



Care, Woman and Curbing of Desire: A Study of Mare pan ek ghar hoy(Wish, I too had a home)

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Renu Adlakha in her article “Kinship Destabilized! Disability and the Micropolitics of Care in Urban India” --- posits that care constitutes “the material and moral foundations of life and society” (1). Care comprises a range of practices which are integral to the “maintenance and reproduction of society” (Adlakha 2). The practices that characterize care work as a counterpoint to the selfcare, as sacrifice, compassion, selflessness are essentialized aspects of care which constitute and sustain various institutions such as family. Moreover,, care is used as an important trope in constructing the discourses of domesticity and womanhood. The present paper attempts to analyze the notion of womanhood and domesticity in the novella Marepanekghar hoy (Wish, I too had a home) by Gujarati writer Varsha Adalja. It further attempts to analyze how the ideologies of care practices inform the discourses of domesticity and womanhood, and how they are perpetuated by Patriarchy. The focus of the study is also on the analysis of the curbing of women’s desire in the name of sacrifice and how disability is devised as a “narrative prosthesis”(Mitchell and Snyder) to delve into meaning making process of women’s predicament. The paper brings to the fore the sense of abandonment felt by the woman protagonist as well as the disabled characters.

The novella Marepan ek ghar hoy (Wish, I too had a home) revolves around the central figure of the novella Leena’s life. Leena and Surekha are sisters and Leena is three years elder to her younger sister Surekha. Leena is a bright student and aspires to become a doctor. Meanwhile, Leena and other family members observe a kind of strangeness in Surekha’s behavior, as she starts throwing tantrums at an increased frequency. Surekha is taken to a doctor and is diagnosed with schizophrenia. The family is advised to take care of Surekha’s emotional wellbeing. As a result, every wish of Surekha is fulfilled at the cost of sacrifice from other family members.

As discussed earlier, Leena aspires to become a doctor. However, she has to sacrifice her desire (Adalja 23). She is bound by her duty towards Surekha. She becomes the victim of injustice at the hands of her own parents (36). There is no open discussion about Leena in the family, but an un-stated pact is formed between Leena’s parents. All Surekha’s wishes start getting fulfilled and in order to do so, everybody gives

up her or his desires. Her parents follow their pact so religiously that they even expect Leena to do the same (Adalja 87). Surekha's father is the only earning person and hence, the family is dependent on his meager salary. As Surekha is unable to attend the regular school, her parents decide to give her tuitions at home. As a result, Leena fails in paying the fees to complete her study. Once while Leena was reading late at night, she heard a conversation

between her parents regarding satisfying Surekha's needs even at the cost of Leena's aspirations. Her parents reach to a conclusion that it is important to pay attention to Surekha's education, as she is a weaker and poorer among the two. Leena has no inkling that this ordinary conversation would one day devour her like a python and destroy her existence completely. The narrator says: it is said that the mother loves her weaker child more and it is true in this case as well (90). As the novella progresses, we learn that looking after the small and great needs of Surekha also befalls on Leena, as the demise of their mother takes place. The acquired motherhood of Leena reiterates the metrics of sacrifice. In addition, Leena and Surekha's father suffers paralytic attack and he becomes disabled too. Thus, Leena becomes a care giver both for Surekha and their father and her role as a care-giver results into identity crisis for Leena.

The concept of care is primarily associated with womanhood. Many feminist scholars have brought to the fore the gendered dynamics underpinning the concept of care. Hilary

Graham is of the view that caring is often equated with the "processes engaged in by women" (Thomas 654). In her view, carer is an important facet of an "adult female role, intimately bound up with those of mother and wife" (Thomas 654). While analyzing the gendered nature of the very concept of care, Addlakha argues that gender is a "critical structuring principle" in the organization of care throughout the life cycle, as women are at the core in procreation, childcare, and the larger domestic sphere (1). Further, caring has become an essential trait of socially constructed woman's self (Thomas 654). In her book *Desire and domestic fiction* Nancy Armstrong argues that taking care of sick people and house management are considered as the primary duties of women (70). As caring has inextricably been linked to womanhood within the institutionalized space of home, care plays a significant and vital role in shaping the domesticity.

In the novella *Marepan ek ghar hoy* (Wish, I too Had a Home), Leena's domesticity consists of caring for her disabled father and her sister Surekha. As her father becomes disabled, he ceases to be a breadwinner for the family and his inability to work adds to the debility of the family. Subsequently, Leena becomes a breadwinner for the family. Moreover, she works relentlessly in order to save their house which is on mortgage. She finds it difficult to tackle Surekha's extreme anger and tantrums. Her every day becomes tedious. She experiences fatigue and exhaustion caused by the same

routine of doing household chores, providing care to her disabled father, dealing with Surekha's sudden an unexpected gush of anger and typing on the typewriter in the office. The typewriter emerges as a symbol of the mundaneness, as while typing on a typewriter in her office, she ponders on her feelings of disinterestedness and boredom, and compares her life to the keys of typewriter. The complex nexus of her duty to her father and Surekha, responsibility of catering to their needs and meeting the financial needs renders Leena lifeless. She loses friends, as she cannot join them for any celebration. She compares her life with that of Ramila, who hails from an affluent family. Ramila works only to kill time, whereas, Leena has to work as a clerk to run the family.

The only solace she finds is in Anupam, who works in Leena's office. Anupam is extremely extrovert and entertains every one with his talks. Leena is captivated by his talks and his outlook for life. She gradually falls in love with him. She waits eagerly for Anupam in the lunch break and that one hour time compensates for otherwise exhausting life. Leena's desire for Anupam revitalizes Leena and she starts taking out time to adorn herself. She wants Anupam to notice her. However, Anupam falls in love with Surekha, as he finds her bubbly and cheerful. He admires Surekha's paintings and loves to spend time with her. Leena learns about Anupam's fondness for Surekha and Leena is completely scattered. Anupam's love for Surekha works as a panacea for Surekha's illness. Anupam does not learn Surekha's illness. Surekha and Anupam

eventually get married and Leena is abandoned. Thus, care metrics form Leena's domesticity. However, this domesticity does not provide her a sense of fulfilment. The institutionalized space of family and the private domain not only takes away the agency from her, but foster the discourse of sacrifice mired in the gendered nature of care. As Leena after Surekha and Anupam's wedding thinks:

“This house, this garden, all belonged to her. Like a son, without complaints, she had used her intellect and hard work to shoulder the burden of this entire house. But what did she get in return? Did Bapu ever realize what she had done? Did he know that Surekha loved her Anupam, was going out with him and was nurturing sweet dreams of leading a life with him?” (Amin 168).

The above quote describes Leena's anguish and intense pain. Despite fulfilling all her homely responsibilities and duty, she is deprived of a normative domestic life. She longs for a lover, a husband, a partner, but is left abandoned. She could neither realize her dream of becoming a doctor, nor could she marry a person of her choice and initiate a family.

It should be noted that Leena throughout the novella, undergoes a conflict, a conflict between her duty and desire. She loves her sister dearly. However, she feels exhausted taking care of her. She at times is disgusted with Surekha. However, Surekha's innocent face calms her down. The following lines from the novella exhibit Leena's multiple voices:

"This was the same Surekha, the one whom she still could not decide whether she loved or hated. Today

Leena realised that she hated her, hated her intensely" (Amin 130).

She considers Surekha as the biggest impediment in her way of the fulfilment of her desires. She thinks:

"Surekha is stuck to her life like a leech that would not be pulled until she sucks Leena's blood" (AAdalja 125).

While commenting on the conflict faced by women between duty and desire, Kundanika Kapadia writes:

"At one moment whom she hates the other moment she loves. She will sacrifice her life for the one against whom she wishes to fight" (101). Leena oscillates between her ideal self that wants to love Surekha and the real self that ruthlessly hates Surekha. Ila Arab Mehta is of the view that the present novella is a struggle between Leena and Surekha. Infact, between the ideal and the real selves residing in Leena herself. According to her

Leena's emotions blow hot and cold between her two split selves one that ever loves her sister Surekha and is gentle and compassionate to her and the other that hates her, for being a burden on her (Adalja 82).

Leena's desires are curbed by a societal voice that erases Leena's femininity by equating her

with a man. Leena is suffocated by this strategic cancelation of her desires, as the narrator says: "she disliked all those who praised her for efficiently bearing the burden of the family; the schizophrenic sister and paralytic father" (83). Moreover her relatives and neighbors also compare her capacity with that of an eagle. Like an eagle, she by stretching her wings has sheltered the whole house' (Adalja 85). Thus, the assumed authority by the society reiterates the discourse of sacrifice and by celebrating her identity of a care-giver, the societal voice systematically curbs her desires.

It is to be noted that disability in the novella has been devised as a "narrative prosthesis"(Mitchel and Snyder).Narrative prosthesis" implies discursive dependency of literature upon disability (1-35). In Mitchel and Snyder's view, to prothesise is to compensate for a body which is lacking, which is not functional or which is inappropriately functional (7). However, prosthesis always carries an "ideological aberrant 8). Narrative prosthesis institutes body within the zone of tolerable and if disability is too far to conform to the norms, it aims at erasing the difference (Mitchell and Snyder 8). The novella *MarePan ek ghar hoy* (Wish I Too Had a Home) is discursively dependent on disability. The characterization of intellectually challenged Surekha and her disabled father initiates the process of comprehending the plight of a woman protagonist Leena. It can be argued that Surekha's rage and anger voice Leena's oppressed self. The ideal self of Leena which is bound by duty as a care-giver is silenced by the

tactics of care such as affection and sacrifice. However, Surekha's rage allows Leena's silence to break. Moreover, the novella systematically renders Surekha invisible by sending Surekha to an asylum. It first compensates for Surekha's lack by allowing her to fulfil her desire of falling in love and getting married to Anupam. By doing so, it renders Surekha's disability tolerable, as Anupam's love tames Surekha's anger. However, the novella reaches its resolution by rendering Surekha invisible and restoring Leena's ideal domesticity. Moreover, Leena's father's disability accentuates the structural debility caused by the urban space, as setting of the novella is city. Thus, disability emerges as an important trope to delve into a complex entanglement of gender and the challenges thrown by the urban space.

To conclude, the paper through the analysis of the novella *Marepan ek ghar hoy (Wish, I Too Had a Home)* brought to the fore the gendered nature of care. By delving into the narrative of sacrifice of Leena, the paper analysed how the discourse of care is informed by the metrics of sacrifice. It further studied how the narrative of sacrifice discursively curbed Leena's desire. It further brought out how disability is used as a "narrative prosthesis" in order to bring out woman's plight and comprehend the complexities of an urban life.

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