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**The Impact of the English Women Novelists on Kajal Oza Vaidya's
Novel *Krishnayan* (2006)**

Dr. Kamal Mehta

Professor,

Department of English & Comparative Literary Studies,

Saurashtra University, Rajkot



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Kajal Oza Vidya is a very popular Gujarat writer, particularly, among the youths. She has written many novels, short stories, plays, poems, essays etc. She takes up domestic and social issues in her works. Man, woman, love, marriage, life, human relations and their nature today in the society etc. happen to be her major concerns. She has also dealt with the issues of the young generation ladies like their living of the life between the husband on the one hand and the lover on the other, the pain of the life being lived under social and personally emotional compulsions, falling in love at a very late stage in life and the resulting dilemma as well as its impact, their quest for love, two ladies in love with the same man, and women in search of their identity in spiritual sense etc. She provides a voice and idiom to the entire generation of youths of the contemporary time on these issues. She has, in this endeavour, also tried to recast quite fictionally some prominent and debatable mythological characters in the light of new thinking. She has also tried to appropriate them in new contexts. In short, her novels reconstruct the common experiences of life and its challenges in the present times.

Among her many popular works, *Krushnayan* (2006) occupies a very prominent place. It has been translated in many other languages including English. In this novel, she deals with four major characters of Bharatiya *vanmay*: Krishna, Rukmini, Draupadi and Radha. She has appropriated them in the light of the modern ideational contexts and that has made them interesting and perhaps appealing to the new generation of youths. Of course, her appropriation alters the basic personalities of these characters also. This paper intends to examine and critically assess the same.

The novelist has put the dilemmas and questions of the contemporary individuals in the personalities of these mythological characters. She has herself confessed in her 'Preface' to the novel that whatever she has written has no scriptural base. She also states that her narrative has nothing to do with history, facts or the researches done on Krishna (7) She further adds that it is the story which has emerged in her own mind and she has herself lived and experienced the life presented in the novel. (7) She states that the Krishna of the novel is her own Krishna as imagined by herself. (7)

This novel is very relevant for discussion because the story and the ideas which emerge in the course of the narrative do show a very powerful impact of the novels and the views and concerns of and about women in the English women novelists, critics and thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries.



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This novel has impressed the readers who happen to be the youths and who are not aware of the characters as they are portrayed in *The Mahabharata*, *Srimad Bhagvatam* or *Harivamsham*. They are just very happy to see that the great characters of mythic stature feel and think like themselves. Naturally, they are likeable to them. Thus, though the novel is basically the story of Krishna, it is specifically about the Krishna as he exists in the minds of various women in the text with focus on Rukmini, Draupadi and Radha. These three major women characters in the novel are allegorically the contemporary women. The author has portrayed her women and their concerns as women in different roles in the society. Also, the author herself in the various manifestations of the woman today is represented in these three as well as other minor women characters like Satyabhama, Yashoda, Devaki, Shyama etc. The novel reveals various facets and concerns of women in the present contexts.

The novel primarily concentrates on Krishna's relationship with these three women i.e. Rukmini who represents a wife, Draupadi who stands for a friend from the other gender and Radha, a beloved. Krishna is portrayed as he exists in the hearts and consciousness of these three women characters and also as he interacts with them. As they are different manifestations of the author herself, she states that it is "her own Krishnayan", i.e. the story of Krishna as seen from her own lenses. She goes further and states that the Krishna in the novel is neither any Yogeshwar, Giridhari, the blower of the Panchjanya, or the preacher of Gita; rather he is the one who can join us in our morning walk and talk to us about the philosophy of life or the one who sits with us for coffee on the table or who remains with us in all our daily and routine activities.

It is true that these three women play a very crucial role in the life of Krishna. However, there are other women also in his life who too play significant roles in his life. The author has, however, avoided their roles and perspectives on Krishna, because she rightly thinks that the three relationships of the woman i.e. of the wife, friend and beloved are voluntarily chosen by the individual. The other relationships i.e. the mother, sister or daughter etc. are given by nature. In other words, they are inherited and the individual has no role in choosing them. Hence, she has not explored them in the novel. The three relationships narrativized here are actually chosen, nurtured and lived by the individual oneself and hence how does one handle them becomes very relevant and interesting in assessing and understanding the individual.

In the feminist literary works, by and large, the authors explore women in different situations and crises. In other words, they remain woman-centric, depicting her in different hues and colors. However, in this novel, the author has explored with focus on the character and personality of Krishna, a man, as the title of the



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www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

novel itself suggests. Still, it is not a contradiction, because quite creatively, it depicts from different angles a man as desired by women either as a husband, friend, lover or all in one simultaneously. In other words, the novel presents the picture of a lovable and admirable man from feminine perspective. All the three women characters have their own complains also against him, yet all of them love him so much that they never desire to lose him from their lives. In spite of some reservations, they are fully aware that it was he who allowed them to flourish and progress in life and attain their own identities.

The author has chosen the last couple of days from the life of Krishna to portray in the novel. Particularly, she has depicted what is going on in the mind of Krishna when he was already injured fatally by the hunter and was awaiting his final departure from the earth. At that time, these three women come again and again in his memories and those moments spent with them are lived again by him. This helps the readers see the nature of his relationship with that person and what Krishna felt for the person then. At the same time, these three women are portrayed as passing through a deep unease to meet him and see him, as they realize telepathically that they are going to lose him for ever, because he is likely to bid final good bye to the world. And that is unbearable for them. Through these reminiscences, the author also reveals some complex aspects of these relationships which have remained unexplored and unexpressed in mythology, in the view of the author.

All the four individuals are portrayed as common human beings like us who have to make compromises with the circumstances and pave the way ahead. Of course, many of these modifications in their personalities are absolutely unconvincing and far removed from the facts as they occur in the original sources of them. This makes the readers assume that the author has failed to make the readers accept her appropriated reality as convincing and admittable. The author thinks that she has done a great service to the portrait of Lord Krishna by depicting him thus, but actually she has rejected the version of Ved Vyas and also the memories of millions of scholars of *Mahabharata* etc. by depicting Krishna as fallible and often confused as well as uncertain of his decisions and hence, questioning his past deeds. A few of the matters are so much away from the source texts that they seem to be subverting the images of these characters who have been in the memories of the people for centuries.

Literary appropriation is possible where there is a scope for seeing the matter alternatively. For example, the Sanskrit playwright Bhasha could do it in *Urubhangam* and project Duryodhana as a likable and deserving the readers' sympathy and appreciation in the given context of the text without twisting the facts of the



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Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

source text and convincing the spectators to appreciate his own foregrounding and backgrounding of the source text. The appropriation has to be artistic and acceptable to the readers. The appropriation is successful, if the readers accept the new version also as probable reality. Somehow, that does not happen in this novel. It is very difficult to be convinced of the characters of Krishna, Rukmini and Draupadi as portrayed in the novel. It can be described as the authorial failure in projecting these characters as intended by the novelist. In over-enthusiasm to portray her favourite character of Krishna more lovable to youths, she has, in fact, done a lot of injustice to Krishna's character. It has subverted the image of Krishna that has existed for centuries in the minds of the scholars of *Mahabharata* and other texts as well as the common lovers of Krishna.

The author has not been able to relate the things as probable in the characters of the three women. She has shown their dissatisfaction and anger on Krishna on the one hand and on the other hand, they feel a very strong bond of love for him. This is due to her strong aspiration to be popular among the readers, because these days there is a tendency to show the mistakes made by the respectable characters in given situations as purely acceptable in the name of human tendencies. In ancient texts, even if the giant characters are shown with some human errors, the intention is to alert the humanity against such weakness. It occurs as a warning to common men that they should be alert and not fall a victim to them, because even giants have also been trapped into them and they have invited problems for themselves and the society.

The ancient texts never intended to project human weakness as universal and hence not to be either worried about or feel shy for. The writings of some authors in the contemporary time, on the other hand, not only condone them but indirectly promote them also. They think that that is how they can project themselves as progressive in thinking. The readers who do not know these characters as they exist in the source texts, may like and appreciate this type of Krishna and the three women, as they are able to associate and relate themselves with them more closely. But, at the same time, no matured author would cause so much of damage to the personality and character of Krishna, who is known in Indian literatures and philosophical/spiritual descriptions as a *Purna Purushottam* (A complete man among the best men). Many of the liberties with the source texts taken by the author here are too much and unjustifiable.

The novelist's retaining of the same context and characters and changing of the content in such a manner alters the images of these characters irrationally and proves this literary liberty to be unfair and unacceptable. The narrations in the novel change the image of Krishna and others into typically ordinary,



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fallible and vulnerable characters i.e. typically human as we understand humans today. Specifically, when the great height and stature of these characters are overlooked, it is literarily not right. Authors do have a right to question the biggest characters and their actions also, but for that there should be some ground. Unfortunately, there is nothing of that sort here. Appropriation does not aim at changing the facts about the historical or mythological characters in such a manner that the rasa experience that emanates from them changes out and out. The writer can change the fundamental character of the persona, but in that case, the alteration has to be acceptable and convincing. In this novel, both the things are missing in the authorial appropriation of the existing narratives.

The author has created a new fictional ground and generated new questions. Which Krishna would the readers remember whether of *Mahabharata* etc which they haven't read or *Krushnayan*, because they have read it? How many readers are aware of Krishna as he exists in the original sources is also an issue. It is true that people would accept what they read and feel convinced of. If they have not read the original at all, they will accept the version of the novel as authentic. It would be damaging (in cultural sense), because they will carry this new image of Krishna in their minds and would never be able to see the grandness of the character that he had been and the ideals that he stood for and practised in his life. They would be missing for ever to witness the amazingly unprecedented grand character and his ideas and thoughts, representing the height of personal stature as understood and represented by Ved Vyas.

Valmiki and Ved Vyas happen to have an exceptionally unique place in Indian literature. They have influenced almost all the Indian writers of all the genres either directly or indirectly as well as knowingly or unknowingly in terms of themes, style, and vision. There is hardly any author in India who has not been influenced by either both or one of these two great writers. One would find a diversity of responses, interpretations and appropriation of these two writers in the new texts written over time. It would not be wrong to state that these two great writers are found in almost all the major works by any major writer, if one investigates into intertextuality in these texts. The reason for this is that Vyas and Valmiki have become the part of collective unconscious in India and hence its literatures.

Kajal Oza Vaidya has been overtly influenced by Ved Vyas. Her reception of him is worth analysis with reference to her novel *Krushnayan*.



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Kajal Oza Vaidya, as she mentions in her 'Preface', has great admiration and appreciation for Krishna because he is good, approachable and having tremendous empathy/compassion/tuning with common people and their concerns. So, she neither parodies, nor ironizes, but indulges in socio-psychological criticism by exploring and bringing out the hidden and unknown recesses of the psyches of these characters and thus show that they also thought and felt the way the contemporary youths do. She does not aim at elevating the readers' sensibilities to the level of these characters (in terms of their complexities), but bringing these characters to the level of the contemporary generations (in simplistic terms) of youths. However, in that endeavor of her, she seems to have altered the very fundamental aspects of the personalities of these characters. Further in doing so, she hasn't been successful in convincing the readers of her projection, as there are conflicting trends in these characters. *Vakrata* is welcome in literary writings, but that has to be convincing to those who know the domain of knowledge well. In other words, one has to convince those who are in knowledge of the things being narrated. (in Kuntak's terms *tadvidahlaadkaarini*)

All the three women in the novel have very high regards or true love for Krishna. They feel a very strong bond with him. At the last phase of his life, they feel like meeting him and making him free from his sense of any responsibility to themselves, so that he can die peacefully.

Krishna is lying fatally injured by an arrow. He has realized that his last moments are not far. Before his death, in such a situation, so many memories of these women come back to his mind and we see him experiencing great difficulties in being free from his bond to his near and dear ones (21) The novel depicts him doubting and reviewing his decision of taking all the Yadavas to Prabhaskshetra for the *Yadavasthali* i.e. severe infighting among themselves (76). He feels that people trusted him and hence followed his instructions. The question troubling him then was whether he was right or not. When the war of Kurukshetra took place, the Pandavas, particularly Arjuna, had put trust on him. But then, was the Dharma really victorious? Whether anyone was able to celebrate the victory? Whether Adharma was really defeated? These are some of his questions and doubts. (76) The author calls the *Yadavasthali* as the second 'Kurukshetra' for Krishna. However, this time, this charioteer of Arjuna was himself shaken from within due to his own doubts and questions about the future of the infighting among the Yadava warriors leading to huge self-massacre. The massacre has already taken place. Krishna himself is also to die along with thousands of other Yadavas. In the state of fatal injury, Krishna is looking at his life and remembering his relationships and emotional bond with the three women – Rukmini, Draupadi and Radha. The novelist uses the metaphor of the meeting of the three women and Krishna as the meeting of the three rivers with the ocean in



Prabhaspatan. The rivers Kapila, Hiranya and Saraswati stand respectively for Rukmini, Draupadi and Radha, while Lord Krishna stands for the ocean. In Prabhaspatan (Somanath) these three rivers really meet and then merge into the Ocean there.

Rukmini:

Rukmini had great admiration and love for Krishna. When she was asked by her father and brother to choose Shishupal as her husband in her *swayamvar*, she wrote a letter to Krishna for help and saving her from the humiliation of marrying someone whom she disliked. Krishna comes to her rescue and then he marries her. She was very glad then to have married a man of her dreams and of great merits and was emotionally overwhelmed on that day. (33) To the surprise of the readers, she then states that, in reality, her married life was always full of her eternal waiting for Krishna, resulting into disappointment on her part. She also adds that everyone knew about it. (32)

Right from the first night of their marriage till that night, in spite of her penance, Rukmini states that she had not gained 'her god', meaning Krishna. (34) She had realized that her husband, lover or god did not belong to herself alone. He first belonged to others and then, if something got left, to her. She also realized that he was ready to serve all in the same way as he had helped her. Hence, she always had the complaint, "When had he time, even for a second, for me, my feelings, my desires, my dreams" (35) She often thought why people used to utter Radha-Krishna and not Rukmini-Krishna, even though she was the main queen of him. The author also narrates that even Krishna had realized it. Even on that day, lying injured under the tree, those eyes of Rukmini, having the feeling of having been abandoned and cheated again comes in front of the closed eyes of Krishna. (36) She used to feel jealous of Radha. She had a question in her mind as to who and what was she after all? What was her place in the life of Krishna? She herself was the main queen of Dwarika. She used to sit on the throne of Dwarika, but she was not the one who can be called so dear to Krishna (*Krishnapriya*), because that fortunate person was Radha. She was neither even the friend (*sakhi*) of him, because that coveted place was occupied by Draupadi. Even the wife or queen who would often get displeased and angry and then whom Krishna would try to win back and please, was Satyabhama and not herself. She was not even Kubja who would become beautiful with the touch of Krishna. She was not Shibya or Rohini also. Then, who was she? This was the question in her mind. (37)



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Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

When Krishna decides to go to Prabhas region, Rukmini finds him psychologically disturbed and in some unease. She asks him the reason also, but he does not tell her anything. Rather, he calls Uddhav and tells him something. Rukmini feels pained as to what was it that he could not share with herself but could convey to Uddhav. She experiences the feeling of possessiveness rising in her heart. However, when she goes close to him and he looks into her eyes, she feels that he was not the same whom she had married or whom she had loved so much and spent so much of her intimate time with. She fails to know who was he then. (42) And then when the time of departure from the palace comes and Krishna puts his hand on her head, all her frustration, anger and wailing subside and she excuses everything and utters in a mild voice “*Twadiyamasti....*”.

Krishna is also surprised. He feels that he had failed to understand her also the way he had failed to understand Draupadi. He tries to know sincerely whether he had ever tried enough to satisfy their expectations and feelings. He realizes that only women can bring their heart and mind under their control and put their paramount duty (*swadharma*) into practice. Only they have the skill (ability) of excusing (others), accepting (the reality), doing things naturally and loving the lover. (54) He realizes that only they can accept whole heartedly utter pain and give birth to life.

When Rukmini bids last adieu in an emotionally charged atmosphere, she seeks permission to demand something from Krishna. Krishna tells her that he has given everything to her- his body, soul.... And feels surprised that still something is left out. She does not utter but conveys in a tone of complaint through her tears that he has never given his mind (*mana*) to her, because he had never shared his agonies, pains, worries and requirements with her. Krishna tries to pacify her but it was not possible. He had for the first time found it difficult to face her eyes. (57) The author has put the situations and sentiments which often occur in married life of any person. Such moments of answerlessness, i.e. one willing to say something but the words failing to communicate, arise in the life of anyone. The inexplicable compromises made with oneself and one's better-half get communicated without words. Krishna too is not able to see in to the eyes of Rukmini at that moment of his ultimate departure from his palace and he departs from her with a heavy heart.

The author narrates an incident very briefly which takes us into the mind of Rukmini. Krishna has just brought another queen, Satyabhama. She is being given a grand reception and welcome by the mother Devaki. The whole of Dwarika is in the mood of celebration, but at that time, the palace of Rukmini is in total darkness. Only one lamp is burning and the queen Rukmini is sitting sad with red swollen eyes due to



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www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

her weeping for a long time. Her ornaments are lying scattered all over. She is experiencing then that her life in Dwarika was futile, as there was none whom she could belong. “The lover, trusting whom she had left her home and parents and come to Dwarika to stay with, had today become somebody else’s.” (110) It is further narrated that she was feeling intense anger resulting from her frustration and sorrow on her ill-fate.” (110)

This kind of response from a woman is quite convincing in the contemporary context, but making those feelings felt by Rukmini also in the same fashion is not convincing. She would not respond to this extent that she would be in utter frustration to the level of losing interest in life itself. The kings used to marry many times then. Rukmini cannot be unaware of it. Satyabhama was not the first queen whom Krishna married after his marriage with Rukmini. The author on the one hand retains the ancient context, but, on the other hand, puts modern ideas in the minds of the characters, which is unrealistic and improbable, because one can’t take up only a part of the context only. It is not that the lover Krishna had betrayed her and gone to live with someone else. The author’s narration conveys the matter that way. Further, when Krishna comes to win her back and explain to her everything, she tells him that she wants to return to Kundinpur, her parental town and, if not possible, she would not mind dying in the ocean of Dwarika also. (114) When discussion between the two goes further, she asks Krishna to stay in her own palace that night, if he really loved her so much. (115) The anger that a woman would feel in such a situation is quite realistically described, but in the given context of the novel that does not seem probable. Of course, she is pleased over in the end and she feels sorry also and then the lights are reignited all over the palace for celebration. It implies immature or impulsive behavior on the part of Rukmini, though the author has portrayed her as a scholar, mature and seasoned woman. Krishna used to discuss complex political crises with her and seek her guidance. Such a behavior of her does not match with the other qualities put in her by the author.

Further, a little ahead in the novel, it is narrated that both Krishna and Rukmini were in discussion over how to stop the War. She offers a suggestion also. In the light of her behavior in the case of Krishna’s marriage with Satyabhama, it is difficult to reconcile her giving such a suggestion to Krishna to stop the War. She suggests that Draupadi should go and request Karna not to fight on behalf of the Kauravas and further she should accept him as her sixth husband (121). Rukmini does not mind taking advantage of Karna’s strong emotional attraction for Draupadi as a political tool. Karna was also married and she also knew that Draupadi would never agree to do so, but she is sure that Draupadi would not deny, if the proposal is from Krishna. This is a strong contradiction in the novel with regard to Rukmini’s personality. Or, it stands for double standards on her part which is also not true. Her personality in this novel is described as the very



personification of care, love, maturity and scholarship. (216) Such an incident contradicts with such an overall assessment of her individuality by the novelist herself.

Rukmini has another serious complaint against Krishna that, in their long married life, they could never connect with each other and in her communication with him, she could never reach his soul. She always felt that whenever he was with her, actually, he was never fully or exclusively with her. He was always in fragments. Even while he was in her embrace, he was mentally occupied with others and their problems. She levels a charge that they were never alone, when together. She also adds that he could never give her what she wanted. Painfully, she says that she was never interested in his worldly or material prosperities; she rather wanted to dissolve herself into him and be one with him, but that never happened. She did not mind his coming to her palace sometimes only, but then, whenever he did, she wanted him to be completely with her alone. She also asks him if that expectation of hers was wrong. Krishna feels sad due to his failure in doing so and sympathizes with not only her but the entire class of women for their very simple aspirations and their not getting fulfilled. (217-8)

Krishna has a very nice conversation with her and he succeeds in convincing her that they had a very good life together and she had been successful in becoming an ideal wife. Krishna acknowledges that she had given him a blissful life. Rukmini also then realizes that Krishna was never at fault because he was a different type of man. He never looked at women as objects or merely bodies for pleasure. He had become a true friend to her and fulfilled the promises given in *sapt padi* at the time of marriage. She realizes her misunderstanding about or ignorance of the conduct of Krishna. And then, she expresses her desire to find Krishna only as her husband in next births. (223)

Draupadi

The author has given more space to Draupadi than to any other woman in the novel. It is Draupadi perhaps who reveals Krishna more than anyone else in the novel. She also thinks of Krishna as the most appealing character and personality.

Krishna recollects that Draupadi had once told him that she felt excited whenever she felt like asking him if he had ever loved and desired her even for a moment? She had also felt like asking him about her place in his life? She, of course, had not expected him to reply to that then, because she had not yet really asked that question to him. (27) Nevertheless, Krishna had replied even then that she was not required to ask it to him,



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but rather to her own self and then she would have got the real answer also, because he and her mind were not two separate things.

Draupadi, one night, all of a sudden, tells Arjun to take her to Krishna immediately then himself (85), because she felt that he was calling her. She always took him not as a god but as a man who was taller and higher than others. She also adds that whatever she was it was because of him only. (87) Arjun feels that the one who had remained composed in the worst situations, including the deaths of her five sons, was very disturbed at that time, because she felt that Krishna was in deep pain and hence she was highly worried and impatient to see him.

The novel also narrates that Draupadi had some differences with Krishna. For example, she always felt that Krishna knew that she loved him so much and yet he had married her off to Arjun and later distributed her among the five Pandavas to keep them together. (100) Actually, Draupadi wanted every other prince to fail in piercing the fish and then Krishna to accomplish the target, so that she would marry him (101). Because she felt that Karna might succeed in the test, she had addressed him as *Sutaputra* and stopped him from participation. She, at the same time, is also depicted as experiencing that Krishna had participated and shared every pain of hers equally and deeply.

She recollects the incident when Arjun had brought Subhadra as his wife. Draupadi had felt hurt and she was also upset with Krishna. She was of the opinion that Krishna had made Arjun kidnap Subhadra and thus impose his sister on herself. She had then failed to understand that the one who used to experience deeply all her feelings, did not understand what would happen to her in that situation. She was hurt more that the entire conspiracy was hatched behind her.

Draupadi also recollects how he then had asked her not to link everything with her self-respect. (104) Krishna had then given his arguments that he also had more than one queen. A man did not need or expect merely youth and beauty of the woman. He explains to her that though he had several queens, the place of Rukmini was unshaken and firm in his life. Secondly, though Rukmini was an essential and inseparable aspect of his life, Radha was also never away from his heart. Then he had asked her, if he was doing injustice to Rukmini and cheating Radha. When he told her that Subhadra would not take away anything from her, but rather will remain dedicated and subservient to Arjuna, she had asked him why should a woman remain dedicated and slave to her husband to gain his love.



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Draupadi had then added, typically like a modern feminist, whether the woman who struggled for her identity and individuality and who questioned the questionable, was worth loving or not. Also, whether she deserved the love of man or not? Krishna had then answered that only that type of lady, who struggles for identity or individuality and questions the questionable is truly the *sahdharmacharini* (life partner). She herself was that type of lady and hence deserved to be on the throne with her husband king and be addressed as the empress. (106) When he described, one after the other qualities of her, she had started weeping and deploring over her fate. She disliked the fire and brightness of herself. Krishna had made her convinced that only she was the fire personified and Subhadra was just a firewood to keep her ignited and burning. He had thus suggested to her that Subhadra would just give new life and longevity to her. Convinced then, she had accepted her.

The novel also narrates the incident when Draupadi had met Krishna for the first time, when he had been a guest to her father, Drupad. Since then, she had started feeling a great attraction for him. She had also strongly wished that he participated in her *swayamvar* and married her. However, that did not happen. When Arjun came with the garland of marriage, she had felt that Krishna had rejected her. She had felt hurt that Krishna had played with herself.

Again, on the eve of the great war of Kurukshetra, when Krishna asks everyone to frankly say about themselves, she feels the same hesitation and shyness to talk about herself that she had felt when she had met Krishna for the first time. Initially, she denies to say anything because she was not going into the battlefield herself, but Krishna describes her to be the cause of the war as well as its solution. (Actually, for Ved Vyas, the restoring and destroying of dharma and-adharma respectively was the cause of the great war) She narrates, on his insistence, what was there in her mind. She mentions that when all her five husbands were watching her being humiliated in the worst condition, she sought help from Krishna. Her relationship of trust and distrust with Krishna is described by Draupadi as that of inhaling and exhaling. She acknowledges the immense contribution of Krishna to all of them. She further prays also that that type of support would always be sought from him in all births. She says that she was not pained so much because she was humiliated in the court by the Kuru prince, but for the fact that her husbands were responsible for her insult. She considers the Pandavas to be solely responsible for the tragic event, which too is goes very far from the source texts.



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It is very strange that she does not consider Duryodhan and his allies at all responsible for it. This is typically modern and so-called-logic-based poor argument and assessment of a big happening. It is not a matured assessment of a '*pragnavan*' scholar or writer (here Draupadi of course who was considered very intelligent otherwise). The author puts the great heroine like Draupadi into the category of immature and typically ordinary female who has no access to either *shashtras* or deeper understanding of the truth involved in an event. Ved Vyas has not belittled Draupadi by showing her to be so ordinary and superficial in her assessment of reality. She is rather shown as having a great emotional and intellectual stature. Thus, it is a contradiction in Draupadi's character which fails to convince the readers. Draupadi's own different behavioral patterns and thinking seem quite ill-matching within the text too.

Author also alters the dates of the War and the incident of Draupadi tearing her cloth and tying a bandage on the finger of Krishna when he was injured. The novelist has shown Krishna slicing fruits and getting injured, rather than getting injured while using his *Sudarshanchakra* on Shishupal. In order to show Krishna like contemporary men, the author seems to have imagined him as slicing vegetables and fruits. (158) The novelist relates this incident with the incident of the royal court of Dhritrashtra when Krishna supplied cloth to her and protected her honor. In order to show that Draupadi can ask very intelligent and subtle questions to individuals and society, she has put some questions on her tongue here too, but some of them are quite irrelevant and lacking in substance. For example, she asks why can't a woman love more than one person? She is upset that the society does not ask such a question to a mother who loves her two sons equally, but when a woman shows same love for two men or her two husbands, the society becomes orthodox? (161) Such arguments bring down the emotional and intellectual height of Draupadi. She is not so foolish that she would not understand the irrelevant comparison here.

Towards the end of the novel, Draupadi is shown as seeing the three rivers of sweet water getting merged into the ocean and turning salty themselves also. Some questions arise in her mind then like why can't women resist dissolving their identities into the identities of men/husbands? Why she has to dissolve all her aspirations, expectations and feelings into those of men and be lost in his identity? Doesn't she have a *mana* (mind) of her own? Why is she not allowed to express/articulate the same. These are some of the questions which emerge in the minds of the heroines of the English women novelists.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

The height and the depth of these questions of women remain limited in scope in the English novels and they do not go beyond that boundary, the way it goes in the classical Sanskrit texts of Vyas and Valmiki. Though this novel of Kajal Vaidya is based on the *Mahabharata* story to a larger extent, the height and depth of the thinking of these great women remain very ordinary in the novel.

In Draupadi's last meeting with Krishna in the novel, the author narrates the communication between the two. Krishna tells her that he always loved her as a person or rather as his own self and not anybody else outside him or even as a woman. However, Draupadi replies to him that she always loved him and desired him right from her first meeting. She wanted him to be victorious in the *Swayamvar* and marry her, but he left her to struggle for survival in the world of imperfections and incompleteness all alone (204).

The author also shows Krishna's philosophy and manifestation of love as typically spiritual in nature. He did not think of it as husbandhood or wifehood. Marriage was not the necessary outcome of love for him. So, love was never a monodirectional flow. Rather it was the prayer for the betterment of the beloved and her well-being, self-respect and happiness. Touching her or living with her was never a part of his love for her. It was never essential for his love to stay under the same roof with the beloved. He advises her to separate the love and the body. Krishna is not a body but an idea and he expects her also to think of that to attain completeness and perfection of love. And then, he shows that Draupati realizes everything and also feels the greatest moment of her life. It is the moment of really experiencing her gaining of him. (205-6) Then she bids him her last adieu. Also, she hopes to meet him again in another birth. She feels that her love would bring him back on the earth again one day. Krishna asks her to be free from that *moha*, but she says that she does not have to, because she is a human being. And then Krishna utters that he is also not a god and it was she alone who did not allow him to be a god. (206)

Radha

The character of Radha is a very unique character in Indian culture. The author has also picked her up in this novel, because Krishna's character cannot be complete without her. Although, Radha as a character is completely absent in *Mahabharat*. (her character is described elaborately in *Shrimad Bhagvat*). The way Rukmini and Draupadi in person meet Krishna during his last minutes, Radha does not. Krishna needs her permission also to make his final departure. Of course, she does it from Gokul itself. Both of them communicate for long, but not in person the way he does with the other two women. They communicate



through their telepathies, which is very symbolic.

The author has created a fictional character called Shubhra alias Shyama, who is made the daughter-in-law of Radha. Through very frank and personal interactions between the two, the mind of Radha is revealed in the novel. The novelist begins by referring to a quarrel between Shubhra and her husband, leading her to get upset and in that state sitting outside all alone till very late night. And then Radha goes to her and expresses her love and compassion for her. This leads to her crying freely in Radha's lap and asking a question to her, "O mother, is it a crime to love?" (171) Then, Radha also has tears in her eyes and that is the beginning of a strong bond between the two ladies, who forget their social relationship and talk as two women only. Radha states that in the world, it is not necessary that the lover is always the husband. She adds that the more painful fact is that the husband is not always a lover. (171)

The ancient character is put in a different psychological context with new questions. Shubhra feels that she has been carrying out all her duties towards the husband and the family sincerely and she has never given anyone a chance for complaint. If after fulfilling all duties, her mind (*mana*) goes to someone, because she has no control over her *mana*, what can she do? (171) Then both discuss how love is experienced by men and women differently. Radha then gives her a new name, Shyama. Shubhra realizes while interaction that Radha was also disturbed within. She asks also, if someone was occurring in her memories (Shubhra had already heard many stories about Radha and Krishna from others). This leads her to cry with deep sobs. It also leads to an access to the memories of Radha, particularly, the memories of Krishna's departure from Gokul. (277-80)

In a very complex manner, when asked by Shubhra what will she do, if he comes to her, she says that she has closed entire Gokul in such a way that none can either go out nor can anyone - who has left Gokul once - come back. (226) When asked whether she ever aspires to go to Dwarika, she says 'no'. She also adds that the pain of loneliness, the strong desire to meet the lover and the vacuum felt by the beloved due to destiny has to be accepted. The happiness lies in the acceptance. She also says that it is foolishness to think that one can change the reality. (228) She further adds that the loneliness, vacuum and pain of separation are joy for her, as they remind her of her having remained connected with him. She is sure that he has not forgotten her. She says that the realization that he is remembering her and still loving her is more blissful and exciting than living with him. (229) Then, Shubhra asks her that if she was very happy in her life as she claims then why was she so much disturbed during last few days. She replies to her that every time before any departure,



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An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

Krishna had sought her consent. He wanted to seek her good bye then also. She would permit him to depart, because she would never be the cause of pain for him. (229)

The author then narrates the conversation between Krishna and Radha taking place at psychological level in which Krishna tells her that she was a complete woman and it was she who had made him reach that state of complete and ideal man or god. Without her, he was notable to even imagine his existence. He says that whatever was delicate and soft, fundamental and essential, pure and basic in him was due to Radha herself. He describes Radha as his essence and spirit. (233) Radha asks Krishna to keep aside all the great philosophical matters and come back to Gokul that he had left, as everything was still awaiting him.

The conversation between Radha and Krishna is very beautifully narrated. Radha asks him whether he lived truthfully with himself and others or cheated them. He replies that he never cheated anyone. However, he also confesses that he did not live as he wanted to live. (This is, of course, the denial of the entire incarnation theory on the part of the author) He adds that his mind wanted one thing, but his duties always carried him in different directions. Nevertheless, he did not do anything for himself. (235) At one point he also tells her that often he felt like leaving everything i.e. the politics, the responsibilities, the throne, the intricacies of life etc. and go to Gokul and sit beside her for hours without uttering anything and then go back. (235) He further mentions that whenever he felt shaken or he lost faith in truth, or even his own self, he thought of her and adds that her eyes only saved him from getting disoriented from life and his duties. (236) Radha replies that her husband, family and children etc. were her duties. There was no bliss in it. His love and the memories of the time spent with him was true bliss for her. (236) Then she asks him if he was to go somewhere and seeking her adieu. He responds in affirmation and seeks her promise that she would not stop him. She makes him free from her bond, just the way she had never tied him in past also. After this moment in the novel, Krishna opens his eyes in the presence of Rukmini and Draupadi, takes a deep breath and departs eternally from his body. Only then he feels that he has no aspiration, duty, question, responsibility or waiting for anyone. He becomes brighter than light, cleaner than the water, wider than the sky and moves to his eternal abode.



III

Robert Jauss explains how the horizons of expectations is constructed in the text in these words:

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, bring the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the “middle and end,” which can then be maintained in tact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text. 26

Douwe Fokkema states that rewriting appears in many manifestations at linguistic, narratological or pragmatic levels. He adds that the rewriting can be in different modes like quotation, negation and variation. Thirdly, there can be various variants of rewriting comprising of a range of devices. (111-2) It may aim at the criticism of the source text (parody), questioning of the source text without finding a straight answer (irony) or aim at critiquing the social conditions by referring to historical text leading to social criticism. Similarly, there can be so many forms of variations depending on the authorial intentions and reception of the matter.

The author, Kajal Oza Vaidya is rewriting the parts of the source texts (ST) not for negation or critiquing and questioning them, but by making them look like the contemporary ones with some eternal human questions. Perhaps, it seems that she wants to make these individuals more likeable in this manner. She has made use of them and their situations and dilemmas in the light of her own horizons of expectations generated by her own understanding of the world and its crises.

There is certainly an impact of the English literature and the ideas of the 19th century women writers and thinkers who make her look at the issues of the major characters in the novel with new ideas and questions of the contemporary world. Thus, she seems to be examining the old characters and their contexts with new ideas and parameters. No doubt, she differs significantly from these novelists, critics and thinkers with regard to the concepts of identity, love, marriage, attitude to the society and happiness as well as the ultimate goal of life. The author has tried to put the contemporary issues in the lives of the ancient characters and show that they were not different from the contemporary individuals. Therefore, perhaps, she has retained



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Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

the characters and their contexts as they were. What her authorial alterations imply has been stated here. Her reconstructions do make the narratives and the personas very interesting. However, those who know the source texts very well do not feel convinced of her implications and descriptions and that happens to be a major failure on her part as a writer. Also, culturally speaking, perhaps unknowingly, she has rejected many ages old perceptions and understanding of the crucial issues involved in the epic narratives. One doubts whether she is aware of it or whether consciously she would ever do so. Perhaps the writer in her has carried the person in her away in the course of writing of this novel. Her modifications are difficult to imagine and feel convinced of. The novel would not disturb those who are not aware of the source texts, but at the same time, they will carry in their memories the characters of Oza rather than Ved Vyas. The characters of Ved Vyas have sustained Indian ethos and culture. We don't know what would Oza's characters do on the minds of the people.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

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Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

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