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# Exploring Eastern Philosophy in Radha by Krishna Dharabasi: A Comprehensive Analysis

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## Abstract

*The Eastern philosophy, deeply rooted in the cultural and intellectual traditions of South Asia, provides profound insights into the human condition, addressing themes of duty, action, and liberation. The novel Radha by Krishna Dharabasi offers a modern reinterpretation of the mythological Radha, challenging traditional portrayals by focusing on her existential and philosophical struggles. The paper examines how Dharabasi weaves together Hindu concepts such as dharma (duty), karma (action), and moksha (liberation) with Buddhist and Jain teachings on suffering, non-attachment, and self-realization. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis and comparative approach to explore Radha's recontextualization of ancient philosophical doctrines, addressing contemporary debates on identity, agency, and autonomy. The portrayal of Radha as a multifaceted character navigating personal and societal expectations bridges traditional philosophies with modern existential concerns. The research aims to deepen understanding of Eastern philosophy's relevance in contemporary literature and contribute to interdisciplinary discourse on the intersection of philosophy, literature, and cultural studies.*

**Keywords:** Eastern philosophy, dharma, karma, moksha, existentialism, non-attachment

## Introduction

In *Radha*, Dharabasi reimagines a beloved mythological figure in a way that not only challenges established narratives but also invites readers to reflect on timeless human concerns. This study examines the philosophical themes intricately threaded throughout the novel, particularly the ideas of dharma, karma, and moksha, which are central to Hindu thought. These principles shape Radha's inner journey as she grapples with questions of duty, action, and ultimate liberation, making her story profoundly relatable even in a modern context.

The novel also draws heavily from Buddhist and Jain philosophies, bringing to light concepts like suffering, non-attachment, and spiritual liberation. These philosophical ideas shape Radha's character, presenting her as someone searching for deeper meaning beyond life's everyday struggles. As she faces the pain of attachment and the pressures of society, her path becomes a powerful reflection of anyone trying to find peace during life's challenges. Radha's journey is not just about seeking spiritual truth, but also about confronting the difficulty of letting go and finding inner calm.

In addition to her spiritual quest, the novel uses Radha's story to challenge the rigid gender norms of a patriarchal society. Rather than accepting the roles that society expects her to play, Radha takes an active role in questioning and resisting those expectations. Her journey of self-discovery becomes an act of defiance against a world that tries to limit her based on her gender. By rejecting these constraints, Radha reshapes her life and becomes a symbol of women fighting for their independence and authenticity. Through her, the novel highlights the broader struggle for women to break free from societal expectations and claim their rightful place in the world. Radha's story reminds us all of the power of questioning the roles we're given and striving to live more true to ourselves.

Finally, this study examines how Dharabasi contrasts Radha's portrayal in traditional mythology with his modern interpretation. The novel connects ancient philosophies with contemporary debates, reframing Radha's story to address modern issues of identity, freedom, and self-realization. Through this perspective, Radha becomes more than a reinterpretation of a myth—it becomes a thoughtful exploration of the enduring relevance of Eastern philosophy in navigating life's complexities, making her journey as meaningful for today's readers as it was in the context of her mythological origins.

## Literature Review

Eastern philosophy has profoundly influenced South Asian literature, providing a foundation for narratives that grapple with themes of duty, morality, and liberation. Canonical texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* highlight the interplay between dharma (duty) and karma (action), urging individuals to fulfill their moral obligations with detachment, as a path to spiritual enlightenment (Sharma 45). Similarly, the Upanishads, particularly the *Katha Upanishad*,

explore moksha (liberation) as the ultimate aim of human existence, emphasizing self-realization and the transcendence of material desires (Radhakrishnan 112). In classical Hindu texts like the Bhagavata Purana, Radha is portrayed as the epitome of devotion and divine love, her identity intrinsically tied to Krishna. While this portrayal immortalizes Radha's love, it often reduces her to a metaphorical figure, overshadowing her individuality. Recent feminist scholarship, however, has challenged these traditional narratives. Scholars like (Banerjee 58; Mukherjee 102) advocate for reinterpreting mythological women as autonomous figures capable of challenging societal constraints and patriarchal norms. Dharabasi's Radha aligns with this progressive outlook, transforming Radha into a multidimensional character who critiques and transcends traditional gender roles.

Beyond Hindu philosophy, Dharabasi's novel also resonates with Buddhist teachings. As articulated in the Dhammapada, the concepts of dukkha (suffering) and the Middle Way provide a lens through which Radha's existential struggles can be understood (Kalupahana 123). Her journey reflects the Buddhist emphasis on overcoming attachment to alleviate suffering and achieve inner peace. Similarly, Jain principles of non-attachment (aparigraha) and the ethical dimensions of karma, as Jaini discussed, enrich the text's philosophical depth. These elements underscore how Radha's narrative extends beyond Hindu frameworks, incorporating a broader spectrum of Eastern thought.

While prior studies have focused on the philosophical dimensions of Radha, this article marks a significant departure by situating the novel as a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Unlike earlier interpretations, which often view Radha's struggles through a singular lens either as an allegory of devotion or as a feminist critique this study emphasizes the intersectionality of her identity. By exploring the novel's synthesis of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophies, it examines how Dharabasi reimagines Radha as a vehicle for addressing contemporary existential and societal dilemmas. This approach not only highlights the novel's literary and philosophical innovations but also its relevance in engaging with enduring human concerns.

## Methodology

This research employs a qualitative textual analysis combined with a comparative approach to explore the novel Radha by Krishna Dharabasi through the lens of Eastern philosophical doctrines, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The analysis focuses on the protagonist Radha's internal struggles, identity, and relationship with Krishna, examining themes of dharma, karma, and moksha, alongside Buddhist and Jain concepts of suffering, non-attachment, and self-realization. The theoretical approach to this research combines Eastern philosophy and literature, exploring how the core tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are woven into Krishna Dharabasi's Radha. These philosophies, with their emphasis on karma (action), dharma (duty), and moksha (liberation), provide a framework for understanding Radha's existential struggles and her journey toward self-realization. The novel reinterprets these ancient concepts, recontextualizing them in a modern literary form. By analyzing Radha through these philosophical lenses, the research reveals how literature

can serve as a medium for the exploration and critique of philosophical ideas, highlighting the ongoing relevance of Eastern thought in contemporary narratives. A comparative approach contrasts these philosophical ideas with the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhist sutras, and Jain scriptures, exploring how Dharabasi recontextualizes ancient philosophies in a modern narrative. Key themes, such as Radha's dharma, the consequences of her actions, and her journey toward self-realization, are mapped onto these philosophical principles to understand their reimagining in the contemporary context.

## Textual Analysis

### *Radha and the Concept of Dharma*

Dharma, a cornerstone of Hindu philosophy, encompasses the moral and ethical duties that guide individual and societal conduct. Traditional narratives often frame Radha's dharma as her unwavering devotion to Krishna, relegating her identity to that of a devoted consort. However, Krishna Dharabasi reimagines dharma as a dynamic and evolving concept, exploring the tension between personal desires (swadharma) and societal expectations (samajik dharma), making it central to Radha's existential journey.

In Radha, the protagonist faces a profound ethical conflict: should she pursue her love for Krishna, which defines her inner truth, or conform to the community's rigid expectations? This tension is vividly captured in scenes where Radha questions her role in society and her responsibility to herself. For example, in one of the novel's pivotal moments, Radha reflects: "Can I be faulted for wanting to walk the path my heart dictates, even if it leads away from the world's approval? Why must love demand my silence while duty demands my sacrifice?" This internal monologue underscores her struggle to reconcile personal authenticity with societal obligations, a dilemma that mirrors Arjuna's crisis in the Bhagavad Gita. Like Arjuna, Radha wrestles with the weight of her duties; however, unlike Arjuna, she receives no divine counsel to resolve her conflict. This lack of external guidance amplifies the complexity of her moral decision-making, placing the onus of action squarely on her shoulders.

Dharabasi critiques the rigidity of traditional societal norms through Radha's narrative, presenting dharma as not merely adherence to prescribed roles but as a process of negotiation and self-discovery. For instance, Radha's decision to confront the patriarchal structures that dictate her life by choosing self-expression over compliance illustrates a feminist reinterpretation of dharma. Her actions challenge the notion that duty is monolithic, emphasizing instead the need for individuality and contextual judgment in navigating ethical dilemmas.

This feminist reimagining aligns with Bhattacharya's perspective on dharma as a personal, rather than purely societal, construct. Radha's questioning and ultimate rejection of imposed roles symbolize a broader critique of patriarchal expectations that limit women's autonomy. Dharabasi's Radha asserts that dharma must evolve to accommodate human complexity, echoing the view that true ethical living lies in balancing societal roles with personal truth (Bhattacharya 45).

Through Radha's journey, Dharabasi bridges the traditional and the modern, transforming dharma from a static code to a dynamic and deeply personal pursuit. Her story becomes a powerful exploration of how individual agency can reshape long-standing norms, making Radha a resonant narrative of philosophical and societal transformation.

### ***Karma and the Cyclic Nature of Existence***

In Radha, Krishna Dharabasi beautifully explores the principle of karma, where every choice we make carries consequences that shape our lives. Radha's decisions, driven by love and devotion, create a ripple effect that ultimately determines her fate, reflecting the deep connection between cause and effect. As Radha faces the outcomes of her actions, she wrestles with the responsibility they bring. Her journey shows us that understanding the consequences of what we do can lead to personal growth and spiritual awakening, reminding us of the power our choices hold.

The concept of karma isn't just about Radha; it extends to the other characters as well. Through her story, Dharabasi shows how we are all linked by our actions, inviting readers to reflect on how even the smallest decisions can impact the larger flow of life. One of Radha's most significant choices is her decision to pursue her love for Krishna; despite knowing it will alienate her from her community and subject her to scorn and ostracism. For instance, in a particularly evocative scene, Radha muses: *"To love him is to embrace exile; yet, to deny this love is to exile my soul. I choose to bear the burden of consequence, for this love defines who I am."* (p.123)

This moment encapsulates her conscious embrace of the karmic consequences of her actions. Radha's choice is neither impulsive nor naive; it is a deeply reflective act that acknowledges the moral and societal costs while affirming her agency. Radha's journey in the novel is a powerful exploration of suffering, self-reflection, and spiritual growth. Her defiance and the pain that follows become key moments in her transformation, revealing how suffering can be a path to spiritual awakening rather than just a form of punishment. In Jainism, suffering isn't seen as something bad or punitive, but as an opportunity for purification. It's a chance to reflect, repent for mistakes, and grow closer to a higher understanding of the self. Radha's suffering, though intense and painful, becomes a necessary part of her spiritual development. It helps her detach from worldly attachments and move closer to Krishna.

Radha's reflection on her suffering teaches her that it's not the external events that matter, but how she responds to them. She begins to see suffering as a way to deepen her devotion to Krishna, showing how spiritual growth often requires sacrifice. Her giving up material wealth, social status, and familial ties demonstrates her commitment to something greater than herself. These sacrifices aren't just losses; they're part of her spiritual journey, helping her to purify her soul and move closer to liberation. In this way, suffering isn't something to be avoided but embraced as a way to grow and evolve spiritually. Through her experiences, Radha comes to understand that liberation isn't about escaping the world but about transcending its limitations through inner change. Her growth also challenges the idea

that karma is simply fate. Instead, she shows that our actions and choices matter deeply in shaping our path. Unlike the passive view of karma, where we're just carried along by forces beyond our control, Radha's story emphasizes human agency. Her decisions, her devotion, her sacrifices, and her reflections help guide her through the karmic cycle and lead her toward self-realization.

In the end, Radha's evolution is a reminder that spiritual growth is not a passive process. It requires conscious effort, self-discipline, and a deep commitment to the journey within. Her story shows that by embracing suffering and using it as a tool for inner change, we can move toward liberation. Radha's path ultimately leads her to a state of enlightenment, where she is no longer bound by the world's expectations or material constraints. Her journey illustrates that true freedom comes from understanding who we are and living in a way that purifies the soul, not from escaping the world but from learning how to transcend it. *"Every wound inflicted by the world sharpens my resolve, every loss clarifies my purpose. It is through these trials that I learn to rise above the transient and grasp the eternal."* (p. 78)

This passage highlights how Dharabasi uses Radha's journey to depict karma as an active, transformative force rather than a passive accumulation of deeds. Her struggles reflect the Jain ideal of consciously shaping one's destiny through ethical action and self-awareness. By providing Radha with the agency to navigate her karmic path, Dharabasi critiques traditional deterministic views of karma. The novel suggests that while actions carry consequences, individuals possess the capacity to shape their future through intentionality and reflection. This dynamic interpretation of karma aligns with broader themes in Eastern philosophy, making Radha not just a literary work but a profound exploration of ethical and existential resilience.

### ***Moksha and the Philosophy of Non-Attachment***

Moksha, or liberation from samsara (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth), emerges as a central theme in Krishna Dharabasi's Radha. The protagonist's journey toward self-realization aligns with the Upanishadic teaching that true liberation arises from transcending material and emotional attachments (Radhakrishnan 78). This philosophical underpinning forms the backbone of Radha's evolution, highlighting the intricate relationship between love, detachment, and spiritual growth.

Radha's relationship is a key narrative thread that exemplifies the principle of vairagya (detachment). At the outset, her love for Krishna is deeply rooted in earthly desires, manifesting as a longing for union and recognition. For instance, Radha reflects: *"Is my love for him but a tether to this world? Or can it be the bridge to the divine?"* (p. 78)

This contemplation marks the beginning of her internal struggle to transcend the possessiveness inherent in her emotions. This question lingers in Radha's heart, sparking an inner struggle as she grapples with the depth and nature of her feelings for Krishna. At first, her love is intense, almost overwhelming a passionate longing that feels as though it defines

her very existence. She yearns to hold onto him, to make him hers, but this desire also brings with it a sense of restlessness, a weight she can't ignore.

Over time, in Krishna's presence, Radha begins to see her love in a new light. She realizes that what binds her is not the love itself, but her need to cling to it, to define it in human terms of possession and control. Slowly, she starts to let go of the idea of love as something she must hold onto and begins to embrace it as something that can free her. Her love for Krishna becomes less about having and more about being open, being present, and being connected to something infinite and sacred. This transformation isn't without pain. Radha has to confront her fears the fear of losing him, of losing herself in the process. But as she surrenders her attachment, she discovers a deeper, purer form of love. It is a love not defined by longing but by liberation, one that reflects the principle of aparigraha, non-attachment. In letting go of her need to possess Krishna, she finds that her love doesn't diminish; it expands. It becomes a bridge to the divine, a connection that transcends the limitations of the physical world.

Radha's journey reminds us that true love isn't about clinging or controlling, it's about opening ourselves to something greater. In learning to let go, she doesn't lose Krishna; instead, she finds a love that is eternal and transformative, one that connects her not just to him but to the divine essence within herself.

A pivotal moment occurs when Radha, faced with Krishna's departure, embraces the impermanence of their bond. Instead of succumbing to despair, she finds strength in accepting the transient nature of their relationship: *"To hold him is to chain the divine. To let him go is to touch eternity."* (p. 145)

This realization signifies a profound shift in Radha's character, where love ceases to be a source of bondage and becomes a medium for liberation. Dharabasi uses this transformation to underscore the transformative potential of love not as a possession but as a vehicle for spiritual growth.

Through Radha's narrative, Dharabasi challenges traditional notions of moksha as a solitary pursuit, suggesting that relationships, too, can be integral to achieving liberation. By intertwining the emotional with the spiritual, Radha's journey offers a nuanced exploration of detachment, demonstrating that the path to moksha is not about abandonment but about redefining and elevating one's attachments.

This analysis repositions Radha's love as a symbol of resilience and spiritual evolution, aligning with Eastern philosophical traditions while offering a modern reinterpretation of moksha. Through textual evidence and Radha's introspective arc, Dharabasi reaffirms that liberation lies in embracing the impermanent with grace and transforming attachment into a source of transcendence.

## ***Buddhist Influence and the Concept of Suffering***

Radha's internal conflict in Krishna Dharabasi's Radha reflects the Buddhist idea of dukkha suffering caused by attachment and unfulfilled desires. Her longing for Krishna, limited by societal barriers, shows how suffering is a part of the human experience. Radha's pain represents the common struggle between love, freedom, and the need to let go. Her attachment to Krishna adds to her suffering, especially as she faces the temporary nature of life. Radha's journey represents the Buddhist idea that letting go of attachments is necessary for finding peace. Radha faces the challenge of balancing her desires with the understanding that true peace comes from detachment. Radha's story shows the difficulty of accepting that relationships and life are temporary. Radha grows spiritually by confronting her attachments, demonstrating how hard it can be to find inner peace. Radha's journey represents the broader human challenge of balancing desire and freedom. Radha's experiences show how suffering can lead to personal growth. For instance, Radha reflects on her suffering: *"Is this yearning the essence of love, or is it the weight of my attachments binding me to the wheel of sorrow?"* (p. 112)

This introspection captures the Buddhist idea that attachment, even in its most sincere forms, is the root of suffering. Radha's longing for Krishna symbolizes the human tendency to cling to transient desires, perpetuating emotional turmoil. Her pain stems not from love itself but from the illusion that Krishna, as an individual, can fulfill her completely, mirroring how we anchor happiness to impermanent things. She begins to understand that her suffering is self-created, arising from her unwillingness to let go of the need to control and possess.

However, this reflection sparks a transformation. Radha realizes that love, when free from attachment, can be a liberating force rather than a binding one. By shifting her perspective, she allows her emotions to evolve from clinging to devotion, to longing to transcendence. Through this process, she discovers that letting go does not mean losing love but deepening it, allowing it to flow freely and expansively. In embracing detachment, she finds peace, transforming her suffering into a path of spiritual growth and connection to the divine. Her journey illustrates that true love is not diminished by release; it is elevated by it.

The narrative echoes the Four Noble Truths, particularly the acknowledgment of dukkha and the path to its cessation through detachment. Radha's journey towards accepting the impermanence of her relationship with Krishna illustrates the middle way, a balance between indulgence and renunciation. A turning point in the novel comes when Radha recognizes the fleeting nature of her connection with Krishna: *"If his absence wounds me, it is because I have chained my heart to the fleeting. To love him truly, I must release him to the vastness of the eternal."* (p. 112)

This realization reflects her gradual movement away from attachment toward a deeper understanding of impermanence, aligning with the teachings of the Dhammapada: *"All conditioned things are impermanent when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering."* (Verse 277)



In Radha, Krishna Dharabasi beautifully explores how accepting impermanence can transform a person. When Radha accepts Krishna's departure, it's not a surrender, but a moment of freedom. Letting go of her emotional attachment to him allows her to find peace within herself, something she couldn't experience while holding on so tightly. This isn't about giving up love, but about letting it evolve into something deeper and more freeing.

Dharabasi weaves in Buddhist ideas, especially the concept of dukkha (suffering), to show how Radha learns that love often leads to pain when we cling to it too tightly. As she grows, she realizes that love doesn't need to be possessive or dependent to be real. It can be pure and peaceful when it's rooted in non-clinging awareness.

Radha's journey isn't about abandoning love, but about discovering how to love without fear or control. It's a beautiful reminder that sometimes, letting go of attachment can actually make love stronger and more meaningful. In the end, it's this understanding of impermanence that helps Radha find the inner peace she's been longing for.

## Conclusion

Krishna Dharabasi's Radha is a remarkable reimagining of a mythological figure, blending Eastern philosophical traditions with modern existential themes. By intertwining concepts like dharma (duty), karma (action), and moksha (liberation) with Buddhist and Jain teachings on dukkha (suffering), vairagya (detachment), and aparigraha (non-possession), Dharabasi crafts a narrative that is intellectually profound and emotionally compelling. Radha transcends her traditional portrayal as a symbol of devotion, becoming a powerful medium for exploring identity, love, and freedom.

The novel explores Radha's internal struggles, illustrating the interplay between personal desires and societal expectations. Dharabasi redefines dharma as a dynamic and individualized pursuit, aligning with feminist critiques of rigid societal norms. Similarly, karma emerges as a transformative process that empowers human agency and challenges deterministic interpretations of destiny. Similarly, Radha's journey toward moksha (liberation) highlights the transformative power of love and detachment. Her evolving relationship with Krishna transcends earthly longing, embodying the Upanishadic ideal of self-realization and the Buddhist emphasis on overcoming attachment. Dharabasi bridges emotional and spiritual dimensions, presenting moksha as attainable through redefined relationships and inner transformation.

The narrative's alignment with Buddhist principles on suffering and impermanence further enhances its philosophical resonance. Radha's progression from dukkha to inner peace reflects the middle way, a balance between indulgence and renunciation. Jain ideals of self-purification also surface, emphasizing the ethical dimensions of her choices. By integrating these philosophies, Dharabasi demonstrates the enduring relevance of ancient wisdom in addressing contemporary challenges. Radha is not only a mythological reimagining but also

a profound meditation on identity and the human condition. It invites readers to reflect on their struggles with societal constraints, inner conflicts, and the search for peace.

Radha's journey from attachment to liberation resonates universally, offering insights into self-acceptance and the impermanence of life. Her transformation underscores that true freedom begins within and can be achieved by letting go of external expectations. Dharabasi's portrayal of Radha as a seeker of balance and inner peace renders her timeless, and relevant to modern readers. Ultimately, Radha represents the vitality of philosophical inquiry in literature. Dharabasi's work urges readers to transcend societal norms and embrace the transformative power of love, detachment, and spiritual growth. In doing so, Radha reaffirms the timeless wisdom of Eastern philosophy while addressing the complexities of contemporary life.

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