation. His plays were *The Great God Brown* (1926), *Without End* (1934) and *Strange Interlude* (1928) that explore high

thoughts and feelings through his characters. *The Hairy Ape* (1922) was one of the first plays to introduce expressionism in America. His plays were widely produced abroad and he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936.

Tennessee Williams was also a notable playwright in American drama.

“Williams was the playwright of our soul” (Rineheart 766). His best known work *The Glass Menagerie* holds a high place in American drama. The play opened on Broadway in the spring of 1945. Mississippi-born Tennessee Williams was practically unknown and almost overnight he became an international success. He introduced many colourful women characters in his plays like Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Alma in *Summer and Smoke* (1948) and Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). He explored women’s identity, role of women in family and society and focussed mainly on women’s issues. Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) which won Pulitzer Prize for drama focused on the destruction caused in an unhappy family.

Arthur Miller is also one among the prominent playwrights in American drama. His most notable work was *Death of a Salesman* (1949) a tale of life and death of the ordinary workingman Willy Loman. Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) a story about 17th century Salem witch trials, was a parable for a hunt for communists in the 1950s led by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. Renowned American playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller reached profound new levels of psychological realism, commenting through individual characters and their situations on the American stage in general. As the century progressed, the most powerful plays dealt with issues such as Civil Rights, AIDS, cancer, colour conflicts and an individual’s position in relation to those issues.

In the 1950s the most notable playwrights were William Inge, Arthur Laurents and Paddy Chayefsky who gave more attention to musical theatre. In the musical theatre important figures include Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, Frank Loesser, Jule Styne, Jerry Bock, Meredith Wilson and Stephen Sondheim. In the 1960s, many plays were produced in the theatre. The most essential playwrights were Jack Richardson, Arthur Kopit, Jack Gilber and Edward Albee who introduced avant grade movement. These playwrights were ready to produce their plays through the vitality of their dramatic texts.

One of the best plays by Edward Albee the absurd dramatist was *Fam and Yam* in the 1960s. It was the arrival of the 20th century drama. His plays reflect the spirit of dramatic power and range. The 1960s mark the power of theatrical styles with views on life and art. Albee could produce many popular plays in Broadway theatre. Largely playwrights remain the celebrities of smaller Off Broadway and Off-Off Broadway theatres. Albee's plays are very limited to expose philosophical ideas like life and death, art and duty, joy and sorrow. Richardson was another famous playwright during the 1960s. His plays were *The Prodigal* (1960) a Shavian play and an absurd comedy *Gallows Humor* (1961). His characters are simpler than individuals but lacked the dramatic power which lost effectiveness in his plays.

The decade's new concept of sex in drama was adopted by Murry Schisgal, an absurd dramatist. He handled sex as an instrument to fight alienation, a predominant feature of modern society. His characters mostly asserted love, friendship and their emptiness than with their honest appearance. The dialogues in his plays are repetitive, harmonious and boring, but he lacks any genuine experience, condition and characterization.

After the later part of nineteen sixties, drama moved to Wilson and Ribman's dramatic realism. There are many plays presented with the image of exploring American culture in patterns, values and responses to them. Israel Horowitz was another playwright in the late 1960s. His plays were *It is Called Sugar Plum* (1967), *The Indian Wants the Bronx* (1966), *Rats* (1968) and *Line* produced between 1966 and 1968 and published under the title *First Season* in 1968, which announced him as a significant playwright of the late sixties.

The plays of the new playwrights during the sixties involved patterns of cultural opposition. From Richardson, Kopit and Schisgal to Tom Eyen and Jules Feiffer, they focussed mainly on comic horror in the process of cultural division facing the country. They were highly satirical and disapproved of absurdity and motivated to seek out problems of cultural disintegration. They presented the horrifying comedy of human experience in American culture and society. The sensation and effective presentation of human comedy in a set of dramatic and theatrical statement was the success of artistic innovation and adventure. It has led to a positive spirit of renaissance in the American drama.

August Wilson was another important American playwright who came to prominence in the 1980s. His plays were *Fences* (1985) which portrayed the conflicts between a father and son and *The Piano Lesson* (1987) which focussed on the dispute between a brother and sister over selling a family heirloom to buy the land in which their ancestors worked as slaves. Both plays won the Pulitzer Prize award. Many of the major playwrights of the mid century continued to produce new plays, but they were joined by playwrights like Sam Shepard, Neil Simon, Romulus Lenny, David Rabe, Landford Wilson, David Mamet and John Guare.

American drama not only gained greatest achievements by male dramatists but also included the immensely popular female dramatists. American women's literature gained widespread prominence by the end of the nineteenth century. In the previous era, women's writing was related primarily to writing for children and poetry. These works were characterized by sentimentality, morality and depth of feeling and were considered works of feminine genres. Slowly women started to write plays in order to get their identity strengthened in a male dominant society.

Feminism was the theme for twentieth century American women's drama. Feminism began in the mid-nineteenth century with the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. The primary struggle focussed on equal legal rights for women, particularly the right to vote. Feminist drama covered violence at home like wife battering, child abuse, marital rape to sexual harassment in the workplace, women's search for identity, secret world of women, particularly equal rights in society and male dominance. Feminist movement steadily grew in the twentieth century. During the world wars, feminist playwrights demanded votes for women and their contribution after the war led to the demand for a new image of women. Women have now become conscious of the patriarchal power structure in society and culture.

'Feminism' means women's complete equality with men in all spheres of life. Feminist movement has achieved all the equal rights for women. In other words it aims at providing women with full freedom in all aspects – sexual, professional, personal, educational, political, cultural and religious life. Till the eighteenth century, Western women had neither time nor opportunity to write or to publish what they wrote, because their financial status entirely depended on men. During the late eighteenth century women had the power to produce their plays in the theatre without

depending on men. In this period women's plays focussed on women's issues and their developments.

Deborah Kolb has observed the rise and fall of the professional feminist movement in the early twentieth century and the "rise and fall of the New Woman in drama" (Sequeira, Skidmore 373). This characterization often attributes to the influence of Henrik Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House* developed by American dramatists of both sexes who were inspired by the impact of the early women's movement. Feminism as theme should not be understood simply as a call for women's rights on the part of the playwright or her characters. It may be a statement about feminine consciousness, the feelings and perceptions associated with a female character's identity as a woman.

Women playwrights explore the condition of women as a social and psychological phenomenon at the base of a movement for social change. Various aspects of female experiences such as domestic violence, rape, pregnancy, abortion, motherhood, being single, bonding between women, mother-daughter relationship, forming sisterhood and lesbianism are highlighted in feminist drama.

Modern American feminism began with the publication of *Thinking about Women* by Mary Ellman in 1968 and it was followed by Kate Millett's hard-hitting, influential work *Sexual Politics* (1969) which exposed Freud's male prejudices and some novelists degrading presentation of women as objects. Her attack was critical of the social system giving men power to continue with their unjust domination over women and the latter's miserable subjugation.

This new feminist movement was vigorous, diffuse and highly controversial. In order to understand its origins and goals, its opponents and most important, it's

potential for a changing society, it is necessary to examine the long-term economic and social changes that created an environment within which the movement could emerge. It is important also to appreciate the excitement of the 1960s that provided feminism with its ideological core, vitality and impetus. It explores the sense in which contemporary feminists confronted issues earlier but had left unresolved.

From 1775 to 1850, the prominent works were *The Group* (1775) by Mercy Otis Warren, *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) by Susanna Haswell Rowson, *The Traveller Returned* (1796) by Judith Sargent Murray, *The Female Enthusiast* (1807) by Sarah Pogson, *The Fair American* (1815) by Mary Carr Clarke, *Alforf* (1819) by Frances Wright, *Ernest Maltravers* (1838) by Louisa Medina and *The Forest Princess* (1844) by Charlotte Barnes Conner. They gave importance to women's dramatic writing during that period.

Rachel Crothers was generally recognized as the most successful and prolific woman dramatist in the first half of the twentieth century. Her plays often dealt with feminist themes and contemporary social themes. One of her most famous plays was *Susan and God* (1937) which was made into a film by MGM in 1940 and the main characters were Joan Crawford and Fredric March. Her plays seem to challenge what twentieth century woman had to confront and portrayed her female characters as being bold and original. Her plays dealt with women's role in the family and society and focussed on women's difficulty, their thoughts and feelings.

Crothers wrote over thirty one-act and full-length plays that reflected on the changes in the American society. *He and She* (1920) concentrated on feminist issues and was performed in Broadway in 1920. Her other plays were *The Three of US* (1906) which explored the concept of female identity and societal pressures on

women; *A Man's World* (1910) the story of a woman writer who publishes under a man's name under the hope of greater acceptance and *Young Wisdom* (1914) a satire of the New Woman and the idea of trial marriages. These plays explored women's advancement and their stand in the society.

Her most popular play *Susan and God* (1937) gained the greatest commercial success in the theatre. It tells the story of a wealthy, spoiled and restless woman who finds meaning for her aimless life in an evangelical movement. She plans to leave her alcoholic husband and daughter to assume a public role as an evangelist. At the end of the play Susan changes her mind in order to help her husband's stable life in the society.

Zona Gale, an American playwright of the twentieth century American drama, became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1921. Her Pulitzer Prize winning play *Miss Lulu Bett* tells the story of a spinster who found it difficult to survive in her family under the domination of the male set up. Her other plays were *The Neighbours* (1914), *Uncle Jimmy* (1922) and *Mr. Pitt* (1925).

Susan Keating Glaspell (1876–1948) was an American Pulitzer Prize Award winning playwright, actress, director, novelist and journalist. She was the founder of Provincetown Players, the first modern American theater company. Her plays were *Bernice* (1919) and *Trifles* (1916) which describe a woman's frustration in her heart and set in the kitchen of a desolate prairie farmhouse after the arrest of a woman suspected of murdering her husband. Glaspell's *Alison's House* won the Pulitzer Prize in drama in 1931. Susan Glaspell portrays the various aspects of feminine consciousness and some specific female experiences. Glaspell explored forms such as

realism and expressionism, which were conducive to portray the psychology of women.

Many of the important women playwrights like Beth Henley, Marsha Norman, Wendy Wasserstein, Megan Terry and Maria Irene belong to the twentieth century. They were adventurous women playwrights who wrote primarily about women of their generations. During the 1970s feminist theatre gave a chance for women to air grievances, explore possibilities and advocate changes through the medium of theatre. According to Megan Terry, feminist drama is “anything that gives women confidence, shows themselves to themselves, helps them to begin to analyse whether it’s a positive or negative image, it’s nourishing” (Bhongle 100).

1980s was a period of achievement and success for women playwrights. Women playwrights brought a new vision to the theatre, traditionally dominated by men. Beth Henley was one among the playwrights in this period and the first woman to win the award in twenty three years. Her plays focussed on women and feminine psyche. She received great attention from the audience for *The Miss Fire Cracker’s Contest*, *The Wake of James Foster* and the Pulitzer Prize for her full-length play *Crimes of Heart*.

Maria Irene Fornes was a playwright and director associated with the establishment of the Off- Off- Broadway movement. Fornes’ plays *Fefu and her Friends* (1977) and *The Conduct of Life* (1985) present experiments such as shift of the audience from one room to another instead of changing stage scenery.

Wendy Wasserstein was one among the remarkable playwrights in the twentieth century. He wrote *When Dinah Shore Ruled the Earth* (1975) a parody of beauty contest and *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988), about a successful woman professor

who adopts a baby due to loneliness. Wendy Wasserstein continued exploring women's aspirations in *The Sisters Rosenweig* (1991), *An American Daughter* (1997), *Uncommon Women* and *Others and Old Money* (2000). Emily Mann's play *Still Life* illustrates home effects of the Vietnam War.

She was the first woman to produce her own play in Broadway in the twentieth century. Not all early women's plays provided positive women's images or critics of the golden cage of domestic life. Clare Booth's *The Women* (1936) is exceptional in its spiteful portrayal of women characters. Booth's capacity to identify the types of cages women willingly enter and the types of terror they inflict on other women parallels other women's drama.

Like Caryl Churchill and Maria Irene Fornes, Marsha Norman is one among the most outstanding of the many women who have energized contemporary theatre with plays that embody and explore female experience. Marsha Norman was born in Louisville, Kentucky, the first of four children of Billie and Bertha Williams. Her parents were fundamentalists and Norman kept away from other children. She felt isolated in her childhood so she turned to books and music. At Durrett High School in Louisville she was active on the newspaper and yearbooks and won the first prize in a writing contest.

After graduating from high school, she attended Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, a liberal arts college for women, where she majored in Philosophy and received her B.A in 1965. She returned to Louisville after her graduation and married one of her former English teachers. Two years later in 1971 she received a master's degree from the University of Louisville and then went to work at the Kentucky Central State Hospital as a teacher of disturbed adolescents. Norman's work

at the hospital school did not immediately lead her into playwriting. From 1973 to 1976 she worked at a school for gifted children teaching filmmaking and developing a curriculum in arts and humanities.

During this period evidently influenced by her creatively talented students, she began to try her own hand at writing - not only pieces for the local newspaper but also children's musical and scripts for a children's television programme. During this period she met Jon Jory, artistic director of the Actors Theater of Louisville, one of several regional American theaters that has been particularly influential in the development of new plays and playwright.

She went to Jory seeking his advice about an arts programme since she was developing to stimulate the interest of people in performing arts. During this time, he encouraged her to think about writing a play herself, a docu-drama about local issues in Louisville. Meanwhile, she thought of writing a play about "a painful subject" - a suggestion which led her to think about the violent thirteen year old girl who had terrified her several years earlier at the hospital school.

Stimulated by that memory, Norman decided to write a play that would in some way incorporate a convulsively disturbed and disturbing young adolescent woman. Her first play *Getting Out* (1979), portrays two sides of a woman who has just been released from prison and is trying to make a new life for herself. In order to dramatize two sides of a single person, Norman created two distinctly different but clearly interrelated characters: Arlene Holsclaw, the protagonist who served eight years in prison for robbery, kidnapping and manslaughter, and Arlie, an embodiment of her younger, vicious self, who suddenly appears at moments when Arlene is cruelly reminded of her past.

In the complex psychic drama of Arlene/Arlie, Norman not only drew on her memory of the vicious adolescent days she had encountered in the hospital school, but also on extensive interviews with fifteen women prisoners who told her at length “exactly what it was like to be in prison and exactly what it was like to be out” (Lyman 1210). She also gave her own personal experiences of feeling emotionally imprisoned, as she made clear in her forth right acknowledgment “that person locked up was me” and that “the writing of *Getting Out* for me was my own opening of the door”(Lyman 1210).

She completed a highly successful pair of one-acts, *The Laundromat* which talks of an encounter between a widow and a woman involved in a failed marriage. *The Poll Hall* portrays the owner of the hall in conversation with the son of a notorious pool shark. Her unsuccessful play *Circus Valentine* (1979) portrays the attempts of a woman aerialist to save a failing family circus. Norman continued to focus on the painful experience of “folk you wouldn’t even notice in life” (Lyman 1210)

Her major successful play *‘night, Mother* which received the Pulitzer Price Award, was first staged in 1983 at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge before its Broadway opening in March 1983. *‘night, Mother* depicts the spare and relentlessly worked-out study of a woman’s decision to commit suicide.

Marsha Norman creates a challengingly different kind of protagonist from Arlene of *Getting Out* to Jessie Cates of *‘night, Mother*, who was emotionally imprisoned. In contrast to Arlene, she was vocally and actively concerned with regaining a significant measure of self-control in her life, so much so that she could not tolerate her past happenings in her life. Jessie Cates’s clear-cut and reiterated

announcement of her intention to commit suicide to her mother was because she wanted to escape from her loneliness and bitter life. Both the plays *Getting Out* (1977) and *'night, Mother* (1983), focus on the psychic crises of women whose lives have been vexed by complex disturbing and thwarting personal relationships, particularly their relationship with their mothers. In these works Norman expresses her commitment “to a full rich and self-controlled life for the women on this planet” (Lyman 1207).

Her concern with self-control in women is evidently rooted at least in part in her childhood experience of growing up in a highly strict home, where her mother did not allow her to watch television or permit her to play with the neighbourhood children because they were not “good enough” (Lyman 1207) and did not let her “say anything that was in the least angry or that had any conflict in it at all” (Lyman 1207)

Later she dedicated her life wholly to plays in Broadway theatre. Norman is one of the successful practitioners of playwriting in contemporary American theatre. Her recognition as a playwright in 1977 came after receiving the American Theatre Circuits Association Award and later in 1983, the Pulitzer Prize for *'night, Mother*. *'night, Mother* has been translated into 23 languages. The play also received the Hull-Warriner Award and the Saran Smith Blackburn award.

Marsha Norman is a member of the Council of the Dramatist's Guild and the Board of the American Theatre Wing. She has written seven full length plays, five one act plays and one novel *The Fortune Teller*. Four of her plays examine women's struggle for identity, exploring the secret worlds of women and feminist issues. Norman has used realism and humanism to communicate her feminist vision of life.

Norman's musicals *The Secrets Garden* earned the Antoinette Perry Award and Drama Desk Award for the best book of a musical in 1991. *In Merry Christmas* (1979) deals with a family which copes up with the mother's sudden deafness when she is released from the hospital for Christmas. *The Holdup* (1987) is based on tales told to Norman by her grandmother. It is about an individual who comes out from all different situations by using various ways. It also examines the importance of time in one's life.

Traveler in the Dark (1988) presents a picture of a loving and supportive mother. The play is about women who inspite of adverse circumstances, fight all alone with the outside world. *The Secret Garden* (1991) based on a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, tells the story of Mary, an orphan, who comes to live with her uncle. *Trudy Blues* (1995), Norman's semi-autobiographical creation is about Ginger, a writer experiencing health crisis. The play seems to question whether time or death is the solution to the dilemma of life. *Sarah and Abraham* (1998) depicts the eternal condition of women overshadowed by their men, losing their lights and identities in marriage, whether materialism destroys marriage or it is an important ingredient in marriage

Marsha Norman's plays and characters are not just characters in her plays performed on Broadway, but live human beings, and their pain and sufferings are those of real people. She has focussed on various day to day issues which have a deep impact on human psyche. Particularly, her plays focus on feminine psyche. One can see the curiosity of the audience to know what happens in the end of her plays.

Marsha Norman's *Getting Out* and Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in This House* both rely on the formal structures of realism to depict a female character's

entrapment in material conditions. Both plays portray women's condition of being located into limited social roles and powerfully explore the consequences of personal and social confinement.

The main themes of her plays are communication, mother-daughter relationship, suicide and immorality, complex family structure, resolution, humour, sentimentality, female identity, longing for love and meaning of life. These themes are reflected predominantly in her plays through her characters. Marsha Norman has portrayed women as victims symbolizing the universal human condition of suffering and pain. Thus Norman is a leading voice in the American theatre today.

The first chapter gives a broad outline on American drama, American women playwrights and their works. Most of the women playwrights have given importance to women's autonomy and their identity. Through their works one can understand women's deep feelings too. The contemporary women writers in American drama have also concentrated on similar issues like those of Norman.

The second chapter "Establishing the Individual Self – *'night, Mother'*" is about Jessie getting freedom and identity through the ultimate act of suicide. Marsha Norman has moulded the play through the protagonist's action. The play provokes Jessie's introspection to freedom in *'night, Mother'* and makes the audience introspect on the same.

The third chapter is titled "Unification with the Family - *Traveler in the Dark.*" Glory's enormous courage to get identity and freedom in the male dominated world is highlighted in this chapter. It deals with women's power of politeness and their concern about their families. Through this one can understand women's potential

to get their autonomy and identity in the patriarchal society and Glory has been able to be one with the family.

The fourth chapter is titled “Into the Cohesive Community – *Getting Out.*” It has focussed on a woman’s deep feelings on getting freedom and identity in the male dominated world. The protagonist of the play is Arlene who struggles to get freedom in the world and focusses on Arlene’s first day of freedom after she is released from the prison. She tries to gain not only identity but also freedom for her ‘self.’

A woman’s self-exploration leads her to the discovery that she is the product of a culture in the making where she holds a predominant role. Her true identity engulfs her and she is pushed to the margins of her existence. To be part of this existence and yet reveal her identity, it is imperative that she recalls her experiences as a woman and cull out the dominant trait in her to acquire freedom and establish her identity. Thereby she maintains solidarity within herself, in the family and in the community. The characters in Marsha Norman’s works are true to these ideals of women.

Chapter - 2

“Establishing the Individual Self - *'night, Mother'*”

In this life it is not difficult to die. It is

More difficult to live.

Vladimir Mayakovski (qtd. in Mehta 1)

Vladimir Mayakovsky, poet of the Russian Revolution writes these lines condemning the suicide of Sergei Esenin, the last poet of what he calls “Wooden Russia” (Mehta 36). He felt completely isolated from the Bolsheviks and on December 27, 1925 Esenin slit his wrists, wrote his last lines of poetry in his own blood and then hanged himself. Similarly one of the outstanding women dramatists, Marsha Norman talks of Jessie in *'night, Mother*. Like Esenin who was completely alienated from her life, Jessie commits suicide. *'night, Mother* has tempted the audience to analyse why one commits suicide.

Many people think that most of the problems can be solved by suicide. For example Dido, the founder and queen of Carthage killed herself because of unrequited love; Zeno, founder of Stoic philosophy, hanged himself at the age of 98 suffering from minor injury. Attitudes toward suicide vary greatly from one society to another. For example, the early Greeks have considered suicide a perfect solution to many stressful situations such as dishonour, isolated situations in life, disappointment in love and painful conditions during old age. The Romans have also considered suicide as an acceptable solution in some situations. On the other hand, suicide has been condemned by Judaism, Mohammedanism and Christianity as a grievous sin.

One of Marsha Norman's beautiful and realistic plays is '*night, Mother*'. The play was first produced in 1981 and it was the fifth play of Marsha Norman, premiered in San Francisco in 1982 at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, under the direction of Tom Moore. The play received favourable reviews when it was first produced on the stage in 1983. It won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1983. It was a great success in Broadway. The play raised the national expectations for a new woman's voice in the American Theatre. Many critics have praised the play for its emotional honesty and realistic dialogue and much of the praise focussed on a family specifically on the crisis between a mother and a daughter.

The play is on loneliness and emptiness of the lives of two women in the society. It is about the emotional reactions of a mother and her daughter, from the time her daughter announces her imminent suicide till she commits the act ninety minutes later. The play received the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award nomination for the best play; the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Award and the Elizabeth Hull-Kate Warriner Award. The play deals with female identity and feminine autonomy focussing on the mother and daughter relationship.

Most of the female viewers found the play intensely disturbing, realistic and utterly fascinating. There were few men who attended and fewer spoke about the play; some of them had left the performance early. It appeared that for most of them the play seemed too limited in focus, but the play has captured their interest completely. Subsequent reviews revealed a similar disparity of reaction, although not entirely along the lines of gender. Spencer comments that:

John Simon and Frank Rich applauded Norman's ability to weave a shattering existential experience out of the most homely of materials. But Stanley Kauffman and Richard Gilman envied the "rapture" of others, finding Norman's play blatantly contrived on the hand and utterly boring on the other. Gilman, in particular, captures the predominant male attitude I witnessed with this comment: "When the shot sounded, I wasn't startled, dismayed, or much moved; it was all 'sort of', sad 'sort of' lugubrious. (364)

Appropriately the success of *'night, Mother* rests on the special power of the play in performance. The play does work on a number of levels – the naturalistic illusion and the unmediated experience which is open to multiple interpretations. Spencer suggests that the way the male and female audience read, comprehend and respond to the play is fundamentally different. The universal themes of death and desire, of human dignity and human pain, of hope and existential despair are approachable to all; these seem but "secondary elaborations" (Spencer 365) of the primary drama that women may emotionally experience in Norman's play.

'night, Mother provides an interesting study of both the self-consciously addressed female audience and subconsciously worked upon female psyche in powerful ways. Truly, since the play foregrounds issues of female identity, feminine autonomy, the mother – daughter relationship and also controls the narrative movement, the relatively separate position to male viewers simply cannot be taken up by women.

'night, Mother is not the first play to address women and the issues related to them. Norman's *Getting Out* has also focussed on the identity crisis and autonomy of women. All her plays touched upon female autonomy in the patriarchal society and found hope in connections among women. Norman maintains an illusion of reality for the audience. The play runs for ninety minutes without any interruption on a single set. The actual running time noted by an on – stage clock is visible to the audience. Setting is the most important role in *'night, Mother*. Marsha Norman naturalistically maintains the entire setting throughout the play.

The setting in the play is “unlocalised and encompasses both realistic details and surrealistic implications” (Gomez 67). The play does not represent any particular region through accent or stage properties. The setting of the stage ensures the involvement of the audience and identification. “What I want to present is the theatrical equivalent of once upon a time... which lifts you up off the stage and sends you back into yourself for the reference points” says Norman (Gomez 67).

The subject of the play is suicide, love and meaning of life. The play describes the inner world of women who suffer from frustration and distress in their personal life. Marsha Norman presents a modern American woman's mental world through the dialogue between Jessie and her mother. The prominent themes of the play are communication, mother-daughter relationship, sufferings, suicide, family and complex identity. She is of the view that women have authority to take decisions in their life. Through this she feels women will get identity in the world like Jessie in *'night, Mother*.

The plot is straightforward and follows the classical Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. Jessie Cates announces her decision to commit suicide to her mother at the beginning of the play. She shoots herself behind her bedroom door at the end, an hour and a half later. The clocks are visible on the stage in the kitchen and on a table in the living room, hence the audience can find the stage time and real time and extend from 8.15 p.m. to 9.45 p.m. Jessie is very much aware of the passing time, moment by moment till she commits suicide.

The play takes place in a new house built on a country road, with a living room, connected kitchen and a center hall that leads off to the bedrooms. One of the bedrooms opens directly into the hall, and its entry is visible to everyone in the audience. The most important place in the play is the bedroom and the door is the point of all the actions. The living room is cluttered with magazines and needlework catalogues, ashtrays and candy dishes. Marsha Norman has followed unity of action strictly in '*night, Mother*'. The action shows Jessie's past, her present life and future that helps her prepare to commit the act. Marsha Norman is aware of time, place and action in '*night, Mother*'.

The play is structured in such a way that it moves from the present to the past and back again to the present, in each thrust probing the minds of the character. It is just a two character play, but the dramatic conflict is as clearly visible and sensitive as in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* and Ronald Ribman's *Cold Storage*. The play *The Zoo Story* explores the themes of isolation, loneliness and miscommunication; these are all perfectly portrayed by the two characters Peter and Jerry.

Jessie's action is revealed through her planning and concern for her mother's comfortable existence. When the play begins Jessie is seen collecting old towels and black plastic garbage bags to spread on the cot and floor in the bedroom while committing suicide. Then she very quietly outlines her suicide plan to her mother and prepares her mother to accept life without her.

Thelma Cates has been described as being in her late fifties or early sixties. She enjoys talking and likes the company of people. Most of her words and actions are reactions to Jessie's announcement of her suicide. She has worked out various approaches to prevent or delay Jessie's decision on suicide. She has used many tools to change Jessie's mind. Cesare Pavese in *This Business of Living* asserts that:

Death will necessarily come, from ordinary cause. It is inevitable, and one's whole life is a preparation for it, an event as the fall of raindrops. I cannot resign myself to that thought. Why not seek death of one's own free will, asserting one's right to choose, giving it some significance? Instead of passively letting it happen? Why not? (Goel 137)

In *'night, Mother*, Jessie Cates asserts her freedom of choice and makes an existential declaration, "I'm going to kill myself" (1501). The play first reveals the dark world of Jessie's life and later the way she rises from the dark world and how she enters into the new world. The dramatic conflict in the play is between two views of life and two attitudes towards existence as exemplified by Mama and Jessie. In this regard, Christine Gomez states that, "The predominant theme of the play is the juxtaposition of

two attitudes to existence” (Gomez 67). Thelma Cates and Jessie struggle to achieve autonomy to assert their identity.

The audience discovers the reason for Jessie’s suicide through Jessie’s explanation to Mama for committing the act. Jessie has suffered a series of personal loss: her father is dead, her husband has left her, and her son, a petty criminal and drug addict is permanently elsewhere. Even her dog, King has been run over by a tractor. She is not only depressed but also betrayed and abandoned. At first she says: “I’m tired. I’m hurt. I’m sad. I feel used” (1507). Although presently in good health, Jessie’s epilepsy has resulted in a lack of social experience and an increasing detachment from communal ties. Her only acquaintances are the medical personnel. She can’t get a job properly or keep the one she has had and she unnerves her mother’s best friend Agnes, that she no longer visits her.

Physical and psychological loss is one of the themes spread throughout the play. If an individual is psychologically affected then he cannot live long. Jessie was physically and psychologically affected by her father’s extreme love, her husband’s extreme hatred and by her son. She thinks about them throughout her life and this leads to mental depression. Loneliness is the main reason for Jessie to commit suicide. People think that suicide is the only solution for loneliness and other problems. It is not possible for any individual to lead a lonely life. Jessie has been abandoned by the close relationships she has had earlier.

The utter sense of loss for Thelma who is forced to watch her child Jessie accomplish this act leads in methodically preparing for her own suicide. Thelma knows

very well but she cannot do anything to prevent her from killing herself. The extreme seriousness of this hopeless situation comes forth in a scene when Thelma exclaims to her daughter, that she has already gone and that Thelma cannot do anything further. From this point Thelma realizes that there is nothing else she can try to prolong her daughter's life or prevent her from killing herself and that the inevitable will happen. Thelma is psychologically affected towards the end of the play.

The emotional life of an individual like Jessie is dominated by a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and overpowering loneliness – feelings she expresses less than halfway through the play when she responds to Mama's growing hysteria through the following lines:

I can't do anything either, about my life, to change it, make it better, make me feel better about it. Like it better, make it work. But I can stop it. Shut it down, turn it off like the radio when there's nothing on I want to listen to. It's all I really have that belongs to me and I'm going to say what happens to it. And it's going to stop. And I'm going to stop it. So. Let's just have a good time. (1510)

The dialogue clearly indicates first, the connection between Jessie's decision and her desire to establish some personal authority i.e., an autonomous sense of self and second, the impossible, self-contradictory nature of that project.

The relationship between a mother and a daughter is one of the main themes examined thoroughly in plays by women. Some of those plays are Rose Leiman's *Goldenberg's Letters Home*, Honor Moore's *Mourning Pictures*, Ursula Molinaru's

Breakfast Past Noon and also Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother*. In *'night, Mother* such a relationship slightly differs from *Getting Out*. In *Getting Out* the mother doesn't have any concern towards her daughter but it is on the contrary in *'night, Mother*.

According to Marsha Norman, the mother-daughter relationship is "One of the world's great mysteries, it has confused and confounded men and women for centuries and centuries and yet it has not been perceived to have critical impact on either the life of the family or the survival of the family" (Gomez 71). Jessie doesn't share her problems with her mother before taking her decision of committing the act. She informs her decision to her mother and only later, her mother asks for an explanation. Only then does she explain her problems to her mother. Through this one can understand that though they were living together under the same roof they were separated psychologically.

Jessie found a great solution to her problems and through her ultimate solution she thinks she will get autonomy and identity in her life. Her basic problems will be solved by the ultimate act of suicide which will specifically address her need to protect, to fix and to determine her identity. Jessie describes the problem by juxtaposing two moments in her life: the moment she reconstructs herself of an old baby picture, and the present, absent self:

That's what this is about. It's somebody I lost, all right, it's my own self. Who I never was. Or who I tried to be and never got there. Somebody I waited for who never came. And never will. So, see, it doesn't much matter what else happens in the world or in this house, even. I'm what was worth waiting for and I didn't make it. Me ... who might have made a

difference to me... I'm not going to show up, so there no reason to stay, except to keep you company, and that's reason enough because I'm not...very good company. (1525)

Jessie's own analysis gives her less self-conscious moments. For example, Jessie refuses to differentiate between her own identity and her absolute failure of her son.

According to Freud, "suicide represents unconscious hostility directed toward an introjected, ambivalently-viewed love object and as such, is the very symptom of an underdeveloped ego" (Spencer 368). According to Jessie, suicide is deliberate and fully reasoned action. She portrays suicide as private, personal, her own, freely chosen and rational. Suicide secures her identity, establishes her authority and gives meaning to the play. The audience is not bewildered at Jessie committing suicide rather they should wonder why Jessie tells her mother and then commits the act and questions the underlying significance of that action. The play is more about mother and daughter, feminine identity and female autonomy than a play about suicide.

Many important feminist scholarships have been dedicated to the mother and daughter relationship, but Dorothy Dinnerstein describes the psychoanalytic dynamic in a distinct manner. In *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* she explains both the sexes in such a position:

[A woman's] first fight for some personal autonomy, fought against an authority so total that male authority seemed comfortingly limited by comparison, was in a sense fought against herself. It was fought against a parent of her own gender, a parent with whom she is apt to have remained

passively identified, as a baby, longer and more deeply than a boy baby would, and with whom she is apt to have identified herself actively, as a small child, more fully than a little boy could. Separating the sense of oneself from the old sense of continuity with the mother is a problem for every child; but it is ordinarily a much harder problem for a daughter than for a son. (Spencer 369)

In *'night, Mother*, mother-daughter relationship is portrayed as a conflict of love-hate relationship. Jessie and her mother express affection and concern for each other till there are outbursts of hostility and strong displeasure. This paradoxical relationship between mothers and daughters has been explored psychologically. The mother has lovingly taken care of her daughter's self and individuality and allows her to go in order to achieve autonomy. The daughter needs to identify herself with her mother but she has cut herself away to attain a mature adulthood. These give rise to tension, doubt and contradictions within the relationship.

The play is about a woman's search and struggle for autonomy, self-definition and self-actualization. Before Jessie kills herself she gives instructions to her mother. So after Jessie kills herself, Mama follows Jessie's instructions promptly, clutches the chocolate pan in her hand when someone arrives, and goes to the telephone to call Dawson. Finally, Jessie has succeeded in establishing her identity with her mother. She lives in her mother's consciousness and exercises authority over her. Gayle Austin sees Norman's play *'night, Mother* as a drama of the end of the bond by the daughter with her mother. She remarks:

The need for a daughter both to detach her love and yet to identify herself with the mother in order to acquire a 'normal' gendered identity, and the need for a mother to support the child's project of autonomy despite mixed feelings regarding separation, is the drama that Jessie and Mama symbolically enact in the play. (Mehta 41)

Though there are contradictions between their relationships, mother and daughter join together on the night of Jessie's death. This communication is a sacred one and Jessie does not want her mother to share it with others. "It's private. Tonight is private, yours and mine, and I don't want anybody else to have any of it" (1527). Jessie takes care of her mother very much. She has made a list of things to help Mama run the house after Jessie's suicide. For example, she has given instructions to operate the washer, how to order grocery, sweets and milk, where to find extra bulbs, the plumber's helper and other odds and ends. After being busy with these activities Jessie planned to have time with her mother and asked her about her parents' marriage and her epileptic fits. After a short time of sharing, Jessie gives her mother the box of things for her future generations and to various people, including gift-wrapped parcels for Mama.

Mama investigates Jessie's motives for suicide and consoles her. She tries to entertain Jessie with happy stories, threatens her with the fear of death, accuses herself for being pitiful, motivates for her better future, advises her and learns out her frustration from her mind. She tries to change her attitudes and thereby emotionally and physically struggles in order to prevent her from committing suicide. She is guilty of her decision and pleads to her mother and her mother encourages her.

As Spencer points out: “Mama acts out all practical suggestions for the prevention of suicide; she listens, she attempts to provide alternatives she offers transfusions of hope, she plays for time, she tries to involve others, she attempts to reduce the pain and to fill the frustrated needs and she finally tries to block the exit.” (74)

Mama tries to prevent Jessie from committing suicide, “partly out of her affection for Jessie, partly keeping her daughter alive in this world, partly to save herself from guilt feelings and partly out of her own fear of death” (74). Jessie thought that she is used as an object and not as a person in her life. Jessie feels sad and overwhelmed by the meaningless of her existence and also feels that even if she lives for fifty more years she will not move beyond her present condition. Thus she decides to put an end to her meaningless life through suicide. Norman pictures her words in this way:

Mama, I know you used to ride the bus. Riding the bus and it's hot and bumpy and crowded and too noisy and more than anything in the world, you want to get off and the only reason in the world you don't get off is it's still fifty blocks from where you're going? Well, I can get off right now if I want to because even if I ride fifty more years and get off then, it's the same place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel like it, I can off. As soon as I've had enough it's my stop. I've had enough. (1508)

Here, life is compared to an uncomfortable bus journey which is useless only because the destination has not arrived yet. As Jessie has reached the point of meaninglessness in life she wanted to put an end to her life. She has understood that the term ‘death’ will give identity and meaning to her life. Camus understands this and points

out that “dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively the ridiculous character of that habit and the absence of any profound reasons for living.”
(Goel 138)

The play indicates that Jessie’s struggle will separate herself from her mother and at the same time is concerned about her mother. She understands that only her separation from her mother will free her from the guilt and responsibility of her death. At the end of the play her mother accepts Jessie’s decision because she has the right to take decisions in her life. Mama couldn’t bear this or even accept her decision. One of the more painful moments of the play occurs in the following exchange:

Mama: Everything you do has to do with me, Jessie. You can’t do anything, wash your face or cut your finger, without doing it to me. That’s right! You might as well kill me as you, Jessie, it’s the same thing. This has to do with me, Jessie.

Jessie: Then what if it does! What if it has everything to do with you! What if you are all I have and you’re not enough? What if I could take all the rest of it only I didn’t have you here? What if the only way I can get away from you for good is to kill myself? What if it is ? I can still do it!
(1523)

The play is a challenge to explore and understand what exactly lies behind suicide. Marsha Norman herself suggests that the play may be an attempt to teach and everybody to understand suicide. In this regard dramatists observe that: “We all know people who have killed themselves And we are hurt and confused, and we would like to

understand, even if we can't accept what they did. But they didn't give us the opportunity. The play should not be seen as something from my life, but as something from our lives" (Mehta 42).

'night, Mother deeply searches for female identity and female autonomy. Her act of committing suicide is a planned, rational action and a way of declaration and re-definition of her own self and means of establishing her personal authority. The play conveys that a woman has the power to take decisions in her life and she has decided to die courageously. Jessie's act of suicide is not an act of defeat or surrender. Norman, in an interview, said that suicide for Jessie is a "total triumph" (Goel 144). Norman's protagonist Jessie hungers for freedom and autonomy like Arlene in *Getting Out*. Arlene gains freedom by choosing the right way of life. But Jessie gains her freedom and complete identity through her ultimate act.

In *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother*, Norman creates a cast of women characters who have suffered similar restrictions and developed shared responses to oppressive environments, despite divergency in their socioeconomic conditions, their upbringing, their ages and their individual temperaments. In both plays the main character experiences herself as a prisoner, and the action of the play focuses on her efforts to escape the external, as well as internal, bonds that hold her. (Hunter 143)

The language of the play is often marked by unconscious and deliberate irony. There are many examples of proleptic or Sophoclean irony when the play opens. The audience do not understand the full significant meaning of the language in the play. For

example, when the play begins Jessie wants old towels and plastic sheets. Mama begins to investigate and thinks that Jessie is going to dye her hair and make a mess and not allow her to do it. “I said don’t make a mess, your hair is black enough, hon” (1499). Later, she looks at her father’s gun curiously and Mama thinks that it is protection against thieves and criminals. Only Jessie knows that it is protection of the inner self which has diminished and which should be defined and asserted through suicide. It is the protection of her identity which has been lost and is going to be asserted through the self-defining act of suicide. Conscious and deliberate irony is used by Mama in her attempt to overcome the crisis. For example she uses the casual ironic tone to amuse Jessie and shock her out of her suicidal mood in the following exchange:

Jessie: If I’d known you were going to act like this, I wouldn’t have told you.

Mama: How am I supposed to act? Tell you to go ahead? Ok by me, sugar. Might try it myself. What took you so long? (1504)

Even during moments of tension intentional humour takes place as in the following exchange:

Mama: Sad about what?

Jessie: The way things are.

Mama: Not good enough. What things?

Jessie: Oh, Everything from you and me to the Red Chinese

Mama: I think we can leave the Chinese out of this. (1508)

Mama evokes the audience to unexpected laughter in the theatre. Both Mama and Jessie have a sense of humour. The play is an exploration and a journey through life, and the behaviour of human beings who are highly unaffirmed and environmentally provoked by uncontrolled actions. Although philosophers like Benjamin Disraeli remark that “Man is not the creature of circumstances, circumstances are the creature of Men” (Mehta 45), and highly stressed insecure people like Jessie fall a prey to their circumstances. Marsha Norman further explains, “Her approach to the play is to put somebody else in the room, somebody “who has the right to claim (the other person’s) life, who has the right to say “Don’t leave me, Jessie” (Mehta 45).

Norman believes in emotional bonding of a relationship, which gives one a right to claim. Despite all her suggestions, Thelma fails to stop her daughter from committing suicide, which is hardly an emotional bondage between mother and daughter. Whatever the play is, praise or blame, it proves to be a powerful play exploring the psyche of two women, mother and daughter. It is indeed an “exploration of secret worlds, of worlds that have been kept very quiet” (Gomez 76). This exploration is done with sensitivity, compassion, humour and artistic integrity.

Jessie loves her husband very much and that is why she could not do anything wrong towards him. She wants her husband to live happily in the world and so she does not disturb him. She expresses her love towards her husband to Mama in these words: “He loved me, Mama. He just didn’t know how things fall down around me like they do. I think he did the right thing. He gave himself another chance, that’s all. But I did beg him to take me with him. I did tell him I would leave Ricky and you and everything I loved out here if only he would take me with him, but I don’t understood that” (1519).

Jessie is very much depressed and alienated from her husband and her son. She couldn't overpower them because men have the power to do everything. Jessie takes suicide as an act to overpower patriarchy and obtain autonomy and identity. Her father is not like Cecil since he has given more importance to women in the society. Through her father she gets courage and freedom to take decision in her life.

Through the play *'night, Mother* one can easily understand women's potential power to control their life and their ultimate courage to take decisions in their life. An audience can easily perceive the message that women are the greatest power of the nation and women can do everything in the world. Jessie has finally achieved autonomy and identity through her ultimate act. Women may be born without any identity or freedom but they should not die without autonomy and individuality. This is showed expressively in *'night, Mother*.

Chapter - 3

“The Unification in the Family - *Traveler in the Dark*”

*Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure
(elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a
husband must be constantly worshipped as a god
by a faithful wife.*

- (qtd. in Chandra Nisha Singh 49)

A woman adores, worships and gives due honour and respect to her husband. Women have enormous courage and struggle to gain their individuality in the male dominated society. Similarly, *Traveler in the Dark* has portrayed a woman character through the protagonist Glory. The play was first performed at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge in February 1984 under the direction of Tom Moore. A year later, the play was written in a new version and was opened at the Mark Taper in Los Angeles. It was published in Norman's first collection *Four Plays*, in 1988. Marsha Norman gives attention to a modern crisis of faith, a debate between science and religion in *Traveler in the Dark*.

Marsha Norman's *Traveler in the Dark* presents stark truths about an individual's reaction in the face of mystery and powerlessness. It also explores how our sense of loss can change us to an “inhuman” (Mehta 94) monster, willing to destroy those around us in an effort to diffuse or escape the unbearable pain of living in the world. In part, this truth seems to return Norman to one of her earliest attempts at writing, a prizewinning high

school essay, and one of the most determined themes in her work, “Why Do Good Men Suffer?” (Hunter 215). Most important, however, Norman’s greatest achievement in this play is the description of the psychology of the narcissist and Sam’s struggles with his grief and guilt over his dead mother. Generally, in Norman’s plays, women and men have conflicting expectations and understandings; their conversations are characterized by misunderstanding, manipulation or hostility. In *Traveler in the Dark*, Sam and his wife Glory who were at the verge of breaking their relationship, come together towards the end.

Various criticisms about *Traveler in the Dark* reflect a growing appreciation of Norman’s maturity. William Henry suggests that in “debating the issue of science and faith, love and self – knowledge, the rage to grow and the resistance to change, Norman has stretched herself beyond what he sarcastically refers to as cocoa and marshmallows” (Henry 101). Jack Kroll agrees that Norman seems to be “a natural lightning rod” (Kroll 76) for the crisis that continues to attack one’s faith and hope.

As Norman creates more disturbing crisis, a keen sense for the dramatic actions continue to be refined. Marsha Norman confesses to her own crisis of faith, but continues to be driven by the conviction that understanding comes from darkness. Quoting the poet Theodore Roethke, the playwright maintains: “You learn by going where you have to go!” (178). With the honesty we have come to expect from her, she adds, “More and more it seems like a journey with detours” (178).

Traveler in the Dark is frequently ruined with faint praise. Critics said that her play is artificial and that action does not grow directly out of character or situation, but

out of Norman's need to dramatize a philosophical and theological debate. The most frequently cited criticism comes from Jack Kroll, who complains that "the action [in *Traveler*] seems whipped up under the lash of Norman's urgent need to dramatize a crisis of faith" (qtd. in DLB Yearbook 311). Yet the same critics who damned her, offer backhanded praise suggesting that while *Traveler* "is beset by a number of weakness . . . Norman has fashioned an intelligent play" (Kane 268).

Characters are very important in every genre because only through the characters the playwright explores multiple themes to the audience. Thus each and every playwright gives more importance to the characters. There are eight characters in the play, each and every character distinct from one another. They are Stephen who is a pale twelve year old boy, the son of Glory and Sam. He is a good boy who speaks gently and has not watched television much or played with other children. He is alert and always asks questions towards his parents and his grandfather Everett. He is very affectionate towards his mother than his father.

Glory is a lovely woman who takes her responsibilities as a wife and mother quite seriously. She speaks quickly and laughs easily. She is blessed with a rare grace, an elegance of spirit and nobody understands how on earth she has stayed married to Sam for all these years. She is the protagonist and is portrayed as a good woman in the play. Sam is a world famous surgeon. He is the main character in the play because all the performances are around him. He is Glory's husband. He wanted to leave his house with his son Stephen.

Everett is a country preacher and Sam's father. He is a "one-time fire-breathing" (1111) evangelist who now spends his time burying the same people he worked so hard to save. Everett has become old and he is a great favourite with the ladies. He has a wizard's command of the language and a direct, personal relationship to God and the heavenly hosts.

Setting is also an important component in her plays. It is significant because the audience can easily perceive the message quickly through the entire setting. While Norman's previous play takes place in a house and an apartment, *Traveler in the Dark* takes place in an overgrown garden at Sam's boyhood home, whose crumbling wall is held together only by a large stone goose. Sam spent his fondest moments with his mother reading fairy tales, singing songs and discovering "witches fingers, dragon teeth and fallen stars" (1121) in this garden. Evoking memories of Sam's youth, the garden, whose thematic importance becomes increasingly apparent, provides a realistic setting for a long evening of conversation, confrontation and confession.

Norman used a number of techniques in the earlier plays: restricted setting, focus on the moment of crisis, assertion of secrets, bonding of mother and child, portraits of failed relationships, and humour to highlight and mitigate pain. *Traveler in the Dark* is different from the earlier plays in a number of these elements. There are also several independent couples who exist in the play. There are two father-son relationships (Sam and his twelve-year-old son Stephen, and Sam and his preacher father, Everett) and two mother-son relationships (Stephen and Glory, Sam's wife, and Sam and his dead mother).

Family is the next important aspect in the play. One can see the closeness of every relationship and the sacrificial life of the members. So without a family one cannot understand the real bond of relationships. Family is a cluster of people who decided to live together, not only to survive but also to love one another.

Traveler in the Dark is the best example for family relationships. There are many kinds of relationships portrayed in a perfect manner in the play - husband and wife relationship, mother and son relationship and mother and daughter relationship. All the relationships are fully developed through Glory. Even before she could get back her family she had to face many problems through her husband throughout the play.

The play portrays a breakdown of channels of communication between husband and wife, mainly by the inappropriateness of temperament between the two. This phenomenon of dissimilarity in attitudes, resulting in unsatisfactory relationships runs through almost all her plays. Though this kind of theme is as old as the English novels, this can be found in Richardson and Fielding on one hand and D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway and Faulkner on the other. D.H. Lawrence points out, "The greatest relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary" (Lawrence 130).

Marsha Norman has described women's problems in American social life and particularly in the American family. In most of the male dominated families the concept of marriage as a union of two different minds has not been realized. Women's individual identity has not been openly realized in American social life. Their autonomy and identity are completely suppressed by patriarchy. In particular, they could not come out of the

male domination in the family because of the patriarchal power that exists in the family. Similarly, Glory also tolerated the entire dominating role of her husband Sam.

Patriarchy is seen in the play through Sam. Sam was a world-famous cancer surgeon, who has saved thousands of lives during his lifetime. The traveller's anxiety resides in Sam's particularly modern crisis of faith: his existential loss of faith in God, Science and his own intellectual powers. When his mother died in his childhood he loses his Christian faith. Even after having preached soul-saving sermons, Sam feels God has betrayed him.

Sam devotes himself to science and medicine after his mother's death. Though he has earned an international reputation as a miracle-working surgeon he is unable to save his long-time nurse and sweetheart Mavis. Her death destroys Sam's faith in medicine and himself: "I believed in everything. I even believed in you – or love, I guess. Don't I? Yes. And in God, and fairy tales, and medicine and the power of my own mind and none of it works!" (1146).

Sam's confusion and pain are translated into resentful attacks on his wife Glory and his father Everett. He thought that before Glory rejected him as his mother and Mavis, he wants to go away with Stephen from Glory. He loses his faith in all around the entire world. So he said to his wife that

SAM: I do want a divorce. I want to leave here in the morning and take Stephen with me.

GLORY: What is the matter with you?

SAM: I just never stopped to think about it, I guess. It doesn't make sense, this marriage. It never has. Ask your mother. (1117)

Glory was shocked to hear the word 'divorce' from her husband. She is sad, helpless and she does not know what she will do further. Through this one can understand a woman's deep feelings, and the lack of autonomy and identity. Glory has been completely suppressed by her husband's action of divorce.

Most of the studies on marital happiness indicate that homogenetic persons i.e., those having similar tastes, interests, values tend to form stable relationship. This way marriage is said to be union of two selves or two minds. In most of her plays, Marsha Norman has written about the union of two people.

As marriage is a union of two different minds, there is always a need for adjustments or maladjustment. Generally, in the world most marriages prove to be a union of incompatibility. Men are apt to be more rational and women, emotional and sentimental. Their attitudes and interests are different and their outlook and reaction towards the same things are also different. The woman is expected to adjust with the changing family ways and surroundings. Marriage for a woman meant adjustment by means of deleting her individuality, herself and her conscience. It affects her entire psyche and behaviour which destroys her sensibility and her very self.

Glory wants to know the reason for his divorce. She asks Sam "I mean you're upset about Mavis. You don't think you can work without Mavis. Well, leaving me isn't going to bring Mavis back to you" (1118). She wants to change her husband in order to build up a good family. Rather, he stands firm in his decision to get a divorce from her.

Later she fully understands that he was very much depressed not only by his mother's death but also by the death of Mavis.

Sam was very much affectionate with all the people because he was a doctor and a good human being in the world. He could not console himself from his mother's death. When his mother died, he acts "like it happened to me [him] instead of her. I wouldn't eat. I broke things. But now, well, if she hadn't died, I'd be the biggest momma's boy you ever saw" (1121). Similarly, when his friend Mavis died, he tries to break up his marriage by way of divorce. Sam's narcissism also surfaces through his frequent use of biblical allusions. He doesn't believe God, his wife, his father or anything in the world except his son. Thus he wants to get a divorce from his wife. He doesn't bother about his wife's future without his presence but Glory has always been thinking about her husband's future.

The audience can easily understand the male-dominated role in the play through Sam. Men are of the opinion that women should accept all that they say. Likewise Sam has been authoritative towards his wife in terms of divorce. His main intention is to move away from Glory and his father. Norman has portrayed the character of Sam in a different kind of way in the play.

The institution of marriage becomes an instrument of exploitation in the feminist context. It is regarded as a subtle expression of patriarchal control and the most powerful weapon for female subjugation. Chandra Nisha Singh in the article "Women and Marriage" has quoted Simone de Beauvoir's words: "It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true; but almost always it annihilates woman" (53).

Socialist feminist said that “the marriage contract is a work contract in which a woman produces mainly for the family’s internal use” (Singh 53). Marriage is still assumed to be the primary business of a woman’s life and thus patriarchal values are achieved.

Glory is very much isolated and depressed by Sam’s word ‘divorce’. She doesn’t hate her husband because she knows her husband is totally confused. She is portrayed as a good natured, kind hearted woman and truthful towards her husband. Norman’s early plays showed wise and caring mother surrogates in *Getting Out* and *Third and Oak*. For the first time, the playwright presents a loving and supportive wife who is warm, and a mother who is affectionate. Glory is a “lovely woman” who, in Norman’s words, “takes enormous pleasure in the smallest moments of her life” (Hunter 176).

Similarly, Sam’s mother is remembered as an affectionate woman, humourous, talented and patient. Everett fondly recalls that his wife would bake a batch of cookies, eat every one of them, and send the waxed paper to the intended recipient with the message that as soon as she went off her diet she would send another. Sam remembers her as “the gingerbread lady” who had “curly red hair and shiny round eyes and a big checked apron. Fat pink fingers and a sweet vanilla smell and all the time in the world. Sing to you, dance with you, write your name on the top of a cake” (1121). Marsha Norman has portrayed women characters to be loving and caring figures not only in the family but also in the world.

Courage is the next important aspect in an individual’s life. One cannot live without autonomy and identity inspite of being courageous. In *Traveler in the Dark*, Glory has enormous courage in her life and she believes that God will definitely save her

life and her family. When Sam declares that she takes his child with him always she doesn't get angry at him. She knows her husband's mind very well and knows that he does not take decision from his heart but out of his confused state of mind. She doubts and asks her husband:

GLORY: Someone else, then. Do you want to leave me for another woman?

SAM: I don't want another woman. I want you to be the woman I want.

GLORY: Can I have a straight answer please.

SAM: We've both had affairs. Haven't we. (1126)

Glory is very happy to hear this and each and every minute she plans to change his mind away from getting a divorce. Sam says "Well, I know it can't be that you're having a good time. You should've married that baseball player" (1127). Glory is firm and continues her conversation with him under the pretext of changing him to be a good husband to her, a good father to Stephen and a good son to his father. The following conversation between Sam and Glory shows them at the summit of their separation:

SAM: So this is your chance. I'm offering you a way out.

GLORY: I want a way in, Sam.

SAM: There isn't any way in. There never was. You never had a chance. I married you to spite my father. (Pause) There. Can you hate me now? Can I leave now?

GLORY: I know you loved me. (1127)

Glory does not get angry but struggles to get her autonomy and identity. As a good wife, it is her duty to keep the family in the right way but her husband does not understand her good nature. Hence her struggle continues in order to maintain a smooth relationship with him. Everett was a good preacher and wanted to maintain a good family structure. When his son decided to get divorce from Glory he said “She’s a good girl, and she’s been a good mother to Stephen. Whatever is the matter between Glory and you . . . is probably you” (1128). He also wanted to change Sam’s attitude towards Glory.

Everett tries to tell the truth about death to Sam. Everett says: “When somebody dies it makes everything hard, Sam, but what we all do is try not to make anything worse” (1129). Sam replies, “When somebody dies, you try to make it make a difference, make it mean something” (1129). Everett tries to convince him to change into a good person in the world. Sam says “Divorce is a sin” (1129). Everett said: “Sam, your mother used to say your marriage was like your favorite shirt. You could wear it day after day, and you could try keep it clean, but sooner or later it was going to have to go in the wash. But as soon as it was clean, you could press it fresh, and put it back on, looking good as new” (1129).

Sam replied “I don’t have a favorite shirt. And I don’t need advice from you” (1129). Sam hated his father because Everett loved God more than anybody else. Sam said “We can’t save lives. God couldn’t save Mother. Medicine couldn’t save Mavis. . . . Death wins. Death always wins” (1140). In his childhood days Sam loved God very much but he lost faith in God when his mother died. And again he blamed his father “You

didn't love me, you loved Mavis. Yes! You even loved Mavis more than Mother" (1140). Through this one can understand Sam's mind and he hates everything include god in the world.

Everett's conversations with Sam showed that God is omniscient, omnipresent and the greatest leader of the entire world. Everett says that "... every time he goes into the operating room, God gives him another chance. How many people are alive today because of Him! Hundreds! Thousands maybe. Praise be to the power and the wisdom of the Almighty God" (1132). Whereas Sam gets very angry and shouts at his father saying "You are a hopeless old fool" (1132). Glory enters and warns Sam because he has talked too much against Everett and God. Glory noticed his wrong way of talking and so she advises him saying, "Sam, you apologize to your father!" (1132). Through this one can understand that she is not only concerned about her husband but also about her entire family.

Glory does not show any of her sufferings and depressions to her husband. She says "... I think I'll go to Mother's for a while. A month maybe. You take Stephen and go, Sam. Back to the city or on a trip, whatever you think is best. I don't want to fight with now. I'd just like a month to think" (1143). This shows her humanitarian concern and the feminine attribute embedded in her.

The mother-son relationship is expressed lucidly in the play through Sam and his mother, and Stephen and Glory. When Sam forced his son to move away from Glory, Stephen said, "I don't want to move, Dad" (1138). Sam wants to change his son's mind towards him but Stephen stands very firm in his decision.

SAM: I love you, Stephen.

STEPHEN: If you could stop loving Mom, you could stop loving me.
(1138)

Stephen was very sad about his father's decision to move away from Glory and Everett. Father-son relationships are also highlighted in the play through Sam and Stephen, and Everett and Sam. Stephen does not want his father to live alone in the world so he said, "I don't want you to leave us" (1137).

STEPHEN: Don't you love Mom anymore?

SAM: I guess not.

STEPHEN: What did she do?

SAM: Nothing.

STEPHEN: Did you love her when you married her?

SAM: Yes

STEPHEN: Did she change?

SAM: No

STEPHEN: Did you change?

SAM: No, not really. (1137)

Through this conversation between Stephen and Sam, one could understand Sam's love towards his wife. Stephen asks many questions to Sam with regard to family. Generally, children prefer to live with their parents. Similarly, Stephen wants to live with his parents and his grandfather happily. Stephen threatens Sam for the death of Mavis and he says "What kind of doctor are you if you can't save your own nurse?" (1138).

Sam is sad because of the way his son has spoken against him. He says, “Stephen, I didn’t kill Mavis. You don’t understand” (1139). Stephen replies “What’s there to understand? She’s dead” (1139). Sam wants to convince Stephen but Stephen says, ‘I’m living with Mom.... Don’t call us! Don’t come to see us! . . . don’t come get your things!’” (1139). It hurts Sam very much and he is depressed. The audience could understand that Stephen’s way of speaking has ironically changed his father’s decision on living a lonely life. Through this Norman has portrayed Stephen’s love towards his father.

Sam wants to leave Glory but he can’t go without her because he loved her very much. He wanted to share his problem with her and so he says “Will you not leave . . . just yet? Will you sit with me a while?” (1144). This shows his love towards Glory. Husband-wife relationship is superior to any other relationship. To maintain a good relationship understanding one another is important. Norman has portrayed Glory as a good and understanding wife to Sam. She has maintained peace throughout. She struggles with her husband in a polite manner to gain an autonomy and identity of her own.

Sam shares his guilt feelings about Mavis to Glory. He is guilty that he could not do anything further to save Mavis. Glory says:

.... If you think you destroyed Mavis if you’re out here feeling sorry for Mavis . . . Mavis had you all day, Sam. Mavis had the best of you! I never had the conversations she had with you. I never sweated with you for twelve hours to work one of your miracles. We – you and I never held our breath till the dead man sat up, Sam. (And he doesn’t respond) No,

Sam. Don't feel sorry for Mavis. And don't be mad at me. I have been – Stephen and I have been- happy, all these years, to have what was left over when Mavis finished with you. (1145)

Glory comes to tell the reality that she loved Mavis and Mavis loved her. She also feels sad about her death and says, “I'm feeling real lost without her” (1145). Sam really liked her tender heartedness. He wants to come away from the guilt related to the death of his mother and Mavis.

Mavis has suggested to Glory that Sam's “illusions (concerning Glory) must be preserved” (Hunter 218) Sam works throughout the play to restore his mother's garden and the illusion that he has not lost her. He devotes his energy in restoring his mother's garden, and thus his childhood relationship with her, as a means of absolving himself of his guilt for her death. He sweeps and cleans the wall wherein his toys and other symbols of his childhood are enshrined in an effort to create a suitable symbolic substitute for his missing mother. He cleans and replaces the stone rabbit, the loose stones, and the stone Mother Goose as a way of preserving his own illusions.

The restoration of the garden helps Sam to refurbish his mother symbolically, however, ultimately the geode discovered by Stephen provides Sam with the symbol that will restore the memory of his mother, which can no longer reside in Mavis. They discuss cutting open the geode, but Sam refuses, in contrast to his surgery on Mavis. Nonetheless, it was in cutting Mavis open and examining her more closely that Sam found “forgiveness: It was . . . (And suddenly, the words come from him the way “it” came from Mavis in that moment) it was forgiveness” (1150).

The close identification in Sam's mind between Mavis and his mother allows Sam to find forgiveness through Mavis for his mother's death as well. Moreover, the decision not to cut the geode open simultaneously allows Sam to reverse his decision to operate on Mavis and preserve the symbol of his mother. Sam is highly protective of the geode as an object that first belonged to his mother and is closely associated with her, and second, is a symbol whose meaning must not be examined. When Stephen suggests that they get the hammer to crack open the geode, Sam responds: "(Sudden alarm): No! (Then more quietly) Once you crack them . . . she didn't like to crack them" (1149).

With the innovation of the geode, an apt symbol of the mother, Sam is able to admit his weakness and his human fallibility. With the restoration of the garden and the stone Mother Goose, and the preservation of the geode, Sam's mother is symbolically restored and his grief abates. Freud helps to explain Sam "when he suggests that once the narcissist has been partially freed from his repressions, we are frequently confronted by the unintended result that he withdraws from further treatment in order to choose a love object, hoping that life with the beloved person[s] will complete his recovery" (Hunter 219). Sam is able to redirect his feelings/energy toward things outside of himself, such as his wife, son and father.

In the beginning of the play Sam wants to get divorce from Glory because of his confusion in mind. But the end of the play he fully understands the importance of family relationships through his wife. Throughout the play she has been longing for autonomy and identity in the society particularly in her family.

In the end of the play Glory has achieved her autonomy and identity through her courage and she has gained her individuality also. Norman has portrayed Glory as a successful wife and mother in her family. Through her enormous courage she has regained her family. She gave more importance to her family because she considered family to be a significant aspect in the world.

Traveler in the Dark has emphasized the concepts of feminine solidarity, patriarchy and female autonomy through the characters Glory and Sam. Glory has taken courage to be a powerful weapon against patriarchy. Only with courage she was able to face all her problems and struggles against her husband. Norman's each and every woman character showed the enormous courage at the end of the play. Arlene regained her new life through her courage in *Getting Out*. Finally Glory has successfully reunited with her family and achieved her autonomy and identity.

The end of the play Sam says to Glory "... I need you. I love you ...I want to be a better man" (1152). Sam has totally understood the importance of family relationships and the love of his wife. Glory is happy to join her family with Everett, Sam and her son Stephen. The play has portrayed women's magnificent power and courage through the crucial character Glory. Bartlett said that "In acts of compassion – are solidarity, the rebel defies cost/benefits analyses by taking on risks and sacrifices for the benefit of others. Solidarity in this sense is about action" (98). So *Traveler in the Dark* is the best example of female autonomy and identity. Glory's achievement of freedom and establishing her identity is a stepping stone to getting closer to a close knit family and be a part of the family to strengthen the family bonds.

Chapter - 4

“Into the Cohesive Community - *Getting Out*”

Women are quite validly seeking something more complete than autonomy as it is defined for men, a fuller not a lesser ability to encompass relationships to others, simultaneously with the fullest development of oneself. (Mehta 47)

Women have already gained freedom. But it is a fact that freedom alone can never fulfil women's dignity and need. Women seek more than that of freedom for their development. Miller describes that the term 'autonomy' may not be entirely befitting in describing female psychology, since women often consider that they live only to serve other people's needs. In Marsha Norman's play *Getting Out*, Arlene confronts a community of others as well as her own past 'self' and struggles to find her appropriate 'self'.

Marsha Norman's first play *Getting Out* was produced in 1977 as part of the festival of New American playwrights at the Actors Theatre in Louisville, where it was recognized as the best entry in the festival. It was produced Off Broadway in 1979. Later the play was produced at the Mark Taper in Los Angeles and the Theatre de Lys in New York (where it ran for 237 performances). *Getting Out* was cited by the American Theatre Critics Association as an outstanding new play, won the George Oppenheimer Award, the John Gassner Playwriting Medallion and earned the Outer Critics Award for the best new playwright.

The play concerns a young woman just paroled after an eight – year prison sentence for robbery, kidnapping and manslaughter. Norman has been greatly inspired into writing *Getting Out* due to her encounter with a thirteen - year old girl at the Central State Hospital and on the basis of interviews she has conducted on women who have lived for years in prison.

Norman took the theatre world by storm with the entrance of her first play *Getting Out*. Jean C. Stine has pointed out in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* that Gerald Weales proclaimed Norman as “an impressive addition to the list of good young American playwrights,” (319) and John Simon lauded the play as “brutally, sadly, sometimes thrillingly real” (317). Again Stine pointed that, John Simon perhaps best summarized the favourable responses to the play when he maintained that it is “honest, uncompromising, lucid, penetrating, well-written, dramatic, and as unmanipulatively moving as we expected from the author of the remarkable *Getting Out*” (319).

Getting Out, a hard – hitting, shocking drama about a convicted murderer, was a huge success. The play focuses Arlene Holsclaw on the first day of freedom after she is released from the prison. She has been accused of robbery, kidnapping and murder. It is literally about identity crisis and its theme of the spilt ‘self’ is visually represented on a split stage that alternates between past and present versions of the same person. The play depicts the twenty – four hours following Arlene Holsclaw’s release from a state prison. Although Arlene is legally free as the play begins, she is still surrounded by a system of enclosure. The play also reflects female culture in the society.

As the play's title indicates, *Getting Out* addresses "the female protagonist's specific hopes and the audience's more generalized desire to escape to social entrapment; and yet the play's variety of enclosures suggests the ways in which feminine consciousness is constructed, maimed, reconstructed, and finally validated in our society." (Spencer 365)

In *Getting Out*, the central character is represented by two persons, one playing Arlene as one who has been released from prison and settling in an apartment; another, playing Arlie, her past 'self', imprisoned upstage. This doubling of the protagonist has appeared number of times in recent writing by women (both in drama and in fiction) to find a form to perform the complexity of female consciousness.

Playwrights like Susan Griffin in *Voices* and Ntozake Shange in *For Colored Girls* describe groups of women who collectively constitute a 'self'. Honor Moore finds this dramatic form "choral play" (Hunter 208), one of the hallmarks of contemporary female playwriting. Toni Morrison suggests that in a misogynistic society, psychic wholeness is difficult to achieve for women; thus in *Sula* two women – each half a 'self' – together serve as the novel's protagonist. Similarly, Arlie and Arlene are the dual protagonists of *Getting Out*.

By experimenting with this divided protagonist, Norman dramatizes the concepts of feminist criticism: "For women, then, existing in the dominating system of meaning and values that structure society and culture may be a painful, or amusing, double dance, clicking in, clicking out – the divided consciousness" (Schroeder 107).

The setting in *Getting Out* is significant to the audience who can easily perceive the message quickly. There are two parts in the play one is the prison cell and another one an apartment with bars on the windows, in which Arlene's emotional

and physically dangerous situations are reflected through her conversation with her mother, her former pimp, Carl, a retired prison guard, Bennie, and Arlie. All of them wanted something from Arlene. Arlene gets some strength from Rupy, Chaplain and struggles to overcome her life within the prison walls and from her past. These are authentically performed through the characters by their dialogue and the broad range of emotions created by Marsha Norman.

Destructive by nature, Arlie has been known to pee in her mother's shoes, make bologna and toothpaste sandwiches for father, and fling a neighbour's pet frogs into the street just to see them go "SPLAT". Relating this memorable event, Arlie recalls:

Some of em hit cars goin by but most of em jus got squashed, you know, runned over? It was great, seein how far we could throw em, over back of our backs an under our legs an God, it was really fun watchin em fly through the air.... all over somebody's car window or something.....I never had so much fun in my whole life. (10)

The play opens with Arlene in the prison cell. Arlene has been just released from prison and fearfully enters the outside world with the hope of getting out freedom. She wants to live with her son and forget her past 'self'. She wants to be a new woman in the world. In the introduction to *Getting Out*, Marsha Norman explains: "ARLIE is the violent kid ARLENE was until her last stretch in prison. In a sense, she is ARLENE'S memory of herself, called up her fears, needs and even simple word cues. ARLIE'S life should be as vivid as Arlene's if not as continuous" (Mehta 48).

Throughout the play Norman focuses on the sufferings and the confusions that Arlene experiences between her inner ‘self’ and outer ‘self’ and how both these characters Arlie and Arlene, try to overpower each other. Arlie appears first with a funny story about throwing a neighbour boy’s frogs into the street to be run over by cars. Arlene is aware of Arlie, her negative ‘self’; Arlene tries her best to destroy it, since she is extremely misunderstood by people around her.

Arlene’s past self’s name is Arlie, she hates her past life which made her a bad individual in the world. Arlie shows us a childhood of poverty, neglect and sexual abuse by an alcoholic father, her boy friend Carl, the counsellors and by the prison guard Bennie. The repeated sexual assaults by her father and others led her into prostitution. Prostitution led her towards forgery, to commit robbery and then to commit murder. This chain of events removes Arlie from one prison to another in order to reform her.

On Arlene’s first day out of prison, she felt very sad because there is no difference between the prison and the outside world. When she wants to remove the burglar-proof bars that line her apartment window, Bennie is told that “the landlord owns the building. You gotta do what he says or he’ll throw you out....” (13). When Carl, her former pimp, arrives to tempt her back to work for him, he mocks at her plan to work at a right job and spend her free time playing cards and watching television; “Sounds just like the dayroom in the fucking joint” (56) he remarks.

Arlene has been continuously imprisoned. She wants to live a good life but her past ‘self’ tortures her and the people around her make her commit mistakes and go back again into her past ‘self’ Arlie. Her neighbour Ruby, also a former prisoner, explains that life as a dishwasher is at least life outside a prison, for which Arlene

retorts: “Outside? Honey, I’ll either be in this apartment or inside some kitchen sweatin over the sink. Outside’s where you get to do what you want, not where you gotta do some shit job jus so’s you can eat worse than you did in prison.” (60) Arlene feels that her apartment and her limited opportunities represent continued imprisonment, reflected visually in Norman’s doubled proscenium arch.

Much of Arlie’s life has been spent in reform and correctional institutions – Lakewood State Prison for forgery and prostitution, and Pine Ridge Correctional Institution for second degree murder of a cabdriver in conjunction with filling station robbery. Her years of imprisonment made her suspicious and guarded. In her first hours of freedom, she felt confident, terrifying and disheartening.

The play explains Arlene’s emotions in a difficult situation in the past and present. She is aware of her negative ‘self’ Arlie and accepts her positive ‘self’. In this view Mr. Lori remarks: “The play illustrates the infinite complications that affect an individual’s struggle to reform. Although numerous sociological theories apply to Arlene’s struggle, the labelling theory best explains the difficulties associated with her reformation” (Mehta 48).

This labelling theory claims that the labels people are given affect their own and others’ perceptions of them. These perceptions channel a person’s behaviour either into deviance or into conformity. The labelling theory provides insight into Arlene’s possibility for reforming herself.

Arlene is the main character in *Getting Out*. The play strives to improve her after being released from prison. In her search for a better life, Arlene faces many obstacles from her own family and people around her. The main themes in *Getting Out* are mother and daughter conflict, the struggle for personal autonomy and the

quest for a sense of 'self'. The relationship between mother and daughter is one of the recurrent themes in Marsha Norman's *Getting Out*. It deals with the prediction "... of how that daughter will experience herself, not only in relationship to her mother, but in relationship to the world" (Hunter 171). The basis of that relationship is betrayal.

There are many kinds of relationships that exist in the world but one of the most important relationships is the mother and daughter relationship. Generally, mothers always take care of their child be it a either daughter or a son. They give much importance to their daughter since women face many difficulties in the world and they are always given advice for a better future. Even when they commit any mistake in their life, mothers take care to solve the problems for their daughter's good. Generally, mothers are revered and portrayed to be matured and good mannered.

Norman's early plays describe mothers who provide neither protection nor guidance and they do not nourish their children with food or love. In her first play *Getting Out*, the mother figure is portrayed as an archetypal 'bad' mother, cold and rejecting. The day Arlene is released from prison, her mother comes to welcome her home. She comes to receive her and not out of true love towards Arlene. There has been no communication between the mother and the daughter for the past eight years. Arlene wants to reunite with her family and especially with her mother. Her mother refuses to talk with Arlene.

ARLENE: I didn't know if you'd come.

MOTHER: Ain't I always?

ARLENE: How are you? (Moves as if to hug her. Mother stands still, Arlene backs off).

MOTHER: Bout the same. (Walking into room).

ARLENE: I'm glad to see you. (18)

Arlene's mother neither looking at Arlene's face nor responding to her comment, dispassionately replies, "You look tired" (18). Arlene has no doubt, and understands her mother's rejection. Her mother appears generously by bringing Arlene coloured towels, a teapot and a bedspread to make the apartment more homely. Arlene turns to converse with her son Joey. She had given her son to her mother while in prison. Arlene is very angry and hurt to learn that her mother has treated her young son as she has treated Arlene with coldness and contempt.

Arlene dreamed that her son Joey and Arlene would live happily and that their journey will go in the right way in the world. Arlene and her mother joined in making the bed but the uneasy peace between them does not last for long. While energetically scrubbing the filthy apartment, mother viciously attacks Arlene. Her mother continuously criticises her but she does not talk back. She asks confidently, "May be I could come out on Sunday foryou still make pot roast?" (25).

Arlene is very eager to go to her native place, but her mother says, "Sunday.....is my day to clean house now" (25). In one word Norman conveys how the world has changed for her mother in Arlene's absence. Her mother thought that it was not good to bring Arlene home since there were two children already at home. Arlene was so depressed by the words of her mother.

When her mother was cleaning her apartment, she discovers Bennie's hat in Arlene's house. She thinks that Arlene has returned to her old life of being a prostitute. She takes all the clothes furiously from the bed and puts it into the basket. Arlene explains that Bennie is a prison guard and that he drives her to Kentucky, but her mother does not believe her words. Arlene has failed to convince her mother. Her mother says, "Oh you ain't. I'm your mother. I know what you'll do" (29). These harsh words extremely affected Arlene's mind both physically and mentally. The long mother - daughter relationship came to an end in a moment. "Don't you touch me", (30) Arlene's mother told this in an angry voice and left the apartment. Arlene struggles with the murderous Arlie within: "No! Don't you touch Mama, Arlie." (30)

Arlene has already explained to her mother that she has totally changed from her past 'self' and she continues saying "...don't call me Arlie no more. It's Arlene now." (21) Her mother is firm that Arlene has not changed and she will never ever change until the end of her life.

Marsha Norman has focussed on mother and daughter relationship, not only in *Getting Out* but also in all her other plays. Through this we could easily understand Norman's and her mother's relationship in the world. Norman's mother always scolds her daughter (Norman) in such a way that she is very depressed by her mother's attitude. Hence, Norman has expressed her emotions and feelings highly through her plays.

Arlene can gain strength if her mother gives advice to Arlene to react against the male domination in the world. Arlene's mother neither encourages her nor advises her for a bright future. Her mother's only thought is to prevent her two daughters from getting close to Arlene. Generally, mothers have the potential to direct their daughters

in a correct way but in *Getting Out*, Arlene's mother is not concerned about her daughter. Arlene is much affectionate towards her mother but her mother doesn't show any love to Arlene.

Arlene wants to live happily in the outside world, but she cannot live since her past life has destroyed her present life because of people around her. She has quickly understood that there is no difference between life in prison and life in the outside world. Arlene was fully abandoned by her mother. After being released from the prison, Arlene first met her mother. She wanted to be reunited with her mother but her mother gave her up. She wanted to prove herself to be a good woman to the society and to her mother but her mother considers Arlene to be a bad woman in the society.

Arlene's mother expresses little concern about her daughter's other crimes but she has more concern towards the selling of her daughter's body which she considers as an ultimate act of shame. Arlene has fought to protect her mother's reputation from the charge of being a whore. Mother and daughter share the guilt and shame for a husband and a father whose violence has victimised them. Arlie, as a child, responds to her father's rape by inventing excuses for him and hiding her injuries. Her mother who has been treated violently and absurd defends her husband as a good man and assumes responsibility for his actions. So these women are dominated by men.

Patriarchy is a social system in which the male members are the primary figures of authority central to social organization, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority and control of property, and where fathers hold authority over women and children. According to men, women are portrayed as sexual objects and servants to men and their children. Generally, men think that women do everything for men because they have some power in the society. Similarly, in the

play *Getting Out* the male characters try to change Arlene's attitude towards their needs. But Arlene would not change and she stands firm in her way of life.

Arlene met Bennie, the prison guard who has retired from Pine Ridge with the expectation of taking care of Arlene and to be a surrogate father. Bennie takes more advantage of her without her knowledge. He searches Arlie in Arlene's attitude and he wants to change Arlene to Arlie for his sexual pleasure. Bennie refuses to accept Arlene's change because she does not accept him anymore as her friend. So he does some favour to her and reminds her past 'self' to Arlene. Bennie's attempt to rape Arlene is a prime example of his motive to overpower her. He does not consider Arlene like another woman but has always seen Arlene as a sexual object. He sees her as "Wild cat" (44) that he can control and overcome her for sexual pleasure by his violent force. Although Arlene does not act like Arlie, Bennie thinks that she is sexually available to him because she has once been a prostitute.

Arlene understands Bennie's motivation of raping her and that is the reason he drives her home from prison, sets up her apartment and goes out to get fried chicken for her. She has fully acknowledged his intentions and she wants to prevent herself from going to him. Arlene screams while he attempts to rape and she said "I'll kill you, you creep!" (38). When Arlene calls Bennie a rapist, he stops his attempts at forcing himself on her. Bennie realises that she is not Arlie, she is Arlene now. Bennie's realization of Arlene's change is a crucial turning point for Arlene's reformation.

She gets relieved from Bennie. She cannot be freed from Carl who is a former pimp and the father of Joey. He was the man behind Arlene going to Lakewood prison for forgery. Carl wanted to change her mind towards prostitution. He describes about

her past life as a prostitute when she has lived luxuriously, but now she suffers economically by changing herself to Arlene.

Similarly Carl wants to change her attitude, but Arlene stands firm in her right way of life. Carl says that they will get more money through prostitution and their financial problem will be solved forever. Arlene recalls and tells Carl:

ARLENE: You always sendin to them droolers.....

CARL: You kin do two things, girl.....

ARLENE: They slobberin all over me.....

CARL: Breakin out and hookin.

ARLENE: They tryin me to the bed.....

ARLIE: (Now screaming, gets further away from him.) I could get killed working for you. Some sicko, some crazy drunk..... (Goes off stage, guard puts her in the cell.....). (33)

Arlene rejects Carl's offer since she is very determined to live and bring up Joey in the correct path. Though Arlene rejects Carl's offer, he leaves his contact number, in case Arlene changes her decision. In *Getting Out*, Arlene struggles with the ongoing flashbacks of Arlie's existence. Arlie was sexually assaulted by her father, the school principal, the prison guard, Bennie, her former pimp, Carl and the cabdriver; these men have dominated Arlie and have overcome her femininity. Guaurd-Evance says, "So where is it now. Got it up your pookie, I bet. Back and me with my fingers up your....." (Mehta 56)

In each of the instances, the stage directions indicate that she is pinned, tied to, or sitting on the bed. Even the reformed Arlene is still in a kind of prison, there are bars in her apartment windows and she must fend off the vultures like Carl. Arlene's oppression is based on sex as well as social class.

Arlene is totally reformed by Ruby and the Chaplain. Ruby is Arlene's upstairs neighbour as well as the cook and one who understands Arlene's difficult situations. She wants to take care of her and make friendship between them. She advises her to lead a better life in the society. Ruby plays a significant role in Arlene's life to get reformed. Only through Ruby, Arlene accepts her past 'self' Arlie. She reminds Arlene that it is acceptable to love Arlie because "You can still love people that's gone". (62)

The crucial message Ruby tries to convey to Arlene is that she has to accept her old 'self' in order to become a new person. Ruby has motivated her to be a good, strengthened and courageous woman in the world. Norman portrays the reality that when one accepts and realises past thing in one's life, one can change oneself to be a good person in the world. Arlene gains more confidence to live with her son Joey by ultimately getting advice from Ruby. Arlene has taken her first step towards improving her life when she accepts her past self Arlie.

Patriarchal regime is rightly expressed in *Getting Out*. The Chaplain is portrayed in a good manner by Norman because men have the authority to overcome women but the Chaplain has encouraged and motivated Arlene for her better future. He considers Arlene as a woman and not a sexual object in the world. Some men give equal power to women because they think that men and women are created by god.

The Chaplain is also a reformer in Arlene's life, Arlene tells Ruby of how she managed in the solitary confinement and particularly in prison. She talks about the prison Chaplain, who calls her Arlene and says "Arlie was my hateful self and she was hurtin me and God would find some way to take her away". (61) The Chaplain boosts up Arlene and his advice helps her to visualize a better life. He is her mentor, he builds her confidence and is of great moral support to her. When the Chaplain is unexpectedly transferred, Arlene suffers from emotional breakdown.

She finds religion through the prison Chaplain, believing him when he tells her that God will give a good way to Arlene and destroy her bad 'self'. She also believes him when he says that "the meek shall inherit the earth". (61) Arlene cannot wait for God to destroy her bad 'self', so she finds a way to overcome her bad 'self' by killing Arlene. She stabs herself repeatedly with a fork and says "Arlie is dead for what she done to me. Arlie is dead an it's God's will." (61) Several characters in Norman's plays struggle with issues of religious faith and redemption. She gains consciousness in the hospital and believes that she has succeeded in killing her negative past 'self', which was trying to kill her. Norman says,

they didn't hear nurthin but they come back out where I was an I'm standin there tellin em to come see.....but there's all this blood all over my shirt an I got this fork I'm holdin real tight in my hand.....an there's all these holes all over me where I been stabbin myself and I'm sayin Arlie is dead and it's God's will.....I didn't scream it, I was jus saying it over and over... (61)

After observing the code of silence, the tormented woman tries to kill that 'self' born out of her struggle to survive in the dominant culture. Through Ruby and

Chaplain, Arlene gets freedom and leaves the bad company in her life. She learns the value of life particularly the value of a woman's life. At the end of the play Arlene emerges as a matured character.

Getting Out takes place in Arlene's new apartment. This is the first place she calls at her own 'self' with freedom. Much of the play's stage business allows her an attempt to make a home by arranging, cleaning and shopping. Through these events one can understand the attitude of the characters and the problems faced by Arlene after being released from prison. Arlene's mother visits to help her in cleaning and cooking. Bennie tries to help her but his true motive is to rape her. Carl on the other hand, tries to change her mind towards prostitution in order to get more money. Finally, Ruby offers a helping hand to Arlene and helps her to survive in the new world.

RUBY: You kin always call in sick..... stay home, send out for pizza an watch your Johnny Carson on TV..... or git a bus way out Preston street and go bowlin.....

ARLENE: (Anger building) what am I gonna do?.....what kind of life is that?

RUBY: It's outside. (59)

Food is a symbol of self improvement and getting freedom in the society. When Arlie was a child, food was a form of patriarchal control associated with violence and sex. As Mama reflects: "You always was too skinny. Shoulda beat you like your daddy said. Make you eat". (19) This is immediately followed by Arlie's revelation to the audience, but not to Mama, that daddy molested and beat her. The

prison guards try to get food for Arlie in order to rape her. In prison the girls obediently fatten themselves up. Arlie, however, resists violently and throws her food at the wall. Even when she is beginning her new life, she throws food which is bought by Bennie. Although she is very hungry, she rejects food because she learns his motives and hence tries to maintain her self respect and dignity.

Arlene gets new freedom, self-control and plans to establish her domestic life with her son. By the end of the play she tries to make a home for herself and her son. Arlene does not move into domestic imprisonment but into a sphere in which she can bring her newly found psychic wholeness and commitment to life.

In the opening of the play Arlene has begun her transition from silence to speech. Arlene was silenced when her father seduced her and she could only express anger physically. She finally punishes herself whereas when she gets out from the prison she has some courage to face the world. Initially she prevents herself from Bennie by telling him that she is not Arlie now and calls Bennie a rapist while Bennie attempts to rape her in the apartment. Thereafter Bennie abandons his attempt to rape her.

Getting Out reveals how an individual's life is influenced by the society, which is male dominated. Norman reflects how lascivious men like her father, Carl or Bennie take control of Arlene's life and lead her into the deep to destroy her individuality. According to Gretchen Cline:

“Men's being in power throughout the world thing that could ever have happened in human history. Arlene being a representative of all the women living and having lived on earth, even if a very extreme one. But in favour of men, I claim that men are not really guilty either

because society has become autonomous or cannot be controlled anymore” (Mehta 55).

Gretchen Cline uses Waiter Davis’ theory of the crypt to analyze Arlene being familial and subsequent by a social scapegoat, to show how women are shaped by a society in which the most moral notes, such as family and religion, justify violation and oppression. During her childhood, Arlie suffered from the sexual abuse of her father and emotional neglect of her mother. This caused her first crypt. She is envious to the male dominance and tries to rebel against any humiliation by acting criminally in order to compensate for her humiliation. In prison, Arlie is abused, humiliated and used. After being released from the prison Arlene thinks that everything seems different from what she had experienced earlier. But she cannot come away from the male dominated world like those who used women for their self desire.

Arlene suffered physical, mental, emotional and social humiliation, as there is also a deeper familial background by which the society has shaped her. The society has created Arlie who has tortured and harassed Arlene, but when Arlene tries to fit into the social norms, she learns to face the society and she tries to destroy her own weakness.

Arlene is actually used as a scapegoat twice. First, she is made a scapegoat by her family and she fails to recognize her mental and emotional disturbance which makes Arlie aggressive. Second, she is made a social scapegoat, because the society does not realize Arlene’s wild behaviour. The society learns Arlie’s past ‘self’ and hates Arlene. In fact Arlene allows the society to use her as a scapegoat. In this light Arlie is trapped inside Arlene, and the society in turn abuses and humiliates that ‘self’.

The title *Getting Out* represents a person getting out from a difficult situation. But getting out is the most difficult step for Arlene because she has faced many problems in her life. Each and every day she struggles to live in the male dominated society. Arlene's first step for her freedom is getting out from the prison. On the first day of her freedom, she feels that she has been continuously imprisoned when she met her mother, Carl and Bennie. She thinks that it is very difficult to get out from the male dominated society and there is no difference between a prison and the outside world.

She was even mentally and physically affected but she had some hope of 'getting out' of all her difficulties. When she met Chaplain and Ruby, she had confidence and courage to achieve her freedom and come out of the clutches of the society. Through their pieces of advice given to her, she achieves freedom. At the end of the play the readers can see her 'getting out' from all her difficulties and confidently get into the new world.

Feminist critics' paradigms of women's quest for autonomy offer models for Arlene's progress. Mary Doly, for example, analyses the creation of a new consciousness as a process that states that women dare to confront non-being in the face of their own non-existence. Similarly, Carol Christ outlines the spiritual journey towards a supportive community which "takes a distinctive form in the fiction and poetry of women writers. It begins in an experience of nothingness. Women experience emptiness in their own lives – in self-hatred, in self-negation, and in being a victim" (Hunter 145).

For Daly and Christ, this step in the process is followed by awakening and new-naming of experience, leading idealistically towards a new spirituality and

affirmation through community. We have seen Arlene in *Getting Out*, successfully achieve her goal through confidence. Significantly, she renames herself, because she wants to start a new life and demands that the world recognize her new beginning as Arlene. She recognizes the value of her past by forgiving herself and Arlie joins Arlene in a pleasurable memory of her life.

Getting Out leaves a message to the audience that a self-determined woman has the ability to be independent struggling for her independence with the support of a community that begins with Ruby. In the first phase Arlie struggles for survival. In the second phase, she rejects her past hateful 'self' and decides to live for her son Joey and even faced many difficulties. Arlene chooses the complex and hard path and she has to defeat the temptation to turn men for help: her former pimp offers luxurious life and easy money and Bennie offers protection and security. She resists both their appeals and Arlene learns to be self-confident without going back to the violent self-protectiveness of Arlie.

Moreover, with Ruby's help she knows to love and accept her old 'self' as the first step towards a new life. Arlene is very happy because she is with Joey and energetically comes into the new world. She ends the play at the verge of Gilligan's third phase "inter connectedness". (Hunter 211)

The play deals with an oppressive system of patriarchal beliefs that control and inhibit the female character. Arlene and Ruby were identified by the society. Through the supportive establishment of female community with Ruby, Arlene is able to destroy the part of her former 'self' and come away with a complete sense of identity. Through Arlene's reunion of her past selves as well as through her friendship

with Ruby, Norman portrays the female autonomy and women's successful challenge to patriarchy.

In *Getting Out*, the psychological continuity between the staged Arlie and Arlene scenes reveal Arlene's relationship to herself and others. Second, family is the most vicious site wherein certain emotional restrictions become instituted and regulated. Through Arlene's partial recovery of Arlie's strength, Norman communicates a more satisfying message to the feminist spectator of the play. The spectator sees that women like Arlene have the potential power to challenge patriarchy and she stands as a model of female solidarity that gives authority to get female autonomy. Norman portrays the need for female solidarity against patriarchy and preserves female autonomy through the main character Arlene. Feminine solidarity is the most important aspect in the world. In *Getting Out* Norman perfectly mentions about the values of women and their roles in the society.

Autonomy is the ability to get information and make decision about one's own concerns. It helps to get material resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth and social resources such as knowledge, power, and prestige within the family and community. Women's autonomy indicates that they have the power to do everything in the world. Particularly, they have the right to take decision in their life. Autonomy gives the opportunity for women to prove themselves as great women. In ancient times women did not have enough authority to overcome men's power. But now women have the authority and autonomy to overcome men.

The play ends on a positive note that Arlene has found a new life in the male dominated society. Marsha Norman reflects; "My whole life I felt locked up. I think the writing of *Getting Out* for me was my own opening of the door" (Mehta 130).

Norman is one of the first female dramatists to make relationships in women's lives and create a force in the social and economic strata of the middle and lower class women.

At the end of the play Arlie and Arlene recall a comic episode in their childhood. At that moment, two actresses come together on the stage and simultaneously speak the punch line of the anecdote. Finally the play concludes with the laughter between Arlie and Arlene. That moment of laughter brings to mind the last line of *Days Without End* by Eugene O'Neill in which the newly integrated John Loving exclaims, "Life laughs with God's love again! Life laughs with love!" (Mehta 58).

Getting Out reveals how Arlene gathered her new strength. The answer to this question is twofold. First, Arlene has seen the value of autonomy. Although she recognizes that she will not have extra money, good friends or the companionship of her family (even her son has been taken from her), she discovers that, on the "outside," "when you make your two nickels, you can keep both of em" (59). Second, she learns the importance of female bonding. She is very much close to Ruby and knows the value of companionship. As the play ends Arlene accepts Ruby's supportive friendship, and with Ruby's help Arlene gains autonomy and identity in her life.

It is true, as Keyssar has pointed out, that a realistically constructed play can offer no solution or alternative to class – and gender – based hierarchies. *Getting Out* illustrates, however, that a flexible realism can depict the values encoded and disseminated by a patriarchal culture, assess the consequences of oppression by powerful culture agents, and

simultaneously support the alternative values – such as autonomy and female community - that feminism espouse. (Hunter 108)

In *Getting Out*, Arlene is able to relocate her child-self to survive. As Norman explains, “Jessie thinks she cannot have any of the other things she wants from her life, so what she will have is control and she will have the courage to take that control” (Hunter 212). Jessie shows her courage by separating herself from her mother. She is determined to die and at the same time she is very determined to help her mother to survive after she leaves in the world. In both plays, protagonists seek autonomy by connecting with their families: Arlene for a future with her son, Jessie for her mother’s future without her.

In *Getting Out*, Norman clearly portrays the male characters who saw Arlene as a sexual object. Each and every minute Bennie, Carl and Arlene’s father wanted to change Arlene into Arlie. They did not consider her to be a woman in this world. Arlene stands firmly in her decision that she will not turn towards prostitution since she wanted to live happily with her son. Through this the audience could understand that women should have the courage to live in the male dominated society. Women are the creation of God. Marsha Norman perfectly portrays women’s autonomy, identity, patriarchy and values of women through Arlene.

An audience whether male or female could easily obtain the message that women are not born to simply serve men, they are born to win. God gives enough courage to all the human beings to live with identity and autonomy in the world. Marsha Norman has perfectly moulded the play on the basis of feminist aspects in the male chauvinistic world. Through Arlene, Norman has consolidated a meaningful and coherent pattern of life in the community.

Chapter – 5

Summation

Helmer: First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.

Nora: That I don't believe any more. I believe that first and foremost, I am an individual, just as much as you are.

- Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (82)

Women are the best among all the creations of God and they stand as the best in the world. Hence, they try to show their individuality in the male dominated society. The world of woman, for a long time has been within the four walls of a house. This enclosed home has also been the most desired topic for a dramatist like Ibsen to describe the happiness and the lack of it. It is a place where a panorama of human emotions gets displayed. Marsha Norman also gives importance to home since it stands for women's values and their identity. Woman and her domestic world find chief space in all her plays in spite of the playwright's concern with other issues.

All of Marsha Norman's plays concentrate on feminist perspectives. She considers feminist issues as means that lead to larger problems. Without presenting unnecessary details about her characters, she examines deep into the psyche of her characters and poetically lays bare their inner conflicts and struggles. She has looked into the suffering, love and passion of ordinary women and presented them with a touch of sensitivity.

Today Marsha Norman is one of the powerful voices of international reputation to emerge on the American stage after the Second World War. Norman's play *'night,*

Mother explores the psyche of someone who plans and quietly organizes her suicide. Norman's observation investigates into different ways to getting freedom and identity through her protagonist in the male dominated world. She has been known as an honest and intelligent writer because she carries a powerful message about ordinary people confronting extraordinary circumstances.

A critical study of the feminist concerns in Marsha Norman's plays also help to generate a perspective of attitudes which determines the constitution of the female character therein. Women's writing, as it grows, becomes a manifestation of a woman's potential and rights and a consciousness of the essential biological and cultural collectivity which merge the experience of being female into an essential imaginative continuum.

Marsha Norman's approach to life is always positive, there is confirmation of life amidst suffering. She encourages the policy of compromise between the extremities in life – orthodoxy and modernity, materialism and idealism, spiritualism and industrialism. Her humanism is also evident from her choice of hunger and freedom as the determined themes. The various types of hunger and her request for different kinds of freedom are essentially an outcome of her humanistic vision. Freedom is necessary for women to realize their potential for a complete life.

Investigating female-authored dramatic works like Marsha Norman's presents crucial insights into analyzing the struggles women have experienced as they work through various obstacles. Drama presents a powerful and essential medium for

portraying representations of women as well as patriarchal restrictions which have historically impeded their psychological development.

Although a woman's experience in the male dominated set up has been an acceptable subject matter for the American stage, the last twenty years have seen an increase in plays featuring such themes. In the past, the "Broadway Bobs, eager to please the masses and make a profit, often have chosen to ignore material deemed risky" (Mehta 149). Though women's voices have been frequently inaudible in the past, their voices are increasing in volume in the American theatre at present. Positively, America's history includes a number of female playwrights who have made important contributions to the American theatre, including playwrights such as Rachel Crowthers, Lorraine Hansberry and Susan Glaspell. Their contributions are of great significance to the society.

By 1916, with the establishment of New York's avant-grade little theatre groups, the actor-manager's theatre was giving way to the playwright's theatre. One development in this rapidly increasing American drama was the proliferation of women playwrights. Women playwrights often explore the condition of women as a social and psychological experience at the base of a movement for social change.

In Marsha Norman's plays issues of feminist concern often constitute the essential conflict. Norman takes woman as a protagonist, which itself suggests a concern for the exploration of woman's lives. These inner conflicts may be interpreted as a response to external forces and as a social order which estimates that women are solely responsible for the domestic sphere, limiting their chances of success.

Norman describes various aspects of feminine consciousness, and the specific female experience out of which that consciousness evolves. In the conventional theatre, Norman explores forms such as realism and expressionism which are conducive to portray the psychology of women. As a dramatist of ideas, her characterizations exemplify a statement about women's condition and women's frustration which is an outburst from the heart of Norman's plays.

Norman describes the psychological motives for a woman's attempt to commit suicide by giving the significance of home and family in women's lives, and the female network through which women form close and supportive relationships. In the lightly populated Prairie, the women in *Third and Oak: the Laundromat* understand the quietness of existence and the psychological consequence of their forced isolation from other women.

Norman has revealed a woman's sensitive consciousness of self and an elementary feminism in her understanding of a relationship based on power. Sarah in *Sarah and Abraham*, is a woman who is alert of the social and psychological role that her husband requires her to act. In *The Secret Garden* however, the female protagonist struggles to break free of deceptions. She refuses to accommodate herself to stagnant norms that imprison her and struggles to create new forms and new reality. Her goals are endless but only through this she seeks to protect.

Norman dramatizes her feminist outlook around solid issues. For example, her characters express conflict about the double standard of living and raise questions

regarding the effects of woman's economic independence upon traditional sex roles, as well as upon her own identity and aspirations.

Norman reflects the social powers that shape women's activities, aspiration and values. She not only dramatizes the conflicts of a woman who has made commitments of being a wife and mother, but also searches her essential role and orders her in the right way. The best example is Arlene in *Getting Out*, who wants to start a new life but her past does not allow her to enter into a new life. The play ends on a hopeful note that Arlene will find a new way to get her identity and autonomy in the male dominated society.

Norman's women move nearer to a fully developed self. "They bond with their idealized other, thereby internalizing and incorporating images which, ultimately, contribute to a sense of wholeness" (Mehta 150). She focuses upon mother and daughter relationships, but all of Norman's descriptions show women with obviously established identities moving towards more integrated selves. All of her female characters reveal evidence of fragmented selves. They remain emotional invalids, always searching for someone else to supply the "missing link" (Mehta 150).

With Norman, women like Jessie and Thelma in *'night, Mother*; Arlene and Arlie in *Getting Out*; Mary and Lily in *The Secret Garden*; Trudy and Ginger in *Trudy Blue*; Sarah and Kitty in *Sarah and Abraham* and Alberta and Dee Dee in *Third & Oak: The Laundromat* have established their identities more firmly to move towards fully integrated selves.

As contemporary women have struggled to define themselves anew, they battle to break the patriarchal ties which bring them to a low status in society. However, they face a more complicated task of merely making themselves over into the fully unified selves they long to be. Psychically fragmented and often docile, they have been used to having society dictate their roles to them.

Marsha Norman provides a vehicle in theater for women's voices to be heard. By featuring female characters such as Jessie Cates in *'night, Mother* or Arlene in *Getting Out*, playwrights such as Marsha Norman enlighten women's psychic struggles in a powerful way. She is a realist who is keen on discovering the realities of life. She has a sensitive understanding of the problems of contemporary society. Her plays converse a humanistic vision of life. Norman is a conscious artist who holds definite views on human psyche and behaviour.

The emotional world of woman has been charmingly explored in Norman's plays such as *Trudy Blue* and *Sarah and Abraham*. Norman's protagonists are mostly women, although they have reached different stages in life, and are all delicate introvert "trapped in their own skins" (Mehta 151). Like Jessie in *'night, Mother*, their emotional sufferings sometimes lead to violent death in the end. Development of society is evaluated by the status of women in each society. Currently, these plays have proved to be the best medium of presenting the society which consistently records the changes in the status of women.

Marsha Norman deals with issues of female identity and shows female characters who are able to think of some measure of autonomy. Arlene in *Getting Out*, Dee Dee

Johnson in *The Third & Oak: Laundromat* and Jessie Cates in *'night, Mother* all confront their relationships with their mothers in one way or the other. Through this they come very closer to psychic cohesion. *Getting Out* deals with the female protagonist's powerful hopes and shows the variety of enclosures that suggest that feminine consciousness is constructed, maimed, reconstructed and finally validated in our society.

Norman has focussed on the jitters of a female writer in a male chauvinistic world. *Trudy Blue* reveals the psychic journey of Ginger a novelist who goes through stress in her professional life and a pathological misdiagnosis of cancer, tips the balance of normality. Mehta point out that the play came out of a turning point in Norman's own life and she realized that she was "not attached enough to my own life, I'm not living in a way I have respect for," (138) she said in a 2000 interview in Bomb magazine with April Gornik, an artist and friend. She adds, "It was the beginning of a serious exploration: how I really wanted to be living, what kind of work I wanted to do, how I wanted to relate to the people I was with, and what I was willing to do to get there" (138).

Norman states that each of her plays portrays the struggle of a person to save her and is an act of personal salvation. *Trudy Blue* reveals the protagonist's stream of consciousness, trying her best to think of the past, present and the future. The play explored the emotions and feelings and thoughts that are deeply embedded in the inner success of the sub-conscious. *Traveler in the Dark* explains about Glory's powerful feelings and emotions and how she finally gets autonomy and identity.

Marsha Norman's plays are an exploration of women's hunger for getting autonomy and identity in the male dominated world. They all have the self determination

to overcome the patriarchal society. Norman's character Jessie Cates, controls her life though she chooses death and triumphs over it. She proves that she is the propagator of life and she alone has the right to take decision in her life. Norman, with her exclusive contributions to the American theater, reflects on women's struggles to expand the limits of their lives.

Norman gives more importance to mother and daughter relationships in all her plays. Plays like *'night, Mother* and *Getting Out* prove to be powerful plays exploring the psyche of two women, mother and daughter, and showing a strong bond to each other. This exploration is done with sensitivity, sympathy, humour and artistic truthfulness.

Mehta observes that Norman's *'night, Mother, Getting Out, The Secret Garden, and Trudy Blue* show the image of loss in modern American drama at three levels: "the loss of physical space, loss of psychological space, and loss of moral space" (152). This study examines how Norman has modified and transformed the image of loss by focusing on the myth of the American dream, illusion versus reality, empowerment and the complexity of human relationships.

Loneliness, isolation and loss, all these are highly explored in Norman's plays. For example in *'night, Mother*, Jessie suffers from loneliness which leads her to commit suicide. Arlene in *Getting Out* has been affected by loss but finally she achieves her solidarity. Norman has perfectly illustrated loneliness, isolation and loss through these characters.

Norman's plays explain that women and men have conflicting expectations and understandings; their conversations are characterized by misunderstanding, manipulation

or hostility. In *Traveler in the Dark*, Sam and his wife Glory never get together. Even in *'night, Mother*, Jessie feels very sad because of her husband's action of divorce which is leading her to commit suicide.

Patriarchal set up poses a problem in the contemporary society. In *Getting Out*, an oppressive system of patriarchal beliefs and control is an inhibition to the women characters. While Arlie affirms her identity and is punished for her strength, Arlene and Ruby submit to the identities constructed for them by the society. Through the establishment of a supportive female community with Ruby, Arlene is able to redeem part of her former 'self' and come away with a fuller sense of identity. Through Arlene's union of her two selves as well as through her friendship with Ruby, Norman describes a beginning of female autonomy and suggests the hope for a future and more successful challenge to patriarchy.

In *'night, Mother*, the female characters are also controlled by a male-centered belief system, and while Thelma has satisfied herself with her silent existence, Jessie chooses to confront authority, take control of her life and kill herself. Through her suicide, she has gained her autonomy and identity. Ultimately, Norman communicates in both *'night, Mother* and *Getting Out* – the need for female solidarity to successfully confront patriarchy and preserve female autonomy. In her plays *Sarah and Abraham*, *Traveler in the Dark* and *Trudy Blue*, her approach to life is positive.

Norman explores emotional bonding in any relationship. *'night, Mother* proves to be a powerful play exploring the psyche of two women, mother and daughter, showing their bond between them, with no others but existence itself. Norman has portrayed

women who have firmly established their identities and who have moved towards more fully integrated selves.

There are only two women characters in the play *'night, Mother* but very brief and vivid sketches of three men are given through the eyes of these two women. Men are showed from two different angles. Mama views her husband critically and without love, presenting him as a dull person and who doesn't have any interest except in farming. Jessie recalls him affectionately as a gentleman, a caring person not only for his daughter but also his wife, his son and his sick cow. Cecil, Jessie's husband, is also viewed critically by Mama and lovingly by Jessie. Mama sees him as a selfish and unfaithful man because he doesn't have any concern for his wife Jessie. Ricky is viewed very kindly by Mama who hopes that he would have changed his way of life.

So one can easily understand that both plays represent a female community confronted with the restrictive ideals of patriarchal society. The subjects of the plays are love and meaning of life. According to Marsha Norman women have two alternatives in life; either to submit to patriarchal system and live in a lower state and accept the role of a servant and entertainer like Thelma, Ruby and Arlene; or to revolt against this unfair system attempting to prove her own identity and to have an autonomy over her own life. It is a difficult task woman should undergo, for in such a case she has to challenge the world around her and risk even her own life to win the state she desires. Arlene and Jessie represent the revolting women to get their identity and autonomy in the world.

The ending of all the plays of Norman are positive where her female characters have learned their problems and resolved it with their powerful courage. Mehta said that

some feminist oppose imbuing Norman with the title “feminist writer,” (143) but Norman speaks to those charge by asserting that “If it’s a feminist to care about women’s lives, yes, I’m a feminist writer” (143) Norman realizes that, “On the whole the American theatre, dominated by men, does not perceive women fighting for their lives as a central issue” (143). Norman appreciates herself for being born during a time when she can give women a voice on the American stage.

Norman also deals with the significance of ‘sharing’ and ‘confiding’ which influences a person during emotional crisis. In *Getting Out*, Arlene’s ‘sharing’ and ‘confiding’ of her predicament to Ruby and the priest has a positive influence. She comes to learn with Arlie to face difficulties in her life. And in *‘night, Mother*, Jessie’s sharing of her feelings with her mother Thelma came too late. According to Collins & Miller ‘sharing’ and ‘confiding’ reduces the stress in human beings.

Women have enormous courage and determination in Marsha Norman’s plays. According to Norman, it is an act of determination to challenge to become a professional playwright in a theatre dominated by male producers, directors, theatre critics and playwrights. Norman’s plays are characterized by hope that the characters who were once tragic in nature have stepped into the outside world battling all odds.

Marsha Norman has voiced important truths through her female characters. Other women playwrights are making their voices heard as well. Marsha Norman has a deep understanding of feminine psyche and feminine sensitivity. Her play concentrates on women’s journey to autonomous selfhood, meandering through various obstacles, without limiting itself to a particular approach. She is a humanist and a realist who

reflects women's struggles giving a new outlook to feminist issues. This is Norman's greatest contribution to the American theatre.

Marsha Norman does not like her to be labelled a feminist writer, yet she stands apart from other women writers in that she touches upon the inner psyche of the characters. This work is an approach towards women's attempt in liberating themselves from patriarchy and maintain solidarity among themselves. Attempts have been made to touch upon the feministic aspects in her plays in order to find out the various conventional and unconventional manners in which women experience the ambivalent nature of male domination. Norman has deftly portrayed how much her women are bound by the existing laws of patriarchy and the angst of such a woman writer is very well highlighted in the pages of her works.

Women's solidarity being the norm of the day, women though victimised and oppressed, exhibit certain feminist consciousness and an exploration of their 'selves' lead them to the revealing of their hidden identity subdued in the patriarchal culture. The outcome of all these suppressions through various negotiations yield to the unifying factor among themselves. The team spirit with singleness of purpose steers their lives towards solidarity.

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