



Radha and the Feminine Mystique: Reinterpreting Myth in *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love* by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal through the Lens of Intersectional Feminism

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Abstract:

With centuries of literary and cultural legacy, Indian mythology has seen Radha evolve steadily yet revolutionarily. This paper explores the feminist interpretation of Radha embodied in *Finding Radha: A Quest for Love* (2018) in contrast with intersectionality, gender constructs, and socio-political realities. The study concerns the moral/ethical judgments imposed on women in classical Indian society and whether Radha's character supports or subverts such ideologies. This article discursively analyses the performance of cross-dressing as a feminist ideal, challenging the application of queer theory to analyse agency, performativity, and transgressing ideas of gender. In addition, it explores erasure of their female counterparts in gendered ways and historical silencing, examining how *Finding Radha* reworks this narrative. In addition, it questions the male authorship who form the narrative of Radha, examining its implications for the feminist debate. This multitudinous approach serves for Radha's complex and layered feminist activism that accounts for socially driven acts of political resistance instead of devotion.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender Performativity, Indian Mythology, Intersectionality, Male Authorship, Queer Theory, Radha.

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Introduction:

Radha is an all-too-human goddess, a sublime yet sensual emblem of mortal and divine love. She is subversive in that she possesses an autonomy rarely available to feminine deities. She lives by her own rules, and not those of the world. She is the essential Rasika, the aesthete of passion, and her wild heart belongs only to herself. (Gokhale XIV)

Namita Gokhale is a renowned Indian writer, editor, and literary activist whose remarkable contributions are established in contemporary Indian literature. Gokhale's literary interventions deal with the topics of Indian mythology, history, and women's lived experiences, such as in her popular *Himalayan Trilogy* ("About – Namita Gokhale"). One day, as she was strolling on the streets of Vrindavana, she was on a quest for Radha's secret mystique. She receives a packet of prasad with a traditional *Suhag ka Pitara* inside, which ignites a shocking insight regarding the metaphorical plenty of the feminine self (Gokhale XIII). The objects such as mirrors, bangles, bindis, and nail paint that stimulate selfhood, protection, and religious consciousness, but deepest of all, the nail paint, which reverberates the affective force of *Shringara rasa* as detailed in the *Natyashastra*, the ancient Indian treatise on aesthetics and performance (XIII). In the context of this engagement in Vrindavana, she articulates a depiction of Radha as referenced in the preceding quotation.

Malashri Lal is a distinguished author and academician whose expertise encompasses literature, women's studies, and gender theory. Lal's academic endeavours predominantly focus on the re-examination of myths through a feminist lens. She passionately supports efforts focused on empowering women and actively participates in numerous advisory committees, contributing meaningfully to both educational discussions and community progress. ("About Me"). Lal in an interview to Hindustan Times said, "There is the traditional Radha but I was

particularly taken up by the creative possibilities of Radha, because we know very little about Radha outside the Krishna Radha relationship” (00:03:00-00:03:12). In the preliminary chapter of the book, she provides an overview concerning the origins of Radha, Radha’s role as a romantic partner, the exploration of gender dynamics, Radha’s representation in various musical interpretations, and her enduring legacy across the ages up to the present day (Lal XIX-XXXI).

Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, the celebrated co-editors of *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*, now offer an anthology devoted to the mysterious Radha, the personification of love, who defies the conventions of society while inhabiting the kaleidoscopic tension between the divine and the sensual, the holy and the erotic. Gokhale and Lal fused both classical and modernistic points of view towards the character representation of Radha in the anthology as editors.

Radha’s image is ingrained in Indian culture and mythological history; she has, over time, become a metonym for faith, love, and femininity. Her strong presence in literature, Bhakti poetry, and culture highlights and bears witness to the changing roles and responsibilities of women in society. *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love* (2018) is an edited collection by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal. The book gives a detailed understanding of Radha’s existence through culture, philosophy, and literature. The anthology consists of essays, poems, and translations. These individual works highlight Radha’s role in culture, mythology, and Bhakti traditions.

This anthology offers multiple perspectives on Radha, some of which are historical perspectives, and others are literary reinterpretations. Writers including Devdutt Pattanaik, Jawhar Sircar, and Meghnad Desai look into Radha’s origins, noting her absence from ancient Hindu texts while tracing how she emerges in medieval works such as Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda*.

Others, among them Kapila Vatsyayan and Shrivatsa Goswami, consider the symbolic meaning Radha holds within art and aesthetic traditions; in contrast, Alka Pande and Makarand Paranjape discuss the ways she relates to questions of gender politics and spiritual thought.

It also provides translations of ancient poetry, such as works by Vidyapati, Surdas, and Rabindranath Tagore. Some essays also highlight how Radha is portrayed in Vaishnav traditions and in Bollywood movies. The anthology blends mythology with recent feminist and post-colonialist approaches and analyses the conventional narratives surrounding Radha as a figure of love and resistance.

Radha's Feminist Ethos:

Feminism advocates for gender equality and equality between the sexes. It also questions patriarchal systems that promote discrimination, stereotyping, and exclusion. Intersectional feminism recognises how race, caste, class, gender, and sexuality criss-cross to create models of oppression (Crenshaw 1244). Traditional feminism focuses only on gender inequality; in contrast, intersectional feminism sees how mixed identities aggravate women's attendant problems and marginalisation.

This approach is central to the analysis of Radha's feminist identity, as her story is not only decided by gender norms; it is also decided by caste systems and cultural beliefs. Radha, although at the center of Krishna's mythos, is outside patriarchal social structures, neither totally within domestic structures nor allotted a discrete historical existence. Her feminine agency surpasses class and caste, thus reckoning with critical analysis through intersectional feminism. By examining the codes of ethics and morality codified for women in patriarchal social frameworks, this research will delve into how Radha subverts such codes. Her role as a symbol

of transgressive femininity subverts the hegemonic frameworks that locate her ideally under scrutiny for probing the site where power, gender, and myth converge (Aria).

Radha Krishna's romance is always described as being secret in *Gita Govinda*, and it is referenced as a constant threat of societal shame. Such secrecy adds value and creates depth in their relationship, heightening their love, which transcends the boundaries of society. Jayadeva illustrates this through the following verse, "When in the night I reach the lonely forest, / he laughs heartily in a mood of passion" (187). The poets chose to keep their romance clandestine, adding to the passion and sacredness of it, citing that Radha represents those bound by social duty but yearning for freedom through godly passion. With passing time, Radha was associated with representing a figure of spiritual fervour, the human longing for eternal union, which meant union with Krishna. Hence, shame transfigures to grace and concealment to sanctity.

Debotri Dhar's "A Flute Called Radha" is a quiet and powerful meditation on the identity of Radha that speaks directly to the imperatives of intersectional feminism. She is not just Krishna's consort, but a woman who stands within the intersections of caste, marital status, age, and sensitivity. Her love for Krishna is always blamed, not for being shallow, but for trespassing on the moral expectations imposed on women. She is older than Krishna, already married to another man, yet finds the audacity to yearn. This indiscretion makes her a "madwoman" and "adulteress," though Krishna rises to divinity and royalty (Dhar 165). Dhar rightly argues,

The woman's crime is always greater than the man's. That is why Krishna could forget, while she was forever condemned to remembering...That is why he could move on to conquer kingdoms and become king, be hailed as the virtuous killer of Kamsa, and take a hundred, a thousand, no, 16,000 wives. (166)

exposing the gendered asymmetry of cultural memory. Furthermore, Dhar writes,

He is a man, and they say men are destined for great things, so they worship him. Tomorrow, they might forgive her and worship her too, but what good would such worship do? What would change? Men would still love and leave. And women would still be women, and forgive the men while piously condemning each other. (166)

This quotation condemns gendered double standards by revealing how society applauds male transgression, but women carry the emotional toll and silently judge each other. Radha shouts in anger, “Shame, not on me but on you. Shame, shame, shame!” (Dhar 166). According to Dhar, she is now tired of being a woman and wants to be a man to feel liberated.

Radha’s refusal trapped within domesticity is an act of radicalism. She declares, “My household will not be my universe, for there is a much larger universe outside of my kitchen and my courtyard that I want to hold in my palms. I want to pluck stars from the skies, I want to dance with the sun” (Dhar 156). She repudiates the notion that a woman’s happiness must be tied to her role as wife and mother. Hence, her longing cannot be construed as weakness, but a form of resistance. Even after passing away, she clings to a broken flute by Krishna, which serves as a memento, or remnant of her fierce love. So the flute, which once became an insignia of divine love between Radha and Krishna, now stands for Radha’s suffering as a whole: she feels deserted and devastated, yet she remembers the song.

Her life story becomes a textbook example of grief and anguish, strength and empowerment, and a fierce torchbearer of resistance against hegemonic systems that control women in the name of tradition and antiquated rules. Radha fights for women defiantly; she becomes a figure who breaks the mould, a figure that is willing to love, to remember, and fight out the patriarchal structures hell-bent on myth-making erasures.

Radha's Queer Cosmos: Sacred Play and the Fluidity of Divine Identity:

“Becoming Radha,” an essay by Alka Pande, is a fitting text for an analysis of Radha-Krishna’s cross-dressing using queer theory and Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogic chaos.

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity asserts that “gender is not a fixed identity but an iterative stylization of the body through acts, gestures, and discourses” (Butler 17). Seen in this light, Radha’s and Krishna’s dressing up as the other is a stylized performance in opposition to the accepted gender roles. The text points to a beautiful verse by an unknown poet that reads, “She wears his peacock feather; She sports his yellow garment, He wraps himself in her beautiful sari,” thus using clothing as a means to become another and embody another’s role (Pande 38). This is not play but a sacred form of unity in which Radha and Krishna become one another and thus play a divine parody of gender roles.

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogic chaos, wherein multiple voices and meanings coexist without hierarchical synthesis, is reflected in the festive celebration of *Lathmar* Holi. Krishna, dressed here in women’s attire and forced to dance in public roads, is a situation that blurs sacred and profane, masculine and feminine, into a carnivalesque celebration (Bakhtin X). The chapter describes how Krishna “goes with the flow and partakes in the pleasure,” demanding jewellery and *shringara*, thus embracing the spectacle of gender inversion (Pande 41). This moment personifies Bakhtin’s carnival, wherein the social hierarchies are suspended temporarily, and identity is playful, fluid, and plural. This dimension of cross-dressing is deeply embedded in the cultural context of Northern India, retaining its significance in contemporary society. This exemplifies cultural representation through the lyrics of the renowned thumri ‘*Nar Ko Nari Banao*’ (Transform the Man into a Woman) (41).

The kind of dialogic chaos that Bakhtin highlights is evident during the *Lathmar* Holi celebrations. Krishna is wearing women's clothes, dancing on the public roads; it mixes up the sacred with the profane, and masculine with feminine, it becomes a perfect example of a carnivalesque (Bakhtin X). In the chapter, they explain how Krishna just "goes with the flow and partakes in the pleasure," even asking the gopis for jewellery and *shringara*, which offers a clear example of gender inversion (Pande 41). This act gels perfectly with Bakhtin's concept of carnival, one of those moments where normal social rules are set aside for a while, and identity can become flexible, open to change.

In South Asian contexts, Queer theory is understood as finding a rich space in the idea of *Leela Hava*, where Krishna's playful joy becomes the force that creates everything. Radha is not just Krishna's partner or consort here; she is more like his mirror, his own energy or Shakti. As Pande puts it quite directly: "Radha is the relishability of Krishna. Krishna without Radha is unrelishable" (40). It suggests something deeply metaphysical, a kind of queering of divine identity where neither can fully exist or be enjoyed without the other. Their cross-dressing is not about making something sacred profane. Instead, it points toward a higher kind of transcendence, a ritual performance that transcends strict male/female binaries altogether.

Additionally, the chapter sheds light on the *Stri-Vesha* tradition, in which Krishna dons feminine attire in various stories and even in some temple practices. It is a devotional act, not a framed punishment or a trick. It highlights how divine gender can be fluid, not fixed. Radha's words capture this emotional layer so well: "Oh Krishna, you can look like me but you will never know the pain in my heart when we separate" (41). It is not only about the visual swap; it becomes an exchange at a deeper level, where feeling each other's experiences and embodying them turns into the real way identity works.

In “Becoming Radha,” cross-dressing becomes a divine kind of performance. It queers the divine, shakes up those rigid gender lines, and opens space for multiple voices and meanings. Drawing on Butler’s ideas about performativity and Bakhtin’s carnival, Radha and Krishna are not simply lovers anymore; they are partners in creating a world where identity stays fluid, always in relation to the other, and open to transformation.

In Her Voice: Male Authorship and the Gendered Poetics of Radha:

Radha has emerged as an icon, a symbol of love, a force of resistance in the bhakti literary traditions. Paradoxically, she has often been portrayed by men, not women. The texts, such as from Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda*, verses by Chandidas, Vidyapati, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Vidya, all these male poets have entered the lyrical space of Radha not only to describe her, but to become her, speaking in her voice.

These works by men truly raise urgent questions about authorial objectivity and their agency. Especially, when men take on the first-person voice of a woman to express yearning, love, shame, and transcendence; and in a world where patriarchal norms still limit how much emotional expression men are “allowed,” Radha becomes this ‘literary mask.’ A place through which they can explore love, tenderness, devotion, and emotional vulnerability, that too, without ever destabilising masculinity.

In Bhakti poetry, especially, the theory of gendered mediation shows how figures like Radha turn into these lyrical instruments. Male poets use her to process their own affective and spiritual relationships with Krishna or the divine (Sircar 11). The concept of gendered mediation is not confined to a big theoretical manifesto, but it finds strong expression in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *In Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, she

expresses how women in literary and cultural narratives often function as conduits through which men express affect, rivalry, or emotional solidarity.

These female characters become a type of “structured absence” which is symbolically overdetermined and textually underdeveloped in a way that connects male-male relations in conventional societies that have limited space for the open expression of male intimacy (11). In this type of social structure, a female character becomes a metaphorical figure that is desired, contested, or romanticised, not necessarily in and of herself as a character with agency, but in order to connect male-male relations (16).

Within a devotional or literary context in which male emotion must be reconciled through socially appropriate forms, the female voice represents a socially appropriate space of vulnerability. In this context, Radha, as constructed through male poets, represents a figure through which affective transference can occur.

In her essay “Radha in Nazrul Geeti,” Reba Som discusses Kazi Nazrul Islam’s works, offering a compelling example of how Radha’s character as a persona in Nazrul Islam’s works became a means for the concealment and promotion of his innermost passions (119). An important aspect that must be noted is that Radha’s character became a means for Nazrul Islam to express his innermost passions through his songs. This is imperative in relation to the fact that the innermost passions expressed in his songs through the character of Radha became a means for Nazrul Islam to express his innermost passions in relation to love, desire, and longing in a way that the existing conventions in his time may not have permitted if they were expressed openly (118).

This idea is best expressed in his poem “Emoni Borsha Elo,” wherein Radha laments: “How devoid of compassion is the music of your flute / How cruel is your failure to understand

the women of Braj!” (Nazrul 201). Here, Radha’s need to be understood is reflective of Nazrul’s own inner conflict that he never expressed in words. In a similar sense, this song begins with Radha’s lament: "Shyam! If only you were Radha” – a deep and personal longing that Nazrul expressed through the character of Radha herself (201).

Using this literary approach, the poet probes into his desires with objectivity, the desires that could have been construed as unacceptable or unrealistic to express in an explicit and unambiguous language. In this regard, Radha’s voice was created as a tool to express her personal feelings. This allowed the poet to reveal his inner truth in the name of divine love. These acts are in complete harmony with the Sedgwick model, as the feminine mask of Radha allows the male poet to express personal pain in the name of divine femininity. The poet expresses these feelings not in his own masculine voice, but in the voice of the feminine character of Radha, indicating gender mediation in the poet’s expression of feminised feelings like pain, dependence, guilt, and sensuality.

Besides, the use of male voices to represent Radha’s voice also poses certain problems regarding the politics of representation and empathy. Can male poets really represent the feminine voice without succumbing to patriarchal pitfalls? Does this poetic ventriloquism really help us gain a deeper and richer understanding of Radha’s emotions and complexities, or does it merely serve to aestheticize her voice and turn her into a patriarchal ideal of perfection in devotion and eroticism? These complex questions continue to haunt any discussion of Radha’s character through male voices. To examine the politics of representing Radha’s voice and whether she is an agent or merely a product for male expediency, this analysis will also draw upon Cixous’ concept of *écriture féminine* as a subversive and body-centered writing that challenges patriarchal values and Gilbert & Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* as an analysis

of the silenced “madwoman” in patriarchal narratives. What does this framework mean for male voices in Bhakti poetry?

The concept of *écriture féminine* by Cixous questions the male-centric approaches to literary writing. They endorse a form of writing grounded in the flexibility and diversity associated with the concept of the feminine. “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing...Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.” (Cixous 875). Radha’s portrayal by the male authors may be full of emotion, but is also often portrayed as a tool for the poetic release of the male. For instance, in Jayadeva’s epic poem *Gita Govinda*, the emotion and intensity associated with Radha’s longing are palpable but are expressed in beautifully crafted language:

[H]er fortunate body bears drops of sweat . . .
 upon a delightful-woman’s face, where love has arisen
 where a lower lip is turned for a kiss . . .
 the pitcher of your breast is more heavy and full of juice
 than coconuts and oh, you who bear the burden
 of firm breasts and thighs . . . (Greenberg 33)

Her anguish, all embellished and carefully choreographed like that, really works to heighten Krishna’s divinity and heighten the erotic pull of the whole poem. In Jayadeva’s words, this moment unfolds like:

While Hari roamed in the forest
 making love to all the women,
 Radha’s hold on him loosened. . .
 Ultimately, in his deep love for Radha,

Krishna repents, changing his demeanour
and promising Radha absolute devotion. (Greenberg 34)

Even with all that emotional complexity, this kind of writing still fits into a masculine way of shaping devotional femininity. Longing and submission get turned into these beautiful aesthetic virtues, rather than anything that might point to real radical subjectivity for Radha.

Conversely, Chandidas' Radha is a more subversive character. She expresses her thoughts with force and questions the norms of society and religion. She takes on the established convention of casteism and fights with Krishna. She expresses her eroticism in a quintessential style. Radha blames Krishna for her misery and confronts him in the following manner: "None called me 'Radha!', none; / I saw no hand to clasp, no friendly face // My cry came back unanswered from the night" (Chandidas 197-98).

Although this is Radha's character as seen through the male poet's perspective, there is a glimpse of her disrupting patriarchal norms. Thus, Radha's character in Chandidas' poem is not an example of *écriture féminine* but does reflect Cixous' concept of emotional excess and contradictions in relation to femininity as a space for conflict and power struggles.

Gilbert and Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* that male authors have portrayed female characters as existing in dualistic categories such as the angelic and submissive muse, and the disruptive and monstrous deviant (Gilbert and Gubar 86). Radha's poetic personae often move beyond these dualisms. Tagore's Radha in *Bhanusingher Padavali* is an embodiment of sorrow and vulnerability. Radha's emotions and vulnerability are palpable as she is filled with yearning and sorrow. In the poem "Vasant Aaval Re (Spring is here)," part of *Bhanusingher Padavali*, Radha is portrayed as a restless figure waiting for her lover Krishna. "My joyous heart goes restless ... /

O lovelorn Radha, where is your beloved, Madhav?" (Tagore 201). Radha's emotions are expressed eloquently; however, they are also mediated by the poet's own lyrical and musical qualities and are more an expression of the poet's own inner world than a subversive and radical portrayal of the feminine. The project of male writers speaking as Radha's voice also requires an examination of the ethical and political implications of the layers of meaning in the act of representing.

Roland Barthes' concept of the death of the author, as discussed in his essay "The Death of the Author," posits that the text itself comes into being not because of the author's intention but because of the vast network of language and discourse. This concept implies that the voice of Radha, as represented by poets such as Jayadeva, Rabindranath Tagore, or Nazrul Islam, may not necessarily have anything to do with the gender and biography of the poet (Barthes 148). Feminist scholars have also argued that the concept of the death of the author does not necessarily address the issue of the identity of the author. If the emotions and feelings of Radha, her pain and her desire, are represented by the voices of male poets who dominate the literary and devotional world, then the absence of the female perspective of Radha is not simply an academic oversight but an instance of the presence of other layers of meaning.

In her influential work *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray writes about how the tradition of Western thought has treated women not as subjects in their own right, but as objects and go-betweens in male-dominated interactions (Irigaray 31). When one applies Irigaray's ideas to the figure of Radha, it is easy to see how Radha's body, voice, and feelings seem to be subsumed in the service of strengthening Krishna's divinity or the poet's own artistic potential. In the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva, Radha's pain and beauty are subsumed in the service of Krishna's story. Even in the more subversive poems of Chandidas, Radha's outbursts of emotion

are carefully contained within the strictures of rhyme and meter. While they may offer a brief glimpse of subversion, they quickly return to the devotional tradition. Just as Irigaray's ideas suggest, Radha is adored, beautified, and ennobled, but she is not permitted to transcend the tradition of Krishna or the poet's own artistic vision. Irigaray's ideas about the treatment of Radha as a figure of emotional excess, not as a self-contained voice but as a means to an artistic end, are very relevant.

The argument by Rubin takes us behind the scenes of the ways in which women, especially Radha, are positioned in a realm of emotional overabundance rather than being spoken to as autonomous agents. Following Gayle Rubin's seminal article, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975), she reveals the ways in which women are exchanged among men in patriarchal societies, almost as if they are a commodity being traded in a market. Rubin, with a mix of Marxist theory, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, and Freudian psychoanalysis, contends that it is not merely individual men acting in a vacuum of solitude that results in the oppression of women. Rather, it is a more overarching system of oppression, a "sex/gender" system, which results in the exchange of women as a way of solidifying social bonds. Here, it is the men who hold power, and the women are the bearers of lineage, property, and social relationships.

Gayle Rubin's classic article, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975), contends that women are trafficked between men in patriarchal societies, as if women are a commodity to be bought and sold. Rubin's argument is an amalgamation of Marxist, structural anthropological, and psychoanalytic theories, which she uses to demonstrate that women's subordination cannot be attributed to men alone but to a broader system, which she calls the "sex/gender system," wherein women are trafficked to consolidate social alliances

between families. In this system, men hold a privileged position as women serve as a vessel for family lines, possessions, and social ties.

In much of the male-authored religious literature, from Jayadeva to Chandidas, Radha is defined in terms of Krishna's presence or absence, often as something given, desired, or denied. She is the emotional measure of all divine encounters, poetic desire, and transcendent beauty. As Rubin points out, women often function as "gifts" rather than "givers." Radha's desire is certainly strong, but her narrative self is always tied to male-authored religious discourse (Rubin 174-175). So, Radha, though iconic, is also situated within a mythic system of feminine devotion that buttresses male religious and literary dominance.

The male-written Radha occupies a space that is both inspirational and performative. She feels and hurts, but in a context that is supportive and nurturing of gender ideologies. Her voice is rich and nuanced, but it is rarely free of the cadence of longing, of devotion, of spiritual obedience. To write Radha in an authentic way is not just about understanding her; it is about self-reflexivity and the recognition of the position of the poet and the willingness to consider other voices and the politics of representation. She will continue to be a mediated figure, spoken through but never speaking for herself.

Reclaiming the Silenced: Gendered Erasure and the Politics of Mythological Memory:

Whereas Radha takes centre stage in the realm of Bhakti literature, she fades away in the pages of history and politics. The same holds true for the epic and theological works featuring the legacy of Lord Krishna as compared to the Bhakti literature featuring Radha. This dichotomy speaks of the larger phenomenon of the historicization and institutionalisation of the masculine God as compared to the aestheticisation and spiritualization of the female god and her subsequent marginalisation (Lerner 8-9).

In her essay “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges,” Gerda Lerner uses her critique of patriarchal historiography to show that the absence of Radha is not just an oversight but an active suppression intended to perpetuate the Brahmanical and feudal systems of governance. *Finding Radha* is more than just an ode to the devotion of Radha; it is an act of reclaiming her voice. The essays and poems in the book aim to reinstate Radha as the epitome of female empowerment and spirituality. Her story serves as a metaphor for the lives of other marginalised women, such as Meera Bai and Andal. In this context, *Finding Radha* is an act of feminism that challenges the dichotomy between myth and history, and creates space for the stories that have been buried for centuries under the patriarchal yoke.

To re-imagine Radha is to practice what Adrienne Rich has termed “re-vision, the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (18). *Finding Radha* is the very embodiment of this practice, not only because it restores the voice of Radha but also because it re-constitutes her as a site of feminist resistance. She is a woman of emotional independence, spiritual rebelliousness, and interpretive freedom, unencumbered by the periphery of devotion. Her desire is not weakness but a form of radical resistance against the dominant ideologies of morality that try to appropriate the space of feminine desire in the home.

This collection of essays is a feminist intervention in the historiography of the Radha-Krishna tradition. It subverts the patriarchal ideologies that have always placed Radha in the background of Krishna and never as an equal. This collection of essays, poems, and philosophical musings is an act of reclamation, as defined by Adrienne Rich: “the writing of the past as a way of taking back and redefining the past; and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (19). The story of Radha is re-

constituted as a counter-narrative of dominant femininity. In this re-visioning of the past, Radha is not the passive consort of Krishna but the mythic interlocutor of subaltern women whose stories of longing, labour, and resistance reverberate through her voice. She is not only remembered but re-imagined.

The subjectivity of Radha is intricately constructed through dominant hegemonic structures of gender, caste, and spirituality. Her gender position as a woman situates her at the periphery of the dominant Brahmanical culture. However, her emotional labour and eroticism are idealised and situated in the realm of the spiritual, catering to patriarchal theology. Radha is not situated in the same roles of governance, philosophy, and epics as Krishna. Her position is relegated to the affective periphery. Her voice is represented in songs but not in any scripture. This is an exemplification of the “epistemic violence” of representation, where the subaltern woman is represented and spoken about but not allowed to speak (Spivak 287). The story of Radha, thus, is an exemplification of the silence of the feminine in the realm of theology and literature and a need for a radical shift in the same.

Finding Radha presents a promising scope for reinventing subaltern feminine narratives in association with the symbolic figure of Radha. Andal and Meera Bai, though saintly and iconoclastic in their expressions of bhakti and devotion to God, have often been incorporated into mainstream religious traditions. Andal, a poet-saint from the ninth century in Tamil Nadu, is unique in that she occupies a special place among the twelve Alvars of the Vaishnav Bhakti tradition as its only female representative. Her bhajans and poems are filled with ardent longing and spiritual fervour (Narayanan 135-136). She did not conform to the normative role that society prescribed for women in that age by choosing marriage and settling down in the world. Instead, she saw herself as Vishnu’s bride and chose a divine marriage over a mundane one. Her

acts of devotion were not merely acts of submission and reverence but acts of defiance against the role that society prescribed for women in that age. Renuka Narayanan, in her essay, “Radha: The Unfading Mystic Blossom in Our Midst,” writes,

So the depth and range of this great sweep of devotional, artistic, philosophical, and lifestyle influence can actually be traced back to Andal-Radha. We could go so far as to say that it was the seed influence of Radha-Andal or Andal-Radha which kept religion alive in India through the tumult of history, putting out deep roots, wide spreading branches, and intoxicatingly perfumed flowers. (Narayanan 137)

In this manner, Radha and Andal created the emotional and spiritual heart of Indian devotionalism. The intense passion and non-conformity of the two women spawned a tradition of poetry, philosophy, and ritual infused with the intensity of the female. Even in their marginalised roles, Radha and Andal redefined devotion as a kind of resistance. Through the centuries of turmoil, the voices of the two women stayed embedded in the collective cultural mind, fostering a devotionalism that was personal, non-conformist, and transformative.

In contrast, male subaltern characters like Sudhama are generally celebrated in epics and popular culture. Even though the character of Sudhama is depicted as a poor and humble character, his story is legitimised and remembered. This is a reflection of sociological hierarchy, particularly the concept of masculinities as discussed by Raewyn Connell. Connell proposes the concept of hegemonic, complicit, marginalised, and subordinate masculinities, each of which is embedded in a gendered power structure (Pilcher and Whelehan 83). Even marginalised masculinities have a cultural legitimacy and visibility that is not the case with feminine stories (84). The humility of the character of Sudhama is celebrated because it reflects the dominant notion of male virtues, while the devotional defiance of the female character is not celebrated.

Through the character of Radha, *Finding Radha* challenges the hierarchy of the stories. Her voice is a conduit for the voices of other silenced female characters, transforming the story into a feminist counter-history that challenges patriarchal and masculinist structures of representation.

The search for Radha not only recuperates mythological femininity but also challenges the real lives of women whose labour is being exploited in the name of serving God. In “The Blue-Necked God” by Indira Goswami, Radheshyamis, women whose husbands have died and whose only solace is singing bhajans in temples, are shown to be spiritually adorned and bodily ravaged by leprosy, hunger, and exhaustion. Their labour is exploited by temple accountants and priests. One such Radheshyami sings in derision, “Sethbari’s bhajan ashram, Gopinath’s bhajan ashram, Borbag’s bhajan ashram, the stable’s bhajan ashram,” thereby mocking the sanctimoniousness of such temples and institutions (Goswami 105). The women are forced to perform bhajans while starving and have to look longingly at rotting vegetables being sold in the street. One such Radheshyami laments, “You people live to eat, but we need to eat something in order to live,” thereby revealing the cruel irony of the situation (106).

Unlike the character of “Raikamal,” the tale of “Raikamal” presents a more complex character of feminine power. “Kamal, a mischievous girl, teased Rasik Das and played house with Ranjan. Her story is one of betrayal, caste violation, and emotional martyrdom. Her marriage to Rasik, the old Mahanto, is not a marriage of love but of compassion and duty. On her wedding night, she lies on the wilted side of the flowerbed and says, “The fresh flowers are yours, Mahanto—the stale ones mine” (Bandopadhyay 147), a metaphor for the unequal marriage of emotions. Rasik’s embrace is terrifying: “His arms coiled and writhed about her limbs like snakes. Yet, she did not struggle. She did not scream. She did not weep, but it is a testament to her complex negotiation of love, loss, and survival” (151).

Even when Ranjan comes back, Kamal does not go back to him. She tells Rasik, “I’m a weak woman. I cannot bear the weight of your love.” She acknowledges that she cannot bear the weight of being idealised (Bandopadhyay 151). Her final act of lighting a lamp in front of Rasik’s grave and singing songs that he liked becomes a form of remembrance and not romantic fulfilment but spiritual continuation. When called a harlot for not wanting to go to Vrindavana, Kamal sings a song that says: “They call me a harlot; I’m in love with the name, dear friend. Spurning it... shall I lose my beloved Shyam?” (153).

These stories show us that there is a conflict between devotion and autonomy. Radha’s mythological longing becomes a tool for us to look at this romanticisation of women’s suffering and reclaim women’s spirituality. *Finding Radha* becomes a feminist archive in which devotion does not become a form of submission but a form of resistance and survival. The stories of Radheshyamis and Raikamal show us that behind every divine metaphor is a woman’s body, a woman’s voice, and a woman’s choice.

These stories ask us to rethink devotion as a space that is not a form of submission but a form of negotiation and resistance. *Finding Radha* gives us a feminist reading of Radha’s story and that of Andal and Kamal, and tries to reclaim the feminine voice from the margins of mythology and history. It challenges the romanticization of women’s suffering and tries to reveal to us the mechanisms that romanticize women’s pain and ignore women’s agency and choice. Devotion becomes a form of resistance and survival in this feminist archive and challenges patriarchal control and imagination. *Finding Radha* remembers Radha and remembers all women whose voices were never supposed to be heard in the first place.

Conclusion:

This piece of research revisits Radha from an intersectional perspective of feminism and explores her transformation from Krishna's consort to the embodiment of insurgent agency. As the poet, the philosopher, and the literary imagination portray her, Radha is not a passive figure of desire and longing but a revolutionary figure of feminine empowerment, emotional supremacy, and spiritual resistance. Her story challenges caste hierarchy, gender binarism, and morality, and shows how devotion is a site of resistance rather than compliance.

The works like "A Flute Called Radha", "Becoming Radha", and "Raikamal" reveal how Radha's voice, so often silenced and reinscribed by patriarchal authorship, is reclaimed as a feminist site of suffering, longing, and survival. The politics of memory and erasure in the context of Radha's story is explored in this piece of research to reveal how her marginality is a symptom of broader exclusions in the cultural historiography. In the context of queer theory, gender performativity, and dialogic multiplicity, Radha's identity is relational, fluid, and transformational.

Finding Radha is not a mere collection of literary pieces. It is the repossession of mythic femininity and an act of historiographical intervention. The voice of Radha gives shelter to the muzzled voices of the marginalised women. Radha's remembrance is to remember those women whose desire, hope, and love were never recognised but form the crux of the Indian cultural memory.

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