2021

The Dance of Ādi Śakti: The Goddess in the Songs of Bharati and Nazrul

Achintya Prahlad

Ashoka University, Sonipat, India

Follow this and additional works at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yjmr>

Part of the [Hindu Studies Commons](#), [Music Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Prahlad, Achintya (2021) "The Dance of Ādi Śakti: The Goddess in the Songs of Bharati and Nazrul," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion*: Vol. 7: No. 2, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1193>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yale Journal of Music & Religion by an authorized editor of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact elischolar@yale.edu.

The Dance of Ādi Śakti: The Goddess in the Songs of Bharati and Nazrul

Cover Page Footnote

I am very grateful to Saraswati Rajagopalan, Malavika Ganesh Iyer, Vibishan Balasubramaniam, Krishnashis Mondal, and Balakrishnan Raghavan for the valuable discussions regarding the emotional aspect of the Carnatic rāga Varāḷi, which was used by Bharati for his Cutantira-p Paḷḷu.

The Dance of Ādi Śakti

The Goddess in the Songs of Bharati and Nazrul

Achintya Prahlad

This article looks at the goddess Ādi Śakti in various forms—Kālī, Durgā, Umā—through the eyes of two renowned revolutionary poet-songwriters of the Indian freedom struggle: the Tamil poet C. Subramania Bharati¹ (1882–1921) and the Bangla poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976). The two poets probably never met. While Bharati had some knowledge of Bangla,² and significant Bengali influence from Aurobindo Ghosh and Sister Nivedita,³ Nazrul probably knew no Tamil. Also, Nazrul's most productive period was in the 1920s and 1930s,⁴ after Bharati's death. Thus, it is highly unlikely that they read each other's works. Yet, there are several similarities in their poetry. My work compares some of their ideas through an analysis of their songs that are either addressed to the goddess or connected to her in some way. Both poets wrote a wide variety of poems and songs—political, romantic, philosophical, and devotional. However, the present article focuses on the aspect of Śakti worship and how it influenced their idea of an Indian nation.⁵ The goddess exerts a major influence on both poets. To the best of my knowledge, while a great deal of research has been done on each individual poet, mine is the first comparative study.

The questions this paper addresses are:

1. What are the points of convergence and divergence in each poet's approach to the goddess and in how they transform her worship into a revolutionary act?

2. How do their greatly different cultural backgrounds impact their goddess poetry?
3. How does the goddess shape their views of an Indian nation?

Before addressing these questions, I talk about the goddess in some detail, followed by the life stories of the two poets.

The Goddess

The worship of Kālī—or Kālī, as her name is written in Tamil—and other such powerful maternal goddesses has been influential in both Tamil and Bengali cultures for centuries. In Tamil regions,⁶ it is connected largely to the worship of Dravidian goddesses known as *Amman*,⁷ or to the worship of the ancient goddess Korāvai⁸ of Caṅkam literature. Later, probably owing to influences from the north, some of these goddesses became identified with Śiva's wife Pārvatī or her avatāras Durgā and Kālī.⁹ However, many of them still retain their Dravidian character. The maternal honorific *Amman* has come to be applied as a suffix to “Hindu” goddesses as well,¹⁰ but only to forms of the consort of Śiva. In Bengal,¹¹ mother goddess worship is connected to the Śākta faith¹²—which is based on Purāṇas¹³ and Tantras¹⁴ in Sanskrit—alongside the worship of Bengali goddesses.¹⁵ All these goddesses are referred to with *Mā* (mother) before their names. Unlike *Amman* in Tamil, which is only used for a goddess, *Mā* in Bangla is also the term of address for one's own mother, and, by extension, a term of respect or endearment for any woman. In these senses, Tamil uses

Ammā.¹⁶ Nazrul also uses *Mā* for Islamic figures such as Fāṭimah, daughter of the prophet Muḥammad, or ‘Ā’ishah, the prophet’s third wife.¹⁷

The word *śākta* is derived from Śakti (power), the name of the supreme goddess of this faith, who is now identified with Śiva’s consort in her various avatāras (incarnations) – Pārvatī, Durgā, Kālī, Mīnākṣī, and so on. She is called Ādi Śakti (the Primordial Power) or Ādi Parāśakti (the Primordial Supreme Power). She may also be called Śiva-Śakti,¹⁸ as in some of Bharati’s poems.¹⁹ As a matter of nomenclature, just as those who consider Viṣṇu or Śiva as the supreme deity are called Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, respectively, a Śākta is one who gives supremacy to the goddess Śakti. However, these religious labels also imply certain systems of worship.

In Tāntric Śāktism, the ten Mahāvidyā goddesses are of especial importance.²⁰ They can be grouped into two categories, the Śrī-kula and the Kālī-kula.²¹ The former consists of more “domesticated” goddesses like Lalitā Tripurasundarī and Rāja-Mātangi,²² while the latter consists of “fearsome” goddesses like Kālī and Tārā. South Indian (e.g., Tamil) Śāktism is based more on the worship of Lalitā,²³ while in the east, for example in Bengal, Kālī and Tārā are much more important. In Śyāmā-saṅgīt, a genre of Bangla devotional songs dedicated to Kālī, the names *Kālī* and *Tārā* are used interchangeably.²⁴ I mention Śyāmā-saṅgīt here because Nazrul’s songs on Kālī are also considered a part of this category.²⁵ I will not dwell on South Indian Śāktism here, since those rituals do not seem to have influenced Bharati.

Kālī/Kālī is considered by many to be a terrifying (*ghora*) avatāra of the otherwise calm (*saumya*) Pārvatī. There are songs

in both Tamil and Bengali traditions that describe a bloodthirsty goddess²⁶ wearing garlands of skulls and frequenting the *śmaśāna*, the place where the dead are cremated. The *śmaśāna* commonly appears in Nazrul’s Śyāmā-saṅgīt too.²⁷ However, the corresponding Tamil words – *mayāṇam* and *cuṭukāṭu* – do not figure in Bharati’s Kālī songs. He describes a destructive form of Kālī only in one song, *Ūli-k Kūttu* (Dance of Cosmic Destruction). This song has images of ghosts, blood, skulls, and fire, but does not refer to a *śmaśāna*.

Biographical Details of the Poets

Bharati

C. Subramania Bharati, styled as “Mahākavi,” the Great Poet, was born in a Tamil Brahmin family on December 11, 1882, in Ettayapuram, a small town in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu, India. Though his father brought him up with traditional Brahmin orthodoxy, he rejected notions of caste early on. The loss of his mother in 1887 had a major impact on him, and possibly contributed to his developing a great maternal attachment for the goddess Kālī. His poetic prowess showed itself in his childhood. At age 11, he was awarded the title of Bharati at the court of the Maharaja of Ettayapuram.²⁸ Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess who presides over the arts, including poetry and music, has Bhārati as one of her multiple epithets, and this name, when awarded as a title to a poet, indicates a person who has been blessed by this goddess. Other poets have received this title, but when it is used by itself, it refers to Subramania Bharati alone.

Speaking of Sarasvatī, it is important to mention that Bharati had good knowledge of Carnatic music (South Indian rāga music). Several of his songs are based

on rāgas. Some songs are also based on Hindustani (North Indian classical) rāgas.

From 1898 to 1902, Bharati lived with his aunt in Benares (Varanasi) in North India, which is an important holy city for Hindus owing to being situated on the banks of the river Gaṅgā (Ganges), and a seat of learning.²⁹ At the Hindu College in this city, he acquired proficiency in Hindi, Sanskrit, and English. More important, he was disillusioned by sights such as animal sacrifice in a temple and child widows, their heads shaved, being led away to an institution for widows. These had such a great influence on him that he discarded his tuft and sacred thread—markers of Brahmin-ness.³⁰ Much later, in Pondicherry in 1913, he would perform the sacred thread ceremony for R. Kanakalingam, a boy from an “untouchable” caste, in a symbolic blow to the rigidity of caste hierarchies.³¹

In 1906, Bharati attended the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta.³² This was another turning point in his life, since during this time he met Sister Nivedita (born Margaret Elizabeth Noble), a woman of Irish origin who had become a disciple of the Bengali Hindu saint Swami Vivekananda, who was in turn a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Nivedita was influenced by Ramakrishna’s Śāktism. She passed this on to Bharati, showed him a vision of the nation-mother as an avatar of Śakti, and turned him into a fierce advocate for women’s liberation. Bharati considered her his spiritual guru and dedicated an anthology of his patriotic poems to her. He says:³³

An offering to grace, a temple of love
As a sun that dispels the darkness
in my heart,
As benevolent rain to my thirsty land,

As unbounded wealth to the destitute,
As a burning flame to the bondage
of slavery,
Exists Mother Nivedita,
at whose feet,
I bow in adoration.

From 1904 on, Bharati worked as a journalist. He was first the subeditor of an Indian nationalist newspaper, *Swadesamitran*, and then simultaneously the editor of *Chakravartini*, a magazine devoted to women’s empowerment. He left both these journals to become the editor of *India* magazine in 1906. However, he was not named as the editor on paper, since his “fiery” writings were likely to attract unfavorable attention from the British government. In 1908, the publication of *India* was stopped by the government, and its legal editor, M. Srinivasan, was arrested. Following this, Bharati fled to Pondicherry, then a French colony, to escape arrest. He restarted *India* there.

During his stay in Pondicherry, Bharati came in contact with several *siddhas*, mystics who are believed to have spiritual accomplishments. One of these *siddhas*, Kuḷḷaccāmi, was considered by Bharati as his guru.³⁴ These mystics do not seem to have been influenced by Śāktism or Tantra. However, Pondicherry is also where Bharati became closely acquainted with Aurobindo Ghosh, also known as Sri Aurobindo, a Bengali philosopher and yogi, whose intellectually driven Śāktism must certainly have had an influence on Bharati. On the lines of Aurobindo’s English magazine *Karmayogin*, Bharati started *Karmayogi*, a Tamil magazine.³⁵ He also worked for many other journals. He and Aurobindo together researched Hindu scriptures including the Vedas, and this had a great influence on his poetry.

In 1918, Bharati was arrested when he reentered British India. After his friends helped him to get a quick release, he moved to Kadayam, his wife's birthplace. After some travels, he settled down in Chennai in late 1920.

It is important to mention that Bharati had a brief meeting with M. K. Gandhi during a visit to Chennai in 1919,³⁶ following which he composed a poem in Gandhi's honor, in which he compares Gandhi to heroes in Hindu mythology.³⁷ He also wrote poems in praise of other freedom fighters such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai.

Bharati's poetic career was unfortunately short-lived. In Chennai in July and August 1921, following an attack by a temple elephant that was in musth, his health deteriorated.³⁸ On September 11, he passed away, not yet having completed 39 years of age.

Subramania Bharati's granddaughter, S. Vijaya Bharati Sundara Rajan, says in her 1972 biography of her grandfather that though Bharati was a staunch devotee of Śakti, he did not practice Śākta rituals.³⁹ Indeed, he was not ritualistic, as we see in his poem *Sarasvatī Tēviyiṇ Pukaḷ* (Praise of Goddess Sarasvatī), also called *Vellai Tāmarai* (White Lotus), in honor of the goddess of arts and academics. There, he says:⁴⁰

Muttering mantras,
Stacking books in rows,
Adorning them with sandal paste
and flowers –
These prescribed rituals are not
her pūjā.

The true pūjā (worship) is as follows:

Elucidation of the arts in every house,
One or two schools on every street;

In the entire country, in all towns,
In all the cities, many, many schools;
If there is a town without education,
May it be consigned to the flames...

In another poem, *Paraciva Vellam* (Flood of Divinity),⁴¹ he says:

There is no need of saffron robes or
matted locks;
It is just enough to think [of God]
to attain the highest position.

Bharati makes no distinction between Kālī, Śakti, and the Tamil goddess Māri(-amman).⁴² He also makes no distinction between the goddess and the nation-mother. To quote Vijaya Bharati:⁴³

Bharati visualises Mother India as Mother Shakti. His experience of Mother Shakti is fascinating. The vision is the same; but the experience of it varies. The completeness of his vision had earned for his national poems the reputed title, "Desopanishad," comparing the poems with the Upanishadic vision of ancient India.

This vision of Bharati's is not limited to India alone. In his eyes, Kālī, being also the World-Mother, is the driving force even for international events such as the victory of the Bolsheviks in the 1917 Russian Revolution. His poem *Putiya Ruṣiyā* (New Russia) in fact opens with the words *Mākālī Parācakti* (Mahā-Kālī Parāśakti).⁴⁴

Nazrul

Kazi Nazrul Islam, who is the national poet of Bangladesh, was born on May 24, 1899, in a Sunni Muslim family in Churulia, Burdwan (Bardhaman) district, in what is now West Bengal, India.⁴⁵ His father, who was the imam of the local mosque, passed away early, and owing to penury, Nazrul was not educated beyond the tenth grade.

However, he received religious education. He took over his father's duties in the mosque, and also served as the muezzin there.⁴⁶ But in spite of this strict Muslim upbringing, he was highly interested in Hindu culture. He even acted in musical plays involving Hindu mythological themes.⁴⁷

At age 18, he joined the British Indian Army and was stationed in Karachi. There, in his spare time, he began studying Persian poetry and producing his own poems and stories.⁴⁸ He is said to have been fond of the poetry of Rūmī and Ḥāfez.⁴⁹ But he was also enamored of the work of Bengali writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chatterjee.⁵⁰

On returning to Bengal in 1920, Nazrul began playing an active part in literary and anticolonial activities.⁵¹ His poetry in this period was infused with the fervor of Indian nationalism. In addition, he was a strong advocate of social justice and equality, and an equally strong opponent of religious fanaticism. He was one of the founders of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, which tended toward communism. In 1925, he headed a journal called *Lāṅgal* (Plow), in which he published a series of poems, *Sāmyabādī* (Songs of Equality).⁵²

Of equality I sing:
Where all barriers and differences
Between man and man have vanished,
Where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists
and Christians
have mingled together.

Rachel Fell McDermott rightly remarks that this "mingling" (*miśāno* in Bangla) was a key feature of Nazrul's poetry. Hindu, Islamic, and even Christian imagery coexist in several of his poems. Not just that, he married a Hindu woman from Comilla in East Bengal, Ashalata Sengupta (renamed Pramila by Nazrul), who was a member

of the Brahmo Samaj, a religious reform institution. The union was met by stiff opposition, except by Pramila's mother, who silently took the couple to Calcutta (Kolkata) and conducted the wedding. Even members of the Brahmo Samaj were against it.⁵³ Nazrul continued to receive hatred from sections of both the Hindu and the Muslim community for his syncretic views.⁵⁴

In their married life, Nazrul and Pramila were never very religious or ritualistic. However, they gave syncretic names to their four sons—Krishna Muhammad, Arindam Khaled (known as Bulbul), Kazi Sabyasachi, and Kazi Aniruddha. Krishna Muhammad is an interesting name. The first part is Kṛṣṇa, supreme God for many Hindus, and the preacher of the wisdom of the Bhagavad-Gītā (the Song of the Lord), a central scripture. The second part is the Prophet Muḥammad, the founder of Islam, revered by Muslims. The first two sons died in early childhood, and this became a source of lasting grief to Nazrul.⁵⁵

During the 1920s, Kālī/Durgā became a dominant image in his poems, as the savior of the Indian nation. In some poems, she takes on quite a bloodthirsty form. For example:⁵⁶

Slice off, Ma, this hoax of a castrated
man's love!
Strike with your scimitar, bring on
the battle, teach us the mantra of
immortality.
Make men of the effeminate, give
blood, Ma; show blood!

...

Come alone, mad girl, dancing the
tāṇḍava—"tā thai tā thai!"
Thirsting for blood, chanting the
lamentation, "I am hungry!"
Chinnamastā, mad for blood, "I am
hungry," come, Mā Kālī.

...

In vain did Siraj, Tipu, and Mir
Kasim sacrifice themselves, Caṇḍī!
You took your form of illusion;
everyone said it was the law
of destiny.

...

Suddenly when that rebel the Rani of
Jhansi burst into rage,

Even when that crazy girl pleaded
with you, you did not come, Mā
Bhavānī.

If you act such and play tricks, how
much longer will you be worshipped?

You are the stony daughter of a stony
father;⁵⁷ come now, Ten-armed Mā!

Acting like this year after year—this is
your disgrace; this is no worship.

What blessing is this that you give—
cheating in return for the salutations
of crores of children?

You have eaten many goats and
buffalos; O Rākṣasī,⁵⁸ but your
appetite isn't satiated yet.

Come, Stony Woman, now take the
blood-nectar of your own sons!

Even in this intense appeal to a “Hindu” goddess, Nazrul includes Muslim heroes such as Siraj ud-Daula, Mir Kasim, and Tipu Sultan, alongside a Hindu heroine, the Rani of Jhansi. This poem was considered so controversial by the British government that they arrested Nazrul for it in 1923.

Nazrul produced large volumes of poetry and other literature by the early 1940s, including over 2,600 songs.⁵⁹ He developed his own singing style that he used in drama, films, and music performances. However, this success did not last long.

Nazrul was frequently arrested by the British government for his “seditious” works.⁶⁰ Also, he contracted a neuro-degenerative disorder in 1942, and this effectively ended his poetic career, since he began to lose his memory and speech.

He was admitted to mental hospitals.⁶¹ At some point, he was also taken to London and Vienna for treatment. On his birthday in 1972, India sent him to the newly independent Bangladesh, where he became the national poet. He lived there until his death in 1976.⁶²

Pramila became paralyzed in 1939. After her death in 1962, she was buried according to Islamic custom as per her wish, and not cremated according to Hindu custom.⁶³ Nazrul's *songs* on Kālī—his modernistic reinvention of the traditional Śyāmā-saṅgīt—began to be written in the 1930s, which is also when he wrote his songs on Kṛṣṇa and on Islamic themes and personalities. He wrote thousands of songs on various themes, of which only a few survive. His songs on Kṛṣṇa number 400, and those on Kālī/Umā number 150.⁶⁴ It is on the latter songs that this paper focuses. To quote McDermott:⁶⁵

in compiling a comprehensive anthology of Śyāmā Saṅgīt, or sung devotional poetry to the goddess Kālī, I discovered to my surprise that perhaps the best and most popular of all the composers of the genre was an Indian Muslim poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam. Sometimes when I interviewed singers and asked them to perform their favourite Śyāmā Saṅgīt for me, they would sing Nazrul only.

Like Bharati, Nazrul was a polyglot. He was well versed in Sanskrit, Bangla, and Persian. He also studied Hindustani music (North Indian rāga music). He composed songs in 200 rāgas, and even created new rāgas.⁶⁶

Nazrul's guru, Baradacaran Majumdar, was a Śākta Tāntric *sādhaka* and instructed Nazrul in the rituals.⁶⁷ But even though Nazrul practiced these rituals, he was critical of excessive emphasis on ritual and of religious bigotry. Interestingly, his

Śyāmā-saṅgīt songs do not directly refer to Tāntric ritual.⁶⁸

Both Nazrul and Bharati were Śakti devotees, albeit with different approaches. But neither of them was solely a goddess worshipper.⁶⁹ Many other deities or other religious figures feature in their works. Kṛṣṇa occupies a large space in their devotional poetry. Nazrul came from a Muslim family and wrote a large body of Islamic devotional songs in addition to songs on several Hindu deities. Bharati, too, wrote a song on Allāh and one on Jesus Christ, and a long poem on Guru Gobind Singh, tenth guru of the Sikhs. He wrote several songs on Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, and Murukan, and a poem on Gaṇeśa in several poetic meters. The Buddha finds mention in his poems as well. These collections of poetry warrant detailed discussions in separate articles.

Nazrul wrote songs in praise of Śiva too, such as *Nāce Naṭarāj Mahākāl* and *Aruṇakānti Ke go Yogī Bhikhārī*.⁷⁰ The latter song in fact combines Kṛṣṇa with Śiva. But in Bharati's case, though Śiva is mentioned in several of his works, often as the divine consort of Śakti, there is no separate song on Śiva with his typical iconography. *Paraciva Veḷḷam* uses words like *Civaṇ* (Śiva) and *Īcaṇ* (Īśa, the lord, also a name of Śiva), but the deity mentioned in this poem is without attributes (*nir-guṇa*).

Neither Nazrul nor Bharati can be described as being limited to one religion or one genre of poetry. Though each had a strict religious upbringing—the religion being monotheistic in Nazrul's case—they broke free of the restrictions imposed by religion or caste. Both were committed to the idea of a secular Indian nation.⁷¹ In addition to poems that were devotional, patriotic, or calling for the end of British rule over India,

Bharati wrote on love, nature, the greatness of Tamil language and culture, women's empowerment, ending caste hierarchy, and so on. Several of these themes are shared with Nazrul. Though Bharati and Nazrul wrote a wide range of poetry, the general public knows them mainly through their songs, which are popular to this day. Below I present an analysis of a few of these songs, which in my opinion provide an excellent insight into their views of the goddess and of India. Before moving to the songs themselves, I will describe the system of *svaras* (roughly translated as musical notes) used in Carnatic (South Indian) and Hindustani (North Indian) rāga music. This is necessary since this article talks about songs and rāgas.

***Svaras* and rāgas in Hindustani and Carnatic Music⁷²**

Hindustani and Carnatic music, the two predominant forms of classical music in India, essentially use the same twelve notes as western music, but the treatment is very different. *Svara*, the Indian term equivalent to “note,” does not necessarily refer to a pure note. It is a pure note in some cases, but in others it often contains one or more embellishments, known as *gamaka* or *alaṅkāra*.

The pure notes are defined not as absolute frequencies, but as *relative* to the tonic note *sa*, whose pitch is chosen based on the convenience of the voice or the instrument, with women typically having higher pitches than men. This note is known as the “system tonic,” since it typically acts as the tonic note for the entire performance.⁷³ There are twelve notes in an octave, each being higher than the previous by a semitone. They are described in Table 1, in terms of their names in Hindustani

and Carnatic music—*sa*, *ri*, *ga*, *ma*, *pa*, *dha*, *ni*—and the corresponding note intervals in western music. In a given octave, there is one *sa* and one *pa*, but there are two each of *ri*, *ga*, *ma*, *dha*, and *ni*—one flat (*komala*)

and the other sharp (*tīvra*). Thus, an octave contains a total of twelve notes. Singing or playing takes place in three octaves or registers—lower, middle, and higher. The middle *sa* defines one's pitch.

Name, abbreviation	Carnatic	Hindustani	Western	Western note-interval
Ṣaḍja, sa	Ṣaḍja (S)	Ṣaḍja (S)	1	Perfect unison
Ṛṣabha, ri (Carnatic), re (Hindustani)	Śuddha ṛṣabha (R1)	Komala ṛṣabha (r)	2-flat	Minor second
	Catuḥśruti ṛṣabha (R2), Śuddha gāndhāra (G1)	Śuddha (tīvra) ṛṣabha (R)	2	Major second
Gāndhāra, ga	Sādhāraṇa gāndhāra (G2), Ṣaṭ-śruti ṛṣabha (R3)	Komala gāndhāra (g)	3-flat	Minor third
	Antara gāndhāra (G3)	Śuddha (tīvra) gāndhāra (G)	3	Major third
Madhyama, ma	Śuddha madhyama (M1)	Śuddha madhyama (m)	4	Perfect fourth
	Prati madhyama (M2)	Tīvra madhyama (M)	4-sharp	Augmented fourth
Pañcama, pa	Pañcama (P)	Pañcama (P)	5	Perfect fifth
Dhaivata, dha	Śuddha dhaivata (D1)	Komala dhaivata (d)	6-flat	Minor sixth
	Catuḥśruti dhaivata (D2), Śuddha niṣāda (N1)	Śuddha (tīvra) dhaivata (D)	6	Major sixth
Niṣāda, ni	Kaiśikī niṣāda (N2), Ṣaṭ-śruti dhaivata (D3)	Komala niṣāda (n)	7-flat	Minor seventh
	Kākalī niṣāda (N3)	Śuddha (tīvra) niṣāda (N)	7	Major seventh

Table 1. The twelve notes of Carnatic and Hindustani music, and their modern symbols

From these twelve notes, *melas* (scales, or musical modes) are formed. These are parent scales for *rāgas*, which are not merely collections of notes, but grammatical and *emotional* entities, similar to but not identical with what are known as *dastgāh* and *maqām* in Persian and Arabian music, or *makam* in Turkish music.⁷⁴ A mela as a rule contains *sa*, *pa*, and one each of *ri*, *ga*, *ma*, *dha*, and *ni*. In Hindustani music, thirty-two melas are possible. In Carnatic music, there are forty additional melas, bringing the total to seventy-two. This is because of the possibility of one note appearing in different “roles” in different melas. For example, the note corresponding to the *tīvra ṛṣabha* is a *ṛṣabha* (R2) in some melas, and a *gāndhāra* (G1) in others. The forty additional scales have “dissonant” combinations of notes, and are hence referred to as *vivādi melas*. These melas use at least one out of G1, N1, R3, and N3. The *rāgas* arising from *vivādi melas* are called *vivādi rāgas*. They are typically more difficult to sing than *rāgas* arising from the other thirty-two melas. One such *rāga*, *Varāḷi*, used by Bharati in his patriotic song *Cutantira-p Paḷlu*, is a *vivādi rāga*. It employs one *vivādi* note, G1. A mela is a mere collection of pure notes; a *rāga* has emotional and aesthetic character. Each *rāga* has a unique personality that cannot always be described in words; it can only be experienced. This abstract experience may translate to named emotions in the mind of a musician or listener. Often, *rāgas* that contain more minor notes – especially R1, D1, and/or G2 – may seem emotionally “heavier” or more “sombere” although this is not a general rule. There is a great deal of individual variation in the emotional and aesthetic perception of *rāgas*, but there is also a common thread.⁷⁵ Applying different

rāgas to the same set of lyrics results in them being perceived differently, as we shall see with the songs of Nazrul and Bharati. Also, the lyrics of a song and their meaning influence the presentation of the *rāga* within the frame of the song. Thus, one *rāga* may be used to convey several emotions, even within a single song.

Some *rāgas* pick five notes out of a mela, some pick six, and some use all seven. Some *rāgas* may use both the flat and sharp variant of one or more *svara*-*sthānas* – for example, a *rāga* that contains both R1 and R2, or a *rāga* that contains G2, G3, N2, and N3.

The Songs

I discuss three songs by each poet. I arrange them in pairs based on similarity in what is being conveyed.

Fierce, yet Beautiful

I begin with *Ūḷi-k Kūttu* by Bharati and *Śmaśān-Kālir Nām Śune* by Nazrul. While the imagery differs, these two songs have a common thread of a certain attractiveness in Kālī’s terrifying form.

1. *Ūḷi-k Kūttu*: Dance of Cosmic Destruction (Bharati)

Veṭipaṭum aṇṭatt’ iṭi pala tāḷam
pōṭa – verum
Veḷiyil iratta-k kaḷiyoṭu pūtam
pāṭa-p – pāṭṭiṇ
Aṭipaṭu poruḷiṇ aṭipaṭum oliyir
kūṭa-k – kaḷitt’
Āṭuṇ⁷⁶ Kālī! Cāmuṇṭī! Kaṇkāḷī!⁷⁷
Aṇṇai! Aṇṇai! Āṭuṇ kūttai
Nāṭa-c ceytāy eṇṇai.⁷⁸

This is the opening stanza of *Ūḷi-k Kūttu*.⁷⁹ This is a difficult poem to translate, due to the unusual choice of words. The sounds employed and the pattern of alliteration (e.g., *veṭipaṭum/veḷiyil* or *aṭipaṭu/āṭum*) and

rhyme (e.g., *veṭi/iṭi*, *veḷi/kali*, *pōṭa/pāṭa/kūṭa*, *Anṇai/enṇai*) are nearly impossible to reproduce in a language other than Tamil. It is also often challenging to fathom a poet's thought process. However, I attempt to capture the feeling:

The thundering sounds of the
exploding universe provide varied
percussion.
In empty outer space, drunk on blood,
a ghost sings.
The meaning of this song is
constantly struck, and this sound
mixes into the singing.
O ecstatically dancing Kālī!
Cāmuṇḍī!⁸⁰ Skeletal one!
(Refrain) Mother! Mother!
The *kūttu* you dance –
You have made me fall in love
with it. (1)

The five elements spill and
become one.
Then this entity immerses itself
in the movements of Śakti.
In the light that appears there, the
mind quickly slips. With that speed,
You perform an endless dance and
shower blazing fire.
(Refrain) (2)

As the sky is reduced to ruins, it
shudders in fear and confusion.
The forces of movement are all
dispersed in many directions.⁸¹
There, only the ghost of pralaya⁸²
roams, howling “*Ōhōhō!*”
Intoxicated, you run around roaring,
and perform a heated dance of
destruction!
(Refrain) (3)

The Śakti-ghost strikes heads and
heads together,
Creating a rhythm of cracking
sounds – “*Caṭṭaccaṭaṭaṭaṭaṭ!*”

The fire from your eyes flies in any
and every direction.
This is the time when everything dies
while watching itself burn.

(Refrain) (4)

As Time causes the three worlds
to be uprooted,
The light of divine silence
shines alone.
Seeing Śiva's form, your fiery anger
moves away.
You gently touch his hand and dance
a joyous *kūttu*!
Mother! Mother! The *kūttu*
you dance –
You have made me fall in love
with it. (5)

Let us first look at the literal meaning of the song title. The word *ūḷi* has several meanings. The meaning that is relevant here is the first meaning given by the University of Madras *Tamil Lexicon*: “Time of universal deluge and destruction of all things, end of the world.”⁸³ This corresponds to the Sanskrit word *pralaya* and is the sense in which Bharati uses the word. *Kūttu* means “dance.” In the context of Hindu mythology, this word refers to *tāṇḍava*, the vigorous dance of Śiva or Kālī, which can either create or destroy. This is different from Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa* dance, which is more aptly described in Tamil as *āṭal*, the noun form of the verb *āṭu(-vatu)*, “to dance.” However, the same verb is used in connection with *kūttu*.

The Tamil letter *ṭ* (ḷ) becomes a voiced consonant⁸⁴ – a *d*-sound rather than a *t*-sound – when it appears singly in the middle of a word, or when it is preceded by *ṇ*. Thus, the first line, *Veṭipaṭum aṇṭatt' iṭi pala tāḷam pōṭa*, beautifully captures the “thunder” (*iṭi*) of the exploding universe (*veṭipaṭum aṇṭam*) by producing an onomatopoeic

The word *pūtam*, derived from the Sanskrit *bhūta*, is used in two senses in this poem. The first sense is “ghost” (*pēy*). The second sense is *aim-perum-pūtam*, that is, *pañca-mahā-bhūta*,⁸⁵ the five great elements by which all creation is said to be constituted – fire, earth, wind, water, and empty space. Of these, the poem mentions fire and empty space again and again. Once the fire of Kālī’s rage has destroyed everything, all that remains is empty space, filled with light. At this point, a common motif is found. Śiva appears, and seeing him, Kālī becomes peaceful. This is similar the well-known scene where Śiva lies at the berserk Kālī’s feet and she calms down once she steps on him.⁸⁶ One more such story is that of Taṭātakai (Mīnakṣī), another avatāra of the goddess, who challenges Śiva to battle, but is soon overcome by love for him, and becomes more “feminine.”⁸⁷ In a tale from the mythology surrounding the famous Śiva temple at Tillai (Chidambaram) in Tamil Nadu, Śiva challenges Kālī to a dance contest.⁸⁸ When he dances the *ūrdhva tāṇḍava*, lifting one leg high up, Kālī has to accept defeat, since *ūrdhva tāṇḍava* is considered immodest for women.⁸⁹ But Bharati’s Kālī is undefeated. Her *kūttu* continues even after she meets Śiva, morphing from a fiery dance to a joyous one (*āṇanta-k kūttu*, *ānanda tāṇḍava*). It is still a *kūttu*, that is, a *tāṇḍava*, and not a conventionally “feminine” dance (*lāsya*). Thus, the cycle of destruction and re-creation continues.

power presented in the *abhaṅga* poem *Paṇḍharīce Bhūta Moṭhe* (The Great Ghost of Paṇḍharī) by the seventeenth-century Marathi saint Tukārām.⁹⁰

Books of Bharati's poetry specify the rāga and tāla (rhythmic cycle) for several of the songs. However, *Ūli-k Kūttu* is listed without these. Bharati's songs are largely not sung in the original rāgas,⁹² but that is a separate discussion. Musical interpretations of *Ūli-k Kūttu* exist in many rāgas. Several of these versions have been performed by Bharatanāṭyam dancers.⁹³ The version by the Carnatic vocalist S. Sowmya,⁹⁴ composed in the pentatonic rāga Mōhanam, is especially attractive to me. The song is part of an album of Bharati songs sung by her.⁹⁵

Mōhanam, composed of the five svaras S R2 G3 P D2, which correspond to the major pentatonic scale in western music, contains no minor notes, and thus usually sounds “cheerful.” It could thus be counterintuitive to imagine it being used to express Kālī’s destructive *kūttu*, which is full of three intense *rasas* (traditional artistic

emotions) – *raudra* (fury), *vīra* (heroism), and *bhayānaka* (horror). There might also be *bībhatsa rasa* (disgust) in the images of blood and skulls. However, Bharati says in the refrain that he is captivated by this dance. Thus, he also brings in *adbhuta rasa* (wonder). Toward the end of the poem, *śṛṅgāra rasa* (the romantic or erotic sentiment) also enters, when Śiva appears and the goddess lovingly (*koñci*) touches his hand. Thus, Mōhanam, whose name literally means “charming,” brings out the beauty in this fiery dance. One could also interpret the five svaras of the rāga as representing the five elements.

Sowmya’s rendition of the song represents Kālī’s dance in the following

Figure 1: Śmaśāna-Kālī as depicted by Raja Ravi Varma. Source: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/goddess-kali-ravi-varma-press-karal-lonavala/iAHNImEWSOYQeg>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21792915>.

ways: through its fast tempo, a vigorous and nearly staccato singing style, and the large density of *tāra* (higher-octave) svaras. Unlike other compositions in Mōhanam, the density of *kampita gamakas* (oscillations) is low here. The svaras are not elongated until the end of a line, and are mostly sung briskly to reflect the imagined speed of the *kūttu*. The mṛdaṅgam and violin accompaniment contribute significantly to the overall ambience. Sowmya ends by singing *Kaḷitt-āṭuñ Kālī! Cāmunṭī! Kaṅkāḷī!* thrice. Each time, the last syllable gets higher—from Ś to Ṛ2 to Ġ3, the dot above indicating the higher octave. The ending on Ġ3 with a large jump (*dāṭu*) from D2, reminiscent of *ūrdhva tāṇḍava*, provides a flourish and a sense of triumph.

Interestingly, Nazrul invokes a terrifying Kālī in many of his poems, but *Ūḷi-k Kūttu* is Bharati’s only poem where the goddess is in this form.

2. Śmaśān-Kālīr nām śune re bhay ke pāy?: Who fears the name of Śmaśāna-Kālī? (Nazrul)

Kālī appears in diverse forms. In Bengali depictions, she typically has her foot on a supine Śiva. The Dakṣiṇā Kālī form, in which she places her right (*dakṣiṇa*) foot on Śiva,⁹⁶ is considered suitable for household worship. On the other hand, worshipping Śmaśāna-Kālī—“Kālī of the cremation ground”—at home is considered to be inauspicious, owing to her association with the *śmaśāna*.⁹⁷ In this form, she places her left foot on Śiva,⁹⁸ perhaps indicative of the left-hand path (*vāma-mārga*) of Tantra.⁹⁹ The artist Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906) depicts Śmaśāna-Kālī (Fig. 1).¹⁰⁰ Nazrul’s personal Kālī idol, too, appears to have the left foot in front.¹⁰¹

The traditional view is that Śmaśāna-Kālī is an extremely *ghora* form. However,

Nazrul, ever the *bidrohī*,¹⁰² subverts this view by saying:

*Śmaśān-Kālīr nām śune re bhay
ke pāy?*
Mā je āmār śaber mājhe Śib jāgāy
Hearing the name of Śmaśāna-Kālī,
who is afraid?
Why, my Mother is the one who
awakens Śiva within the *śava*!

The *Śiva-śava* wordplay is traditional. It reflects a central Śākta belief that without Śakti, Śiva is but a *śava* (corpse).¹⁰³ This is an interpretation of the image of Śiva lying at Kālī's feet. However, Nazrul uses this image in a nontraditional place, by saying that Śmaśāna-Kālī is in reality not terrifying, since she is the one who awakens spiritual energy within a "corpse" – which could also signify a country depressed under foreign rule. I say this because it is known that Kālī had a great influence on Nazrul's national consciousness.¹⁰⁴ I translate the rest of the song below:

She is the daughter of joy,
She is the *sudhā* of peace that
counters the throat-poison.
At Mā's feet, the red hibiscus of
dawn-glow is resplendent.
In her four hands, she bears the
khañjanī of the four *yugas* –
Which jingle every day with the
rhythm of dance.
Into the *mr̥ta*, my Mother weaves
mr̥ta-sañjibanī.
In his deepest meditation, [even]
the Lord of *Yogīs* cannot find this
Yogamāyā.

There are several expressions and images here. "Daughter of joy" (*ānander-i nandinī*) is similar to the term *ānandinī* that Nazrul uses for Umā¹⁰⁵ and Fāṭimah¹⁰⁶ alike. We will revisit the image of the goddess as

a daughter later. The poison in the throat, *kañṭha-biṣ*, refers to the poison that Śiva is said to have drunk during the churning of the cosmic ocean. Nazrul describes Kālī as the *sudhā*, that is, *amṛta*, the nectar of immortality, which counteracts this poison. The poison could be representative either of the difficulties faced by India under the British, or of those faced by Nazrul in his own life. Nazrul's Śyāmā-saṅgīt songs – along with his songs on Kṛṣṇa and on Islamic themes – were mostly composed during the 1930s, when he also faced great personal struggles.¹⁰⁷ The image of the goddess as a life-giver could also be influenced by these experiences. Similar to the contrast between poison and *amṛta*, there is the contrast between the *mr̥ta* (a dead person, or a corpse), and the *mr̥ta-sañjibanī* (that which revives the dead). In Hindu mythology, this term refers either to a medicinal plant¹⁰⁸ or to a *mantra*.¹⁰⁹

Red hibiscus of the native, five-petaled variety, known as *lāl jabā* or *rāñā jabā* in Bangla, is the most important flower for Kālī worship in Bengali culture.¹¹⁰ There exists an anthology of Nazrul's Śyāmā-saṅgīt songs that is named *Rāñā Jabā* after this same flower.¹¹¹ The redness of a new dawn is compared to a hibiscus flower at the goddess's feet. Tamil traditions do not seem to ascribe the same importance to this flower in Kālī worship.

Ravi Varma's painting depicts the traditional iconography of Śmaśāna-Kālī. Nazrul's song departs significantly from this, describing her as holding *khañjanīs* representing the four *yugas* in her four hands. The four *yugas* – Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali – are each long durations of time consisting of several millennia, and are representative of the cycle of creation. The *khañjanī* is either a tambourine-like

instrument or a pair of cymbals.¹¹² Just as in Bharati's *Ūli-k Kūttu*, the image of the rhythmic cycle—*tāla*—is found here too, albeit produced by a different entity—the *yugas*. Nazrul also describes Kālī as dancing constantly. To me, the image of the *khañjanī*, with its ringing described using the onomatopoeic verb *ranajhani*—a gentler sound than the crackling *caṭṭaccaṭacaṭacaṭ*—is more suggestive of *ānanda tāṇḍava* than of *pralaya tāṇḍava*. There are other songs of Nazrul where he describes a more *ghora* form of the goddess, but the reason I choose to discuss *Śmaśān-Kālīr Nām Śune* here is that in spite of its imagery fundamentally differing from *Ūli-k Kūttu*, the two songs converge at the goddess's eternal rhythmic dance and the attractiveness within the fierce.

Nazrul describes Kālī as Yogamāyā, the magic of *yoga*. This power is so elusive that even Śiva himself, the king of *yoga* practitioners, has not understood it (or her) completely.

The original 1943 recording by Mrinalkanti Ghosh,¹¹³ with music composed by Chitta Roy, is in a mixture of the rāgas Kauśī Kānaṛā and (Hindustani) Bhairavī.¹¹⁴ Both rāgas have several minor notes, and thus impart a *gambhīra* (serious, somber, powerful) personality to the song. Mrinalkanti Ghosh's impassioned singing adds to this feeling. The rendition creates the fierce image of Śmaśāna-Kālī, but exhorts the devotee not to be afraid.

The scale of Kauśī Kānaṛā is SRgmPdn (*re* *tīvra*, *ga ma dha ni* *komala*), like the western scale known as the natural minor. For Bhairavī, the scale is SrgmPdn (*re* also *komala*), corresponding to the Phrygian mode. However, the *svara* R does enter into Bhairavī. Both rāgas tend to use several P-lacking ascending phrases such

as gmdnŚ, which add to their *gambhīra*-ness. The name Bhairavī also refers to a Mahāvidyā goddess of the Kālī-kula.

A large number of Nazrul's songs, including songs for which he composed the tunes himself, are in Bhairavī. Interestingly, Bharati uses the rāga Punnāgavarāḷi, which is derived from the same mela as Hindustani Bhairavī, for several of his songs.¹¹⁵

The World-Mother as a Daughter

Bhakti (devotion) is said to be of several varieties.¹¹⁶ *Dāśya bhāva* is when the *bhakta* (devotee) imagines themselves as a *dāsa* (slave or servant) of the deity. *Sakhyā bhāva* is when the *bhakta* sees the deity as a friend. More intimate forms are *madhura bhāva* or *śṛṅgāra bhāva*, and *vātsalya bhāva*.¹¹⁷ In *madhura bhāva*, the deity becomes the *bhakta*'s romantic lover. Bharati's devotion to Sarasvatī or Lakṣmī shows shades of *madhura bhava*.¹¹⁸ But when it comes to Kālī/Śakti, she is unambiguously *Anṇai*, the Mother¹¹⁹—except in one poem where she becomes a child.¹²⁰

Vātsalya signifies the love of a parent for their child. In this form of *bhakti*, the deity may be a parent—for example, Kālī as a mother. But it is also possible for the deity to be worshipped in the form of a child. One typically sees male deities such as Kṛṣṇa, Murukan, or Gaṇeśa being worshipped in child form. However, Ādi Parāśakti—considered the mother of the universe—may also be worshipped as a child or daughter. Nazrul often describes Kālī as *āmār kālō meye* (my black daughter).¹²¹ He also describes the universe as her “playroom.”¹²² Also, during the autumnal Durgā Pūjā festival in Bengal, the goddess is both Mā Durgā and Umā (Pārvatī), the daughter.¹²³ Just as Śyāmā-saṅgīt describes Kālī, another collection of songs, Umā-saṅgīt,¹²⁴ deals

with the goddess's annual visit to her mother's house. It can be divided into two categories¹²⁵—*Āgamanī* (Arrival) and *Bijayā* (*Vijaya-daśamī*).¹²⁶ Following in the footsteps of eighteenth-century composers such as Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya,¹²⁷ Nazrul too composed several *Umā-saṅgīt* songs.¹²⁸ One of these, an *Āgamanī* song, bears the common motif of *Umā's* mother, the mountain queen, missing her daughter, and asking her husband *Himālaya* to bring *Umā* home for the autumnal festival.

3. *Āmār Ānandinī Umā: My Delightful Umā* (Nazrul)

*Āmār ānandinī Umā āj'o āseni tār
māyer kache . . .*

*He Girirāj! Dekhe eso, kailāse mā
keman āche*

My delightful *Umā* has not yet come
to her mother . . .

O Mountain King! Please go and see
how she is doing in *Kailās*!

Every *Āśvin* month, my *Mā* comes
running to me,

Saying, "Mother, Mother."

Mā has not come, that is why
Flowers have not yet bloomed on the
creepers and trees.

We didn't go looking for her—
Maybe that's why *Mā* is vexed with us,
And not coming home to her mother,
She roams from *śmaśāna* to *śmaśāna*.

Holding *khīr*¹²⁹ and butter in a plate,
I call out to her with tears in my eyes,
"Come, *Umā*, come!"

She is the daughter who is desired by
the three worlds.

Without her, can [her] mother
stay alive?

This song was set to music by Kamal Dasgupta, the composer for a large part

of Nazrul's lyrics,¹³⁰ and the original 1937 recording¹³¹ was by a Muslim singer, Munshi Mohammed Kasem (known professionally as K. Mallick), who sang several of Nazrul's songs.¹³²

Āmār Ānandinī Umā is composed in a mixture of the *rāgas* *Jaunpurī* and *Bhairavī*, both of which have several minor notes, corresponding respectively to the natural minor scale/Aeolian mode and the Phrygian mode. The *laya* (tempo) is *vilambit* (slow), but there are many cascading phrases, somewhat in the manner of the traditional Punjabi musical form known as *ṭappā*. Such *ṭappā*-style songs are also common in *Rabindra-saṅgīt*, that is, the songs of another well-known Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore. In *Āmār Ānandinī Umā*, the combination of the minor-note-laden *rāgas* with the slow *ṭappā* style poignantly brings out the suffering in the mind of *Umā's* mother, who is pining for her darling daughter.

Umā may be *Ādi Parāśakti* to the rest of the world, but in her mother's eyes, she is the dearly missed daughter who visits only once a year. The recurring idea in many *Āgamanī* songs is that *Umā's* mother, the mountain queen *Menakā*,¹³³ is unhappy with the "crazy" man her daughter has married.¹³⁴ *Āmār Ānandinī Umā* too bears this image, but does not mention *Śiva* directly. It alludes to him through two places he is said to inhabit—the snowy mountain peak *Kailāsa* situated in what is now Tibet, and the *śmaśāna*.

The word *Mā* is used in diverse ways in this song. It is a term of respectful address for the goddess, and a term of endearment used by *Menakā* for her daughter. In other parts of the song, it refers to *Menakā* herself. In my English translation, I have retained the original word where it refers to

Umā, and translated it as “mother” where it refers to Menakā.

The second stanza speaks of flowers. Umā’s maternal home is said to be in the Himalayas, and one cannot imagine flowers blooming in the Himalayan autumn. However, in the minds of her devotees, the mountain kingdom transposes itself to Bengal, where two flowering plants, *śiuli*, the night-flowering jasmine (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*), and a tall grass called *kāś* (*Saccharum spontaneum*), are in full bloom in the month of Āśvin, which roughly corresponds to October.¹³⁵ The image of the flowers not yet having bloomed because Umā has not arrived brings to mind the well-known Greek myth of Persephone. This goddess is married to the god Hades, who snatched her away from her mother Demeter.¹³⁶ Persephone finally gets her freedom, but only partially. During the months that she spends with her mother, flowers bloom and turn into fruits, and the land is fertile. The months when she is away are the lean period.

Just as I see an Umā–Persephone analogy, I also see Hades, lord of the dead, as being analogous to Śiva, the *śmaśāna*-dwelling lord of destruction, who smears the ashes of the dead on his body. However, the difference is that Hades takes Persephone by force, while Umā chooses Śiva as her husband. But unlike Persephone, Umā spends only five days a year with her mother. The mention of this in *Āgamanī* songs is reflective of an age when patriarchy reigned supreme and women, once married off, could possibly not see their parents except during the Durgā Pūjā festivities.¹³⁷ It is important to state here that Nazrul was a strong believer in women’s equality. His views on women, as also those of Bharati, will be discussed in a later section.

Kaṇṇammā – En Kuḷantai: Kaṇṇammā, My Child (Bharati)

Kaṇṇammā, whose name is a traditional term of endearment for a female person, is a recurring character in Bharati’s poems. In several poems, she is a *kātali*, a romantic lover.¹³⁸ In one poem, she is the *kula-teyvam*, the family deity. In the poem that I discuss here, she is a *kuḷantai*, a child. But this is no ordinary child; it is Ādi Parāśakti herself.¹³⁹ This song, which begins with *Cinṇañ-cīru Kiḷiyē!* (O tiny little parrot!), is immensely popular. But the general public may not be aware that the poet wrote this song with Parāśakti in mind. The universal Śakti described in *Ūḷi-k Kūttu* or in other poems such as *Mahā Kāḷiyin Pukaḷ* (Praise of the Great Kāḷi) becomes Bharati’s *cinṇañ-cīru kiḷi* (little parrot) in *Kaṇṇammā – En Kuḷantai* – analogous to how she transforms into Menakā’s daughter in *Āgamanī* songs.

O little parrot, Kaṇṇammā!

O my treasure!

You have come into this world to rid me of my distress. (1)

O sweet child, Kaṇṇammā!

O golden picture that speaks!

O honey-sweet one who comes dancing and embraces me! (2)

When you come running to me,
My heart feels cool.

When I see you dancing around,
My soul embraces you. (3)

When I [lovingly] sniff the crown of
your head,

I feel so proud of you.

When the townspeople praise you,
My body feels a thrill. (4)

When I kiss you on the cheek,
It is as though my heart is high
on palm wine.

When I embrace you,
I go crazy with joy. (5)

If your face goes slightly red
[with anger],
My mind trembles.
If I see your forehead shrink
[into a frown],
My heart is afraid. (6)

When tears flow down your eyes,
My heart bleeds.
Are you not the apple of my eye?
Is not my life-breath yours? (7)

With your childish speech,
You end all suffering.
With your jasmine smile,
You dispel my ignorance. (8)

Can books tell stories as beautiful
as the ones you tell?
In giving love, can any deity
equal you? (9)

To wear on my chest [in a necklace],
Is there any diamond or jewel better
than you?
If one wishes to live in prosperity,
Is there any wealth comparable
to you? (10)

The original rāga of this song is the Bhairavi of Carnatic music, unrelated to its Hindustani namesake. Its notes are S R2 G2 M1 P D1 N2, with D2 being used in the ascent to a small extent. Bharati even gives a *varṇa-meṭṭu* (template tune)¹⁴⁰ for the song, which is as follows:¹⁴¹

sa sa sa – s̄a s̄a – pa pa pa
dha nī dha – pa dha pa – p̄a
pa pa pa – pa dha pa – pa mā – ga ri s̄a
ri ga mā – ri ga ri – s̄a

While the poet's note says that one can change the tune as one wishes using this *varṇa-meṭṭu* as a basis, it is implied that

these changes must be within the frame of Bhairavi. However, the popular version is sung not in Bhairavi, but in the form known as *rāgamālikā*, a “garland of rāgas.” This version, which M. L. Vasanthakumari (MLV) and V. N. Sundaram first sang in the 1951 movie *Manamagal*,¹⁴² consists of the first five and the seventh stanzas of the original poem.¹⁴³ MLV's rendition, skilfully interspersed with rapidly cascading *bhrga*¹⁴⁴ phrases, creates a unique melody. The rāgas used are Kāpi for the first two stanzas, followed by Māṇḍ, Vasanta, the Hindustani rāga Jog, and a relatively uncommon pentatonic rāga for stanza 7, with the unusual scale of S R2 M1 P D1. The vocalist M. Balamuralikrishna (1930–2016) called this rāga *Suṣamā*.¹⁴⁵

Stanzas 5 and 7 are sung by V. N. Sundaram,¹⁴⁶ whose voice has an unusually mellow texture. Unlike the rāgas that precede it, *Suṣamā* presents a melancholy ambience, corresponding to the lyrics of stanza 7. Sundaram's rendition of it is soaked in emotion. The song ends with an unusual phrase, P D1 M1 P M1 S R2 D2. Interestingly, the trailing off at the major note D2—in combination with the *dāṭu* from R2 to D2—adds to the melancholy feeling. This is analogous to the usage of G3 in Śivarañjani, another “sad” rāga used in film music. Śivarañjani is more common than *Suṣamā*. The two are closely related. If one performs a *graha bhēda* (tonic shift) by taking *sa* at the M1 of *Suṣamā*, M1 P D1 S R2 Ṁ1 yields S R2 G2 P D2 Ś, the *ārōhaṇam* (ascent) of Śivarañjani. Thus, G3 in Śivarañjani corresponds to D2 in *Suṣamā*.

I next present S. Sowmya's rendition.¹⁴⁷ Before singing, she talks about the original rāga having been Bhairavi¹⁴⁸ and demonstrates the first two stanzas in

the original *varṇa-meṭṭu* as she interprets it. She then sings the popular *rāgamālikā* version.¹⁴⁹

The fifth stanza could be considered problematic. But there could also be an interpretation that those intense feelings have been expressed because this is Parāśakti, and no ordinary child.

The film rendition, while exquisite, does not bring out the goddess image. It can be a song sung to any daughter. This is because the reference is evident only in the eighth and ninth stanzas, which are omitted here. It would be interesting to study the emotional perception that Bharati's songs produce when they are sung completely and in the original tunes, or at least recomposed in the original *rāgas*. One rarely gets to hear Bharati's songs in the *rāgas* mentioned in the text.¹⁵⁰ While every musical interpretation of Bharati's or Nazrul's lyrics is beautiful, the original tunes would bring us closer to the poets' thought processes.

Rajkumar Bharati, the poet's great-grandson, sings an entirely different version of *Ciṇṇaṅ-ciru Kīṭiyē*, a *rāgamālikā* beginning with the lilting *rāga* Mōhanakalyāṇi and moving to Śivaraṅjani and Kāṇadā.¹⁵¹ It omits stanzas 4, 5, and 10, but features stanzas 8 and 9, thus establishing the divinity of the child.

Nazrul, Bharati, and Women

Nazrul's poems *Nārī* (Woman) and *Bārāṅganā* (Prostitute) are well known for bringing out his views on women's empowerment. In this section, I quote several stanzas of these poems, as translated into English by Mohammad Omar Farooq (MOF) and Sajed Kamal (SK) respectively.¹⁵² For one stanza from *Nārī*, I use Sajed Kamal's translation,¹⁵³ since I find it to be

more effective. Nazrul writes in *Nārī* that he sees no difference between man and woman, and condemns patriarchal oppression of women.¹⁵⁴ I quote a few lines:

I sing the song
of equality;
In my view gender difference
is essentially a triviality. (trans. MOF)

I don't see any difference
Between a man and woman
Whatever great or benevolent
achievements
That are in this world
Half of that was by woman,
The other half by man. (trans. SK)

All the vice or bad in the world,
and the pain or flowing tear,
for half, man should be blamed,
the other half only woman should bear.

Who belittles you as woman,
connecting you to Hell's flame?
Tell him that for the first ever sin
not woman, but man must carry
the blame . . .

Not very far
is that cherished day,
when with homage to man,
to woman also homage, the world
will pay. (trans. MOF)

In *Bārāṅganā*,¹⁵⁵ Nazrul addresses a female sex worker as *Mā*—the same term that he uses for the goddess or for significant women in the Qur'ān.

Who calls you a prostitute, mother?
Who spits at you?
Perhaps you were suckled by
someone
as chaste as Seeta.
You may not be chaste,
Yet you are one of the family
of all our mothers and sisters.

As the poem progresses, he brings in several references from the Mahābhārata, a major Hindu epic. Some of the greatest male characters in the epic, he says, were born to women whom conventional patriarchal society would consider tainted. Among others, he speaks of Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana (Vyāsa) – who is not only a character in the epic, but also fabled to be its author – and Karna, whose respective mothers, Satyawatī and Kuntī, gave birth to them while still unmarried; and Droṇa, whose mother was the *svarga-beśyā* (heavenly prostitute, i.e., *apsarā* nymph) Ghṛtācī. Then, departing from Hindu themes, Nazrul comments on the birth of Jesus Christ:

The great hero Drona
was the son of Ghrītachi,
a prostitute in heaven.
Krishna-Daipayana,
who was universally respected,
was the son of an unmarried girl.
Karna the Benevolent
Was born of a maiden.
Ganga, expelled from heaven,
was married to Shiva.
King Shantanu, too,
offered her his love.
Their son was the immortal Bheeshma,
to whom Krishna paid homage!
The Sage Satyakama
was the illegitimate son of Jabala.
The conception of the great lover
of humanity, Jesus,
remains a mystery.

He further asks:

If Ahalya was freed of sin,
If Mary was canonized,
Truthfully, why shouldn't you, too,
Be worthy of worship?

Nazrul comments that children of sex workers are as deserving of fame and honor as children of other parents:

Your sons are like any of us sons,
as capable of achieving fame and honor
as any of us,
as capable of entering heaven.

These thoughts are highly revolutionary in a society that requires a handful of earth from the courtyard of a sex worker¹⁵⁶ to complete its idol of the Goddess, but continues to dehumanize them.

Bharati, too, wrote many poems such as *Peṅkaḷ Viṭutalai Kummi* (The *Kummi*¹⁵⁷ – song of Women's Liberation)¹⁵⁸ and *Putumai Peṇ* (The Woman of Newness),¹⁵⁹ which can be considered highly progressive for the age in which he lived. He spoke out against the restrictions on women and proposed "Ten Commandments" for their empowerment.¹⁶⁰ While I find problematic elements in some of his poems, his thoughts on women's freedom were a significant step in the right direction.

Peṅkaḷ Viṭutalai Kummi depicts women dancing and singing together, celebrating their emancipation. I discuss this song here since it is connected to the next song featured in this article. The women's *kummi*-song speaks of a nation where women are no longer denied access to education, no longer locked inside the house, and no longer subjected to domestic violence, forced marriages, or trafficking. They choose their partners and marry them for love. Their intelligence is recognized as equal to that of men. They may be doing the cooking if they wish to – but they can also write (new) scriptures and make laws. Those who earlier oppressed them are now ashamed and defeated. The rules of *karpu* (traditional chastity) that applied only

to women must now apply to both sexes. This has a great deal of closeness to the strong statement that Nazrul makes in the end of *Bārāṅganā*:

Purely from carnal urge do men
and women unite.
We are children born of that lust.
Yet how proud we are!
So, listen, religious leaders:
There's no difference between
"illegitimate" and "legitimate" children!
And if the son of an unchaste mother
is "illegitimate,"
so is the son of an unchaste father.

The Goddess and the Nation

5. *Cutantira*¹⁶¹-*p Paḷḷu*: The *paḷḷu* of Independence (Bharati)

Āṭuvōmē, paḷḷu pāṭuvōmē –
Āṇanta cutantiram aṭaintu-viṭṭōm eṇru

This song of Subramania Bharati, which begins with *Āṭuvōmē, paḷḷu pāṭuvōmē* (We will dance, we will sing the *paḷḷu*), is a well-known patriotic song that celebrates Indian freedom. The popular version appears in *Naam Iruvar*, a 1947 Tamil movie,¹⁶² which features many other Bharati songs, patriotic and otherwise—for example, *Viṭutalai Viṭutalai Viṭutalai*,¹⁶³ and *Verrī eṭṭu tikkum eṭṭa koṭṭu muracē*,¹⁶⁴ the opening verse of Bharati's long poem *Muracu*.¹⁶⁵ The film version of *Āṭuvōmē*¹⁶⁶ was sung by D. K. Pattammal and is based on *Māṇḍ*, a *rāga* that mostly uses major notes. Most people take this to be the original version, and do not seem to be aware of the conception behind Bharati's song, its original *rāga*, or the connection of the song to the goddess. To my knowledge, it is only the poet's granddaughter S. Vijaya Bharati, an expert on his works, who discusses the background of the song.¹⁶⁷

Before getting into the specifics of the song, let us explore the word *paḷḷu* for a while. It refers to a genre of songs¹⁶⁸ sung by members of a Dalit caste earlier known as *Paḷḷar* [sic],¹⁶⁹ but who have now chosen the name Devendra Kula Vellalar (DKV)¹⁷⁰ (*tēvēntira kula vēḷālar*)—possibly since the term *Paḷḷar*, being seen as connected to *paḷḷam* (pit),¹⁷¹ may become derogatory. Bharati, however, uses *Paḷḷar*, possibly because the DKV nomenclature did not exist or was not widely known before Independence. He may have used this name for the caste, but he rejected caste hierarchy. This will become clear when we go into the details of the lyrics and what inspired them.

The *paḷḷu* song is said to describe the status of the DKV as agricultural laborers.¹⁷² As per Vijaya Bharati's note on the poem, Bharati too refers to their status as agricultural laborers, but describes the *paḷḷu* as songs they sing while worshipping Kālī and other goddesses. At this point, I find it relevant to quote how the University of Madras *Tamil Lexicon* explains the word:¹⁷³

பள்ளு *paḷḷu*, *n.* See பள்ள.
பள்ள *paḷ*, *n.* 1. Paḷḷa caste;
பள்ளச்சாதி. 2. A dramatic poem dealing with the life of Paḷḷas;
நாடகப்பிரபந்தவகை. (அரு.நி.).
3. A tune, used especially when offering sacrifice to Kālī; காளி முதலிய தெய்வங்கட்குப் பலிகொடுக்குங் காலத்துப் பாடப்படும் பண்வகை. *Loc.*

It is this third meaning to which Bharati was most probably referring. However, the lyrics of the song are in accordance with the second meaning.

Bharati passed away in 1921, when he was not yet 39, which means that he never lived to see an India that was not ruled by a foreign power. But the new India had already taken birth in his

mind. He celebrated it in several of his songs, including the present one. Why specifically a *paḷḷu* for *Cutantiram*? Vijaya Bharati explains this as follows: “The *Paḷḷar* [sic] are an oppressed caste of farm laborers. Bharati says that unless people of this and other such castes are freed from oppression, India can never be considered as having become free.”¹⁷⁴ This is not the only song where Bharati makes this point. In fact, in *Viṭutalai Viṭutalai*, Bharati refers to several oppressed castes –

paraiyarukkum inku tīyar
pulaiyarukkum viṭutalai!
paravar-ōṭu kuṟavarukkum
maṟavarukkum viṭutalai!

The words in boldface all refer to communities that are oppressed by caste hierarchy. Some of these terms, such as *paraiyar* (sic) and *pulaiyar* (sic), are now recognized as derogatory, and I do not advocate their use. However, I wish to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that Bharati was calling for freedom for each of these castes. While in *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu* he refers to *cutantiram*—freedom in the sense of self-governance—here the word he uses is *viṭutalai*, which comes from the Tamil verb *viṭu*, “to leave, to release.” While the former word refers to handover of power to India, the latter refers to being released from the shackles of slavery. However, both imply the same thing—the British government leaving India. Bharati says later in this song:

ēlai-yenrum aṭimai-yenrum evaṇum-
illai jātiyil
*iḷivu koṇṭa maṇitar eṇpat’-Intiyāvil*¹⁷⁵
illaiyē

No man is poor [*ēlai*] or a slave
 [*aṭimai*] by caste.
 The idea of degraded people does
 not exist in India.

Again, these lines do not describe the India of Bharati’s time, but his vision of a new, independent India. I now present my translation of *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu*:

Pallavi

Oh! We will dance! We will sing
 the *paḷḷu*!
 We have now attained joyful freedom!

Caraṇams

Gone are the days when we addressed
 the Brahmin as *aiyar*—

Gone are the days when we addressed
 the white man as *turai*.

Gone are the days when we bowed to
 those that seek alms¹⁷⁶—

Gone are the days when we served
 those who make us grow weary
 through labor.

Everywhere, the only talk is of
cutantiram—

It has now been established that we
 are all equal;

Taking conches, we will blow them to
 announce our victory—

We will declare it to the entire earth.

The time has come when all of us
 are one—

The time has come for lies and deceit
 to be banished.

The time has come when the good
 are higher.¹⁷⁷

Destruction has come to evil
 hypocrites.

We will worship agriculture and labor.

We will criticize those who eat and
 enjoy without earning it.

We will not perish by worthlessly
 irrigating [others’ fields].

We will not end our lives by laboring
 hard for useless people.

We now know that the country where
 we live is our own.

We now know that only we have a
right over it.

We will not be slaves to anyone on
this earth any longer –

Except to the Complete One. It is
only Him that we shall serve.

The predominant compositional structure in Carnatic music is known as the *kīrtana* (unrelated to the Bengali musical form of the same name). A song in this form is divided into stanzas known as *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *caraṇam*.¹⁷⁸ The introductory part, containing the refrain, is known as *pallavi*. Some songs have just a *pallavi* and an *anupallavi*. Others have a *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and several *caraṇams*. Still others lack an *anupallavi*, and the *pallavi* is followed by the *caraṇams*. A number of Bharati's songs are in the *kīrtana* format. *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu* is one such, and belongs to the *anupallavi*-lacking variety. However, *Ūḷi-k Kūttu* and *Kaṇṇammā – En Kulantai* are not structured as *kīrtanas*.

The *rāga* of this *paḷḷu* was originally meant to be Varāḷi, a peculiar, haunting vivādi *rāga*. Varāḷi belongs to the following scale: S R1 G1 M2 P D1 N3. It has been sung since the sixteenth century C.E., the beginning of the “Mela Period”¹⁷⁹ of Indian music, and is one of the oldest vivādi *rāgas* still in vogue today. Its vivādi-ness comes from the *svara* G1, which is none other than R2. G1, with its characteristic *kampita gamaka* (oscillatory embellishment), is the dominant *svara* and brings a haunting quality to the *rāga*. The *ri* of Varāḷi is one semitone higher than *sa*, and *ga* is a semitone higher than *ri*. From *ga* to *ma*, there is a large jump of two whole tones. The sequence *ma pa dha* has the same kind of spacing as *sa ri ga*. From *dha* to *ni*, the jump is smaller (one and a half tones) than from *ri* to *ga*. Again, *ni sa ri* has the same

pattern as *ma pa dha*. The sequence *sa ri ga ma* is not used, and *sa ga ri ga ma* appears in its place. All these features make Varāḷi not easy to sing. Discussions with fellow musicians and listeners have given me different views of Varāḷi. Some say it is somber, others say it is somber yet bright, and others say it may be heroic. One person also responded – without having read this article – that the *rāga* reminds them of *ghora* goddesses like Kālī.¹⁸⁰

It is not clear why Bharati chose Varāḷi for this song. Was it in order to reflect the traditional *paḷḷu* melodies sung by DKV people during their Kālī worship? One will probably never know. Interestingly, in more recent times, T. M. Krishna has sung a song on fisherfolk in Varāḷi, which is markedly different from other Carnatic compositions in this *rāga*.¹⁸¹

Cutantira-p Paḷḷu imagines a new India where the oppressed castes are celebrating their freedom, on similar lines to the women's celebration in *Peṇkaḷ Viṭutalai Kummi*. Both *paḷḷu* and *kummi* are traditional musical forms. In the film version of *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu*, which is the only version that is sung today, only the second, third, and fourth *caraṇams* of Bharati's song are included. The first *caraṇam* is conspicuous by its absence, perhaps because the makers of the film were worried that it could raise hackles. It appears to me like a watered-down version of Bharati's strong views. To understand this, we need to look at the first two lines of the *caraṇam* in the original Tamil.

*pārppānai aiyarenra kalamum pōccē –
vellai-p*

parāṅkiyai-t turaiyenra kalamum pōccē

Here the term used for Brahmins is *pārppān* (sic), which can acquire derisive connotations.¹⁸² *Aiyar* is an honorific title used to address men of the Brahmin caste,

such as temple priests. It is significant that Bharati, himself a Brahmin, calls for an end to Brahmin hegemony. He describes the British rulers in similarly strong terms – as *vellai paraṅki*,¹⁸³ the white *firaṅgī* – and calls for the people to no longer address them as *turai*, “lord, master.” The slavery (*aṭimai*) being referred to in the last *caraṇam* is bilayered. It is the slavery experienced by the “lower” castes at the hand of the “upper” castes, and the slavery experienced by India at the hands of the British. This connects to the first *caraṇam*. *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu* calls for an end to both kinds of slavery. The only valid *aṭimai* in Bharati’s view is the service of *Pari-pūraṇaṇ* – the one who is complete, the almighty.

Uḷavu (agriculture or ploughing) and *tolil* (labor) naturally bring to mind the hammer and sickle.¹⁸⁴ This pairing, along with Bharati’s extolling of the Russian Revolution in *Putiya Ruṣiyā*,¹⁸⁵ suggests the influence of communist thought. However, it is difficult to slot somebody as complex as Bharati into a particular political ideology – except the ideology of an inclusive Indian nation.¹⁸⁶ His images of a lion-riding Bhārata Mātā (Mother India)¹⁸⁷ and his two translations of *Vande Mātaram*¹⁸⁸ from Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s *Ānanda Maṭh*¹⁸⁹ might make one wonder whether he was a Hindu nationalist, but his body of work taken as a whole dispels any such impression. But for now, I would like to leave Bharati aside and move to Nazrul.

6. Ore āy¹⁹⁰ aśuci, āy re patit, ebār Māyer pūjā habē: Oh come, you “impure” ones! Come, you “fallen” ones! Now the Mother shall be worshipped. (Nazrul)

I translate the song below. Though it was independently done, there is some overlap with Rachel Fell McDermott’s translation.¹⁹¹

Oh come, you “impure” ones! Come, you “fallen” ones! Now the Mother shall be worshipped –

Where every person of every caste¹⁹² will fearlessly [*nirbhayē*] touch the Mother’s feet.

Where there is no temple, no priest, no scriptures, no doorkeeper –

There, whoever comes and calls out, “Mā! Mā!” – Mā will take them in her lap.

Look! Mā has descended from her lion-throne and is sitting down on the dust.

Today, Mā’s auspicious clay pot will be filled with holy water that everyone has touched.

We have not seen the Mother, that is why brother inflicts blows on brother –

Today, when you see Her, you will understand that we are all the children of one Mother.

Now the call of the Mother’s mantra *Mā bhaiḥ!*¹⁹³ shall echo in all three worlds.

The rendition of this song by *Bāmlār Chelemeye* “Boys and Girls of Bengal,” which consisted of the siblings¹⁹⁴ Kamal, Subal, Sudhira, and Indira Dasgupta, is available on YouTube.¹⁹⁵ The tune, composed by Kamal Dasgupta, is in a *miśra* (mixed) form of the *rāga* Deś.¹⁹⁶

The following lines from the song, which are sung with passionate repetition of the word *Mā*, are reminiscent of traditional *kīrtan* singing and give a sense of *bhakti*.

*Sethā Mā bale ye ḍākbe ese,
Mā tāhāre-i kole labe*

There, whoever comes and calls out, “Mā! Mā!” – Mā will take them in her lap

The usage of the words *aśuci* (impure) and *patit* (fallen) in the first line does not imply

that Nazrul believes in these caste-centric ideas. Rather, he implies the opposite, which is made clear by the second line. This corresponds to Bharati's thought that the country can be free only when all castes are free.

The fearlessness that Nazrul speaks of here—using the words *nirbhaye* and *mā bhaiḥ*—makes me think of two of Bharati's poems, *Accamillai* (There Is No Fear)¹⁹⁷ and *Jayamuṇṭu Payamillai Maṇamē* (There Is Victory, There Is No Fear, O My Mind).¹⁹⁸

"No temple . . . no doorkeeper" is reminiscent of another Nazrul song, *Mā go, Cinmayī Rūp Dhare Āy* (O Mother, Come in the Form of Spiritual Consciousness). This song, composed by the poet in the *rāga* Bāgeśrī,¹⁹⁹ is addressed to the goddess as Durgā and calls for a new kind of Durgā Pūjā, where the goddess is no longer *Mr̥ṇmayī* (made of clay, as an idol) but is *Cinmayī*, spiritual in form, awakened in the hearts of the nation. The new Durgā is not imprisoned in a temple. Nazrul asks the goddess to infuse the power of her ten arms into the two arms of the *bhakta*. Criticizing empty ritual, he says that if the pūjā of the mother does not make her children—the people of India—powerful enough to overthrow the colonizer, there is no point whatsoever in such worship. Through his plea to the goddess, he also exhorts the people of India to fight for freedom. This is analogous to Bharati's call for the true worship of Sarasvatī that I described earlier, and his aniconic descriptions of Śakti.

The image of the holy water in the auspicious pot (*maṅgal-ghaṭ*) signifies two things. The first is the ritual of *ghaṭa-sthāpanā* (setting up the water pot) that is indispensable to Durgā Pūjā, which is depicted here as a cultural symbol and not as a religious observance. The second

idea is the one of completely rejecting caste-based notions of purity, impurity, and untouchability. Everyone touches the pot. Everyone has an equal right to the nation. This sentiment is repeated often in Bharati's works too.

Bharati sees the motherland as a manifestation of Mother Śakti.²⁰⁰ While he makes this equation, he describes Bhārata Mātā and Goddess Śakti differently. The former has an iconography, and is described as a Durgā-like goddess who rides a lion.²⁰¹ The latter, however, is more metaphysical and *nir-guṇa*, as he describes in *Ūli-k Kūttu* and *Mahā Kālīyīṇ Pukaḷ*.

In contrast to Bharati's nation-goddess who sits atop a lion, the Mother in *Ore Āy Aśuci* has come down from her lion-throne and sits on the dust, at the same level as her earthly devotees. The nation is not higher than the people; it is the people. The Mother accepts anyone who calls out to her with true devotion. This devotion is not fanaticism. It is the realization that, irrespective of caste or religion, everyone is a child of the same mother, and they must therefore eschew violence and come together to fearlessly demand freedom.

Bharati's personification of India as a "Hindu" goddess, along with the frequent appearance of the words *vantē mātaram* in his lyrics, makes one wonder whether his nation would be a "Hindu" one. But the larger body of his works indicates otherwise. He extols Allāh and Christ, and mentions the Buddha too with great respect. In the poem *Vantē Mātaram Enṇōm* (We Will Say Vande Mātaram), he says:

Jāti mataṅkaḷai-p pārōm

We will not see [i.e., will not discriminate based on] caste or religion

In *Tāyīṇ Maṇikkōṭi Pārīr* (Come and See the Mother's Jeweled Flag),²⁰² he describes a flag that appears to be a combination of the flag designed by Sister Nivedita,²⁰³ who was another of his spiritual gurus,²⁰⁴ and either the 1906 Calcutta flag or the one designed by Madame Cama.²⁰⁵ Nivedita's flag displays a symbol of the *vajra* (thunderbolt) of the god Indra, while the other two bear the writing *Vande Mātaram* in Devanāgarī and display the sun at one end and a crescent at the other end. Bharati's imagined flag appears as follows:

Intiraṇ vacciram ōrpāl – atil
Eṇkaḷ turukkar ilam-pirai ōrpāl
 Indra's *vajra* on one side
 And the crescent moon of our Muslims
 on the other side

The expression *eṇkaḷ turukkar*²⁰⁶ (sic) is significant, since it emphasizes that the Muslim population is a part of India. Like the first *caraṇam* of *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu*, the above lines are absent from the popular version of *Tāyīṇ Maṇikkōṭi*.²⁰⁷

Thus, both poets associated the goddess with the nation, albeit in different ways. It is clear that their nationalism was not sectarian.

Concluding Remarks

This article only provides a glimpse of the vast ocean of Nazrul's and Bharati's poetry about the goddess. For a more complete study, books would have to be written. My work is not a hagiography. It does not promote any one country, community, or religion as being greater than others, or even faith over the lack of it. Both men produced great art in the form of poems and songs. The goddess played a pivotal role in both their lives, and one finds striking similarities of thought,

significantly departing from conventional approaches to the goddess, in their works. Nazrul's approach was derived from traditional Śāktism, Bharati's was not. But both of them challenged prescribed rituals and imagined Śakti in novel ways to bring vigor to the struggle for independence.

Both poets had a good knowledge of *rāga* music.²⁰⁸ Nazrul even created novel *rāgas*.²⁰⁹ Recordings of Nazrul's singing exist, but not of Bharati's. Sadly, the original tunes of Bharati's songs appear to be unknown outside the Bharati family.²¹⁰ In Nazrul's case, while some tunes were his own, most of his songs were set to music by others in his own time,²¹¹ but those tunes, too, have often been replaced by other tunes. The modern renditions are no doubt beautiful, and provide varied interpretations of the lyrics of the two poets. However, it is of great importance to study the original tunes. This would give us a better idea of what the poets wanted to convey through their songs. Also, the lyrics that have undergone erasure in some sense, such as the first *caraṇam* of *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu* or the mention of Muslims in *Tāyīṇ Maṇikkōṭi*, must be brought back into the limelight.

Bharati and Nazrul may have been flawed, as all humans are, but they made spiritual and political statements that are still of great relevance today. Their spirituality is itself political, as is the unconventionality in the imagery and sound of their poems and songs. At a time when the problems of religious bigotry and caste discrimination have not left us, I feel it is crucial to revisit poets such as these and develop a deeper understanding of their views on caste and religion. The idea of nationalism is highly problematic if founded on race and religion. However,

Bharati and Nazrul envisaged an India that was beyond caste, beyond religion. Bharati may have described a lion-riding nation-goddess, but he never portrayed any religious or caste group as enemies of the nation. The only “other” in his eyes was the foreign ruler. As for Nazrul, he struck a beautiful balance between his

Islam and his Hinduism, and strongly criticized fanaticism in both faiths. Times were troubled back then, and they are still troubled. Bharati’s and Nazrul’s ideals of secularism, caste equality, and gender equality are as relevant now as they were then.

NOTES

1 In this work, the name Bharati, when used alone, refers to C. Subramania Bharati, except in the author citations, where it refers to his granddaughter, S. Vijaya Bharati. The word may sometimes also be spelt *Bharathi*—Vijaya Bharati says in her blog that *Bharati* is the correct spelling, since that is what the poet used when writing his name in English. This work does not use Indic transliteration in “modern” names. I write “Bharati,” “Nazrul,” “Tamil,” “Bangla,” “Carnatic,” and “Hindustani” rather than “Bhārati”/“Pārati,” “Najrul,” “Tamiḷ,” “Bāṃlā,” “Karnāṭik,” and “Hindustānī.” I apply the same to names of films.

2 A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *Bharati on Tagore: The Nation and Its Poet: A Symposium on Rabindranath Tagore, 1861–1941: Life, Language, Legacy* (New Delhi: Seminar Publications, 2011), http://www.india-seminar.com/2011/623/623_a_r_venkatachalapathy.htm (accessed Jan. 23, 2022).

3 S. Vijaya Bharati, “Annotated Biography of C. Subramania Bharati” (2013), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati—by Bharati’s Granddaughter, S. Vijaya Bharati* (blog), <https://subramaniabharati.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/annotated-biography1.pdf>.

4 Rachel Fell McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother—Kazi Nazrul Islam and the Goddess Kālī,” in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: The Goddess*, ed. Mandakranta Bose (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 289.

5 Ibid., 290, 296–98; S. Vijaya Bharati, *C. Subramania Bharati* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1972; repr. 1989), 18.

6 These would include Tamil Nadu (India), the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, and the other countries where there is a significant Tamil diaspora.

7 Ülo Valk and S. Lourdasamy, “Village Deities of Tamil Nadu Myths and Legends: The Narrated Experience,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 66/1–2 (2007): 177–99; K. R. Hanumanthan, “The Mariamman Cult

of Tamil Nadu—A Case Study in Cultural Synthesis,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 41 (1980): 97–103.

8 G. Sivabalan, “Religious Beliefs among Ancient Tamils as Portrayed in Patirrupattu,” *Jurnal Pengaijan India* 6 (1996): 93–106; Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism* (Rome: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 1988), 123.

9 Sreelatha Vasudevan, “Deity as a Social Prism: A Study of Korraivai (Durga),” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 51 (1990): 122–26; Elaine Craddock, “The Anatomy of Devotion: The Life and Poetry of Karaikkal Ammaiyar,” in *Women’s Lives, Women’s Rituals in the Hindu Tradition*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 138.

10 Johanna Stuckey, “The Goddess Meenakshi and Her Temple at Madurai,” *MatriFocus: Cross-Quarterly for the Goddess Woman* 8/2 (2009), <http://www.matrifocus.com/IMB09/spotlight.htm>; Emma Natalya Stein, “City of One Thousand Temples,” *Room One Thousand* 3 (2015), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/60b551vb>.

11 I use this term to refer collectively to West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh.

12 Rachel Fell McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7; Subhasree Dasgupta, “Sākta Padāvali and Its Contribution to the Music of Bengal,” *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society* 28 (1997): 1; June McDaniel, “My Mother, Myself: Female Mystical Identity in Bengali Shaktism,” *Mysticism Group, American Academy of Religion: November meeting* (2003), <http://www.eial.org/documents/McDaniel03.pdf>.

13 Cheever Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of the Devi-Bhagavata Purana* (Albany: SUNY

Press, 1990); Patricia Dold, “Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests: The Sakta Devotionalism of the Mahābhāgavata Purana,” in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West*, ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003; Indian edition: Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), 39–59; Pushpendra Kumar, *The Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa (Ancient Treatise on Śakti Cult)* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1983).

14 Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Sakta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

15 Progya Ghatak, “The Sitala Saga: A Case of Cultural Integration in the Folk Tradition of West Bengal,” *Ropkatha Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 5/2 (2013): 119–31; Tony K. Stewart, “The Goddess Sasthi Protects Children,” *Religions of India in Practice* (1995): 352–66; Asutosh Bhattacharya, “The Serpent as a Folk-Deity in Bengal,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 24/1 (1965): 1–10.

16 *Ammaṇ* is a term only of reference. The term of address, even for a mother goddess, is always *Ammā*. In some regions, *Āttā* may be used in place of both *Ammaṇ* and *Ammā*.

17 Munshi Mohammed Kasem (K. Mullick), singer, “Ore O Madina Balte Parish” (1938), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxnxoCxEdpw>; Abbas Uddin Ahmad, singer, “Khatune Jannat Fatema Janani” (1937), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cpN74Mky0o>.

18 S. Vijaya Bharati, *Mahakavi Bharatiyar Kavithaigal*, vol. 2: *Deivam-Thathuvam* (Vijaya Bharati Publications, 2015), 65, 77, 94; S. Swaminathan, ed., *Pāratyār Kavitaikal* (Madurai: Bharati Puthaga Nilaiyam, 1964), 97, 99, 111.

19 My main source for Bharati’s lyrics is the standard edition of his poetry in four volumes: S. Vijaya Bharati, *Mahakavi Bharatiyar Kavithaigal*, vol. 1: *Desiyam* (National); vol. 2: *Deivam-Thathuvam* (Devotional and Philosophical); vol. 3: *Kannan Pattu-Panchali Sabatham-Kuyil Pattu*; vol. 4: *Bharati Vazhkkaiyum Pira Padalgalum* (Bharati’s Autobiographical and Other Poems) (Vancouver: Vijaya Bharati Publications, all volumes published in 2015). The first three are of greater importance for this work.

20 David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Indian edition: Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998); Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Pradeep Kumar Rai, *Muṇḍamālā Tantram—Mūla evaṃ Hindī anuvāda sahita* (Varanasi: Prācya Prakāśana, 2010); Kumar, *The Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*.

21 Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*.

22 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*; Sanjukta Gupta, “Lalitā, the Graceful and Enchanting Goddess of Kāñcīpuram,” in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: The Goddess*, 76.

23 Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*.

24 McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 9; Dasgupta, “Sākta Padāvali”; Malcolm McLean, *Devoted to the Goddess: The Life and Work of Ramprasad* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 50.

25 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 297–98.

26 McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 23–25; McLean, *Devoted to the Goddess*, 51; Gana Jay (composer and singer), “Naavellam (RUDRA THE AWAKENING BY GANA JAY),” 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sWCgSA9yPI>; Sri Naga Kali Urumi Melam (singers), “Mayana Kaliamma,” 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nv0JeJkcsFM>; Chinna Rasa Urume Melam Masana Kali Group (singers), “Sudalai Valli Kaliamma - Masana Kali,” 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV37gCiKQfE>.

27 Saregama (recording company), “Shyamasangeet of Kazi Nazrul Islam,” 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=share&v=LIV-rV6hOXI>.

28 Bharati, “Annotated Biography.”

29 Ibid.

30 Aroon Raman, “Colliding Worlds of Tradition and Revolution,” *The Hindu* (newspaper), Dec. 14, 2009, <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/history-and-culture/Colliding-worlds-of-tradition-and-revolution/article16853178.ece>.

31 Bharati, C. *Subramania Bharati*, 33.

32 Bharati, “Annotated Biography.”

33 Translated by S. Vijaya Bharati in C. *Subramania Bharati*, 17.

34 Ibid., 38–39; “Seeking Immortality: Kullachamy” (2016), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati*, <https://subramaniabharati.com/2016/03/15/seeking-immortality-kullachamy/>.

35 Bharati, C. *Subramania Bharati*, 27.

36 Bharati, “Annotated Biography.”

37 Bharati, “Bharati—Gnāna Guru” (2014), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati*, <https://subramaniabharati.com/2014/12/10/bharati-gnana-guru/>.

38 Swaminathan, *Pāratyār Kavitaikal*, 7.

39 Bharati, C. *Subramania Bharati*, 47.

40 Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*, 36; Swaminathan, *Pāratyār Kavitaikal*, 139.

41 Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*, 151; Swaminathan, *Pāratyār Kavitaikal*, 164.

- 42 Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*, 58.
- 43 Bharati, C. *Subramania Bharati*, 19.
- 44 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 163; Swaminathan, *Pāratiyār Kavitaikal*, 78.
- 45 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 289.
- 46 Md. Mumit Al Rashid and Tanjina Binte Nur, “Persian Words Used in Kazi Nazrul Islam’s Poetry,” *Language Art* 2/4 (2017): 117–28; “Islam, Kazi Nazrul,” *Banglapedia – National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (2012–2021), https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Islam,_Kazi_Nazrul.
- 47 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 292.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 289.
- 49 Al Rashid and Nur, “Persian Words Used in Kazi Nazrul Islam’s Poetry.”
- 50 Rafiqul Islam, “Nazrul’s Life – A Biographical Sketch” (2021), *International Center of Nazrul*, <https://www.icnazrul.com/index.php/nazrul-s-life/11-a-biographical-sketch>; Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, “Nazrul: An Ardent Lover of Humanity,” *Daily Star* (newspaper), May 25, 2007, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/2007/05/25/d70525140299.htm>.
- 51 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 289.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 290, trans. Rachel McDermott.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 291.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 293.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 292.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 290, from *Ānandamayīr Āgamane* (The Coming of the Bliss-filled Mother), trans. Rachel McDermott.
- 57 “Stony father”: Himālaya, the mountain god.
- 58 *Rākṣasī*: Demoness.
- 59 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 294.
- 60 M. D. Shahnawaz Khan Chandan, “The Life of a Rebel,” *Daily Star* (newspaper), Aug. 30, 2013, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/the-life-of-a-rebel>.
- 61 Sajed Kamal, “Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Chronology of Life” (2021), *International Centre of Nazrul*, <https://www.icnazrul.com/index.php/nazrul-s-life/12-a-chronology-of-life>.
- 62 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 295.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 292, 295.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 307.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 287.
- 66 Dilip Chaudhuri, “Kazi Nazrul: The Unparalleled Lyricist and Composer of Bengal” (Press Information Bureau, Government of India), <https://web.archive.org/web/20021105092034/http://pib.nic.in/feature/fe0899/f1608991.html>.
- 67 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 292.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 297.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 293; Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*.
- 70 Deben Biswas (singer), *Nache Nataraj Mahakal* (1935), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePIzX3rwXME>; Manabendra Mukherjee (singer), Arunkanti Ke Go Jogi (1973), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3B57hHYiIE>.
- 71 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 294; Bharati, *Desiyam*.
- 72 This section is based to a great extent on the music training that I have received from my gurus and from other sources over the past twenty-one years.
- 73 Harold S. Powers, Frans Wiering, James Porter, James Cowdery, Richard Widdess, Ruth Davis, Marc Perlman, Stephen Jones, and Allan Marett, “Mode,” in *Grove Music Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43718>; Regula Qureshi, Harold S. Powers, Jonathan Katz, Richard Widdess, Gordon Geekie, Alastair Dick, Devdan Sen, Nazir A. Jairazbhoy, Peter Manuel, Robert Simon, Joseph J. Palackal, Soniya K. Brar, M. Whitney Kelting, Edward O. Henry, Maria Lord, Alison Arnold, Warren Pinckney, Kapila Vatsyayan, Bonnie C. Wade, and Inderjit N. Kaur, “India, subcontinent of,” in *Grove Music Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43272>.
- 74 Powers et al., “Mode.”
- 75 Laura Leante, “The Lotus and the King: Imagery, Gesture and Meaning in a Hindustani Rāg,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18 (2009): 185–206; “The Cuckoo’s Song: Imagery and Movement in Monsoon Ragas,” in *Monsoon Feelings: A History of Emotions in the Rain*, ed. Katherine Butler Schofield, Imke Rajamani and Margrit Pernau (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018), 255–91.
- 76 *Āṭum + Kālī*.
- 77 These names would normally be written in Tamil as *Kālī*, *Cāmuṇṭi*, *Kaṅkāḷi*. Bharati often elongates the final vowel *i* to *ī* when addressing the goddess directly.
- 78 A more “Bharati-esque” way of writing these lyrics, in which the words are split according to rhythm and not according to the grammar of the language—possibly an influence from earlier Tamil poetry—would be as follows:
- Veṭipatu maṇṭat tiṭipala tālam pōṭa – verum*
Veṭiyi lirattak kaḷiyoṭu pūtam pātap – pāṭṭin
Aṭipatu poruḷiṇ aṭipatu moliyir kūtak – kaḷit
Tāṭuṇ Kālī! Cāmuṇ ṭī! Kaṅ kāḷī!
Anṇai! Anṇai! Āṭuṇ kūttai
Nāṭac ceytāy enṇai.

79 Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*, 46; Swaminathan, *Pāratīyār Kavitaikal*, 120.

80 Cāmuṇḍā, a name that Kālī is said in the Devī Māhātmyam to have acquired as the slayer of the demons Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. Cāmuṇḍi is a South Indian rendering of this name. However, in the context of Mysore, the name Cāmuṇḍēśvarī refers to the goddess not in the Kālī form, but as Durgā Maḥiṣāsura-mardīnī.

81 Based on the explanation in this post: <https://kavithalaxmi.com/2020/03/23/%E0%AE%8A%E0%AE%B4%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%82%E0%A%E%A4%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%81-%E0%AE%89%E0%AE%A3%E0%AE%B0%E0-%AF%8D%E0%AE%A8%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%A4%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%B0%E0%AF%8D/>

82 The term used by Bharati is *ūlām pēy*. This is an unusual usage, and there seems to be no exact translation.

83 University of Madras, *Tamil Lexicon*, 502.

84 In traditional Tamil pronunciation, the stop consonants *k*, *t*, *ṭ*, and *p*, when in the beginning of a word, or when doubled (*kk*, *tt*, *ṭṭ*, *pp*), are pronounced unvoiced (IPA: /k/, /t/, /ṭ/, /p/ and /k:/, /t:/, /ṭ:/, /p:/, respectively). When they appear medially, they are voiced (IPA: /g/, /d/, /ḍ/, /b/). The affricate consonant *c* is pronounced as /tʃ:/ when it is doubled as *cc*. In some dialects, an initial *c* might be pronounced as /tʃ:/ or /tʃ:/, and becomes a voiced /ḍ/ only when preceded by the nasal consonant *ṇ* [ɳ]. *k*, *c*, *t*, *ṭ*, and *p* are also unvoiced in stop-consonant clusters such as *ṭk*, *ṭc* etc., and when preceded by the letter *r*.

85 The word may be rendered also as *aim-pūtam*, *pañca-bhūta* (five elements), without *mahā-* or *perum-*. In *Ūli-k Kūttu*, it appears as *aint-uru pūtam*. *Aintu* is the number five, which is contracted to the prefix *aim-*. *Uru* has several meanings; in this context, it might mean “to exist.”

86 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 82.

87 Maheshvari Naidu, “Inscribing the Female Body: Fuzzy Gender and Goddess in a South Indian Saiva Marriage Myth,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* (2008): 19–35.

88 Aparna Raghunathan and Amita Sinha, “Rockfort Temple at Tiruchirapalli, India: Conservation of a Sacred Landscape,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12/6 (2006): 489–504; Archana Verma, *Performance and Culture: Narrative, Image and Enactment in India* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 12; Kinsley, “Kālī,” in *Encountering Kālī*, 26.

89 Verma, *Performance and Culture*, 12.

90 R. P. Nair, “What Tuka Said,” *Kavya Bharati: A Review of Indian Poetry* 9 (1997): 92–106; Ranjani-Gayatri (singers), “Bhoot Mote (Abhang)—Soundryam—Ranjani & Gayatri (Full Version)” (Amutham Music, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e403uypVULM>.

91 Bharati, *Bharati Vazhkkaiyum Pira Padalgalum*, 71.

92 Bharati, “The Integrity of Bharati’s Songs: Words and Music” (2012), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati*, <https://subramaniabharati.com/2012/12/28/bharatis-music-3/>.

93 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Rpcb9dyYLS>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQjYnYiHdYw>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppz5lo9gjl>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lr2oXFkpvbI>.

94 S. Sowmya (singer), track 8 in *Bharathiyar Songs* (S. Sowmya) (Chennai: INRECO Entertainment Pvt Ltd., 1999).

95 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIKywbioAo>.

96 Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 86–87.

97 Seema Mohanty, *The Book of Kali* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2009), 22.

98 Elizabeth U. Harding, *Kali: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar* (York Beach, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 1993; first Indian edition: Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), 38, 40, 42.

99 Kinsley, “Kālī,” in *Encountering Kālī*, 28.

100 Tapati Guha Thakurta, “Westernisation and Tradition in South Indian Painting in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906),” *Studies in History* 2/2 (1986): 165–95.

101 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 293.

102 Ibid., 287, 289; Md. Aminul Haque and Tasnia Talukder, “A Comparative Study between Nazrul’s ‘The Rebel’ (Bidrohi) and Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’: Voice against Corruption,” *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)* 4/6 (2019): 1960–67. The word *bidrohi* means “rebel” in Bangla, and is also the title of one of Nazrul’s poems, of which a recitation by the poet’s son, Kazi Sabyasachi, can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29X1GFso6y0>.

103 Dold, “Kālī the Terrific,” *Encountering Kālī*, 53.

104 McDermott, “A ‘Muslim’ Poet in the Lap of a ‘Hindu’ Mother,” 290.

105 Kamal Dasgupta (composer) and K. Mallick (Munshi Mohammed Kasem, singer), *Āmār Ānandīnī Umā*, in Record No. N9975: HMV (1937).

- 106 Khatune Jannat Fatema Janani, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cpN74Mky0o>.
- 107 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 292, 297.
- 108 Barend A. van Nooten, Robert P. Goldman, Rosalind Lefebber, Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, and Sheldon I. Pollock, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. 6: *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, ed. Rosalind Lefebber, Robert P. Goldman, Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, and Sheldon I. Pollock (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 228.
- 109 Pradip Bhattacharya, "Symbols of Immortality in the Mahabharata," *India International Centre Quarterly* 13/1 (1986): 106–15.
- 110 Rai, *Muṇḍamālā Tantram*, 156–61; June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 111 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 308.
- 112 Douglas R. Anthony, "Acting in': The Effect of Performance on Relations between Christians and Hindus in Odisha, India," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 3/1 (2017), Article 1; Debashish Banerji, "Tagore through Portraits: An Intersubjective Picture Gallery," in *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century: Theoretical Renewals*, ed. Debashish Banerji (New Delhi: Springer, 2015), 243–64.
- 113 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0oG8bt0T6Y>.
- 114 Mrinal Kanti Ghosh (singer) and Chitta Roy (composer), *Śmaśān-Kālir Nām Sune Re*, in Record No. N27373: HMV (1943). The initial part of this rendition is in Kauśī Kānaṛā, but the rest is closer to Bhairavī.
- 115 The usage of both R1 and R2 is often seen in both these rāgas.
- 116 David Haberman, "A Selection from the Bhaktirasamritasindhu of Rupa Gosvamin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthayi-bhavas)," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook*, ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 409–40.
- 117 In the case of Kṛṣṇa, any of these *bhāvas* may be expressed by different people and on different occasions.
- 118 Mira T. Sundara Rajan, "Adorer of the Feminine Principle," *The Hindu* (newspaper), Sept. 28, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/society/history-and-culture/bharatis-vision-of-woman-through-the-eyes-of-his-great-granddaughter/article19768311.ece>.
- 119 Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*; Rajan, "Adorer of the Feminine Principle."
- 120 Bharati, *Kannan Pattu-Panchali Sabatham-Kuyil Pattu*, 39–40.
- 121 Mrinal Kanti Ghosh (singer), *Kalo Meyer Payer Tolay* (1932), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2DhPCZV7b0>; Saregama, *Top 100 Songs Of Kazi Nazrul Islam* (2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ur2sN7BcYm4>.
- 122 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 295, 297.
- 123 McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 19.
- 124 Ibid., 7.
- 125 Ibid., 7–8.
- 126 Vijaya-daśamī, known as Bijayā Daśamī in Bangla, is the end of the Durgā Pūjā festival and symbolizes the return of Umā to Śiva's place after spending five days at her mother's house. *Bijayā* songs have lyrics that describe the pain that Umā's mother Menakā experiences owing to the impending separation from her daughter.
- 127 McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 144–47.
- 128 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 307.
- 129 A variety of condensed milk commonly used in Bengali sweets.
- 130 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 308.
- 131 Kamal Dasgupta (composer) and K. Mallick (Munshi Mohammed Kasem, singer), *Āmār Ānandinī Umā*, in Record No. N9975: HMV (1937).
- 132 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWeJCNsnPiY>.
- 133 This Menakā, who is also known as Menā and Menāvati, is the wife of the mountain god Himavān or Himālaya, and the mother of Gaṅgā and Pārvatī. She is not the same as Menakā the *apsarā* (heavenly nymph), whose daughter is Śakuntalā. Dasgupta, "Śākta Padāvali."
- 134 Mohona Chatterjee, "The Oral Tradition of Agomoni Songs as Intangible Heritage: Re-Reading the Marital Migration of the 'Bengali Bridal Diaspora,'" *postScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies* 5/2 (2020): 202–14.
- 135 According to the Hindu luni-solar calendar, the month of Āśvina may begin in September or October. In the Bengali calendar, which is solar, it lasts from mid-September to mid-October. The dates of the Durgā Pūjā festival are decided according to the luni-solar calendar.
- 136 Tamara Agha-Jaffar, *Demeter and Persephone: Lessons from a Myth* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002).
- 137 Chatterjee, "The Oral Tradition of Agomoni Songs."
- 138 The *Kaṇṇammā—En Kātali* series consists of several poems. But three poems that were later included in this list originally did not bear the name *Kaṇṇammā*. These are *Niṇṇaiyē Rati Enṇu*,

Piṭattil Ēri-k Koṇṭāl and *Enkaḷ Cellammā Nakai Putu Rōjā-p-pū*. Bharati addressed these poems to his wife Chellamma, and used her name directly. The change from *Cellammā* to *Kaṇṇammā* has been termed by Vijaya Bharati as “an alteration—dare I say a mutilation” of the poet’s works. She has republished the poems in their original form, with her grandmother Chellamma’s name (<https://subramaniabharati.com/2013/02/23/chellamma-the-heroine-of-bharatis-poetry-part-i/>).

139 Bharati, *Kannan Pattu-Panchali Sabatham-Kuyil Pattu*, 39; Swaminathan, *Pāratīyār Kavitaikaḷ*, 251.

140 Matthew Harp Allen, “Tales Tunes Tell: Deepening the Dialogue between ‘Classical’ and ‘Non-Classical’ in the Music of India,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 30 (1998): 22–52.

141 Bharati, *Kannan Pattu*, 39.

142 Jayakrishnan Narayanan and Dhanavel Senkamalam Periyasamy, “The Musical Language of Piety: The Semiotics of Visual Media in Shaping the Divine Status of Karnatik Music,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 38/8 (2020): 747–65; Shankar Venkataraman, “M. L. Vasanthakumari’s Impeccable Style Gave Us Many Evergreen Hits,” *The Hindu* (newspaper), June 28, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/mlvs-tryst-with-the-tinsel-world/article24278876.ece>.

143 The song can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Z6hCdxBiMo>.

144 A melodic device in Carnatic vocal music. It employs singing several svaras in quick succession, like a “spark.”

145 Rasikas.org, online discussion forum (2008), <https://www.rasikas.org/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7313>; Sanjay Subrahmanyam (singer), *Japath japath hari naam - Ragamalika (Mand, Sushama, Behag, Sindhu Bhairavi)* (2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niK9sr5BauU>. Suṣamā is the second rāga in this piece.

146 I emphasize V. N. Sundaram’s voice here because it is not widely heard.

147 S. Sowmya, track 4 in *Bharathiyar Songs*.

148 There is also a mention of the original rāga of *Ćiṇṇaṇ-Ćiru Kīḷiyē* in K. Balachander’s 1985 film *Sindhu Bhairavi* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu5779GvMVU&t=2937s>), where one of the characters is named Bhairavi. Later, in his television series *Premi* (1997), Balachander uses a viṇā rendition of the movie version (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx2ly_xEh00&t=11m24s), played by Rajhesh Vaidhya, who also acts in the series.

149 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRHKBAt5XM>.

150 Examples available on YouTube are *Viṭutalai viṭutalai* (Bilahari), track 3, and *Murukā Murukā* (Nāṭakuraṇji), track 14, from S. Sowmya’s album (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiVgddFfpKk>) *Pārata Camutāyam Vāḷkavē* (Behāg), sung by the poet’s great-grandson Rajkumar Bharati (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkNaxO_DcsQ); *Ettanai Kōṭi Inṇam Vaitṭāy* (Dhanyāsi), sung by T. M. Krishna (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XR4t-itNhqw>), tracks 2 and 5 in this album of Rajkumar Bharati: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnECC1kTEMo>; *Nantalālā* (Yadukula Kambhōji) by Rajkumar Bharati (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUKoQU7fpLM>); and possibly more renditions. I have personally also begun to compose some of Bharati’s songs in the original rāgas. However, we do not know how Bharati interpreted these rāgas.

151 Rajkumar Bharati, in *Bharathiyar Songs* (© Super Cassettes Industries Private Limited, 2003). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Uz0iEkYQJ8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-bHMGmXyok>.

152 Mohammad Omar Farooq, trans., “Woman” (p. 410), and Sajed Kamal, trans., “Prostitute” (p. 261), in *Kazi Nazrul Islam – 265 Poems* (Poemhunter.com—The World’s Poetry Archive, 2012), 410, https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/kazi_nazrul_islam_2012_8.pdf.

153 Kamal, “Woman,” in *ibid.*, 5.

154 Haque and Talukder, “A Comparative Study”; Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, “I Belong to the World . . .,” *Daily Star* (newspaper), May 29, 2010, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-140431>.

155 Islam, “I Belong to the World . . .”; Biswajit Mandal (reciter), *Barangana* (Uphonic Media, 2010), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0voAtrorAEA>.

156 Meghna Halder, “Dirt: A Social Mirror,” in *From Conflict to Recognition: Moving Multiculturalism Forward*, ed. Michael Kearney (Amsterdam and New York: Brill, 2012), 190.

157 A traditional dance and song form performed by women.

158 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 138–39.

159 *Ibid.*, 135–37.

160 Bharati, C. Subramania Bharati, 19.

161 The Tamil word *cutantiram* is a derivative of the Sanskrit word *sva-tantra*, which means “free” in the sense of “self-governed.” It is synonymous with the Dravidian-origin word *viṭutalai*, which signifies release. Bharati uses both words in his songs.

162 Amanda Weidman, “Circulating Voices: The Gendered Beginnings of Playback,” *Working Papers of the Chicago Tamil Forum* 3 (2016), <http://>

chicagotamilforum.uchicago.edu/working-papers/ewExternalFiles/Weidman%2C%20A_Circulating%20Voices%20%28CTF%2C%202016%29.pdf; G. Dhananjayan, *Pride of Tamil Cinema: 1931 to 2013: Tamil Films That Have Earned National and International Recognition* (Chennai: Blue Ocean Publishers, 2014).

163 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 148–49; Saregama, T. R. Mahalingam – *Weekend Classic Radio Show* (2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhvbcmvbUc&t=36m6s>.

164 Dhananjayan, *Pride of Tamil Cinema*.

165 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 144.

166 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdAxFP3S5KY>.

167 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 70.

168 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, “The Drama of the Kuṛavañci Fortune-teller,” in *Tamil Geographies: Cultural Constructions of Space and Place in South India*, ed. Martha Ann Selby and Indira Viswanathan Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 62–63.

169 A. Ramaiah, “Untouchability and Inter-Caste Relations in Rural India: The Case of Southern Tamil Villages,” *Journal of Religious Culture* 70 (2004): 1–13.

170 Agriculturists who are (considered to be) descended from Devendra—i.e., Indra, king of the Devas. A god known as Vēntaṇ (lit. “king”), later identified with Intiraṇ (Indra), was the patron deity of agricultural lands (*marutam*) in Caṅkam literature. Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism* (Rome: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 1988), 123; M. S. S. Pandian, “Dalit Assertion in Tamil Nadu: An Exploratory Note,” *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy* 12/3–4 (2000): 501–17.

171 Ramaiah, “Untouchability and Inter-Caste Relations in Rural India.”

172 Jorge Manuel Flores, *Re-exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 44–45; A. Srinivasa Raghavan, “Tamil Drama,” *Indian Literature* 1/2 (1958): 128–33.

173 University of Madras, *Tamil Lexicon*, 2551, 2553.

174 This is my condensed English rendering of Vijaya Bharati’s Tamil notes. *Desiyam*, 70.

175 In modern Tamil, India is referred to as *Intiyā* more often than as *Pāratam* (from *Bhāratam*).

176 Perhaps this refers to “holy men”?

177 This comes from a thought often repeated in Bharati’s poems: that there should be no hierarchy in society except the one that classifies good human beings as being higher up. This is influenced by the thoughts of Avvaiyār, the medieval woman poet (K.

S. Mahadevan, “Social Ideals and Patriotism in Tamil Literature (1900–1930),” *Indian Literature* 20/3 (1977): 111–17; Amaresh Datta, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: A-Devo* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1987), 269, 294–96.

178 The difference between the *anupallavi* and a *caraṇam* is that the first line of the *anupallavi* must have a correspondence with the first line of the *pallavi*, in terms of alliteration in the first letter or rhyme in the first syllable. The alliteration or rhyme pattern of any *caraṇam* is not necessarily connected to that of the *pallavi* or of other *caraṇams*.

179 Hema Ramanathan, *Rāgalakṣaṇasaṅgraha (Collection of Rāga Descriptions) from Treatises on Music of the Mēla Period, with Translation and Notes* (Chennai: Published by N. Ramanathan, 2004), Music Research Library, <http://musicresearchlibrary.net/omeka/items/show/3122>.

180 I am very grateful to Saraswati Rajagopalan, Malavika Ganesh Iyer, Vibishan Balasubramaniam, Krishnashis Mondal, and Balakrishnan Raghavan for valuable discussions regarding the emotional aspect of the Carnatic rāga Varāḷi, which was used by Bharati for his *Cutantira-p Paḷḷu*.

181 This song, whose lyrics are written by Veronica Angel, is available on T. M. Krishna’s YouTube channel. Its refrain is *ēlēō ailaṣā ēlēō*, which are musical syllables that fisherfolk traditionally use in the songs that they sing while rowing their boats (University of Madras, *Tamil Lexicon*, 565, 566), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhWH1PI3yeA>.

182 Sarah Hodges, “Revolutionary Family Life and the Self Respect Movement in Tamil South India, 1926–49,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 39/2 (2005): 251–77.

183 The word is pronounced *paraṅgi*. It is cognate to the Hindustani *firaṅgī*. Both are eventually derived from *Frank*, which refers to French people (University of Madras, *Tamil Lexicon*, 2559, <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/tamil-lex/> and John T. Platts, *Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English* [1884], 780, <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/platts/>). These terms are often used in India to describe white people.

184 Thomas Woody, “Towards a Classless Society under the Hammer and Sickle,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 185/1 (1935): 140–52.

185 N. Mariammal Alias Karpagan, “Maha Kavi Subramania Bharathi as an Internationalist,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 76 (2015): 669–77; Christine Mangala Frost, “Bhakti and Nationalism in the Poetry of Subramania Bharati,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10 (2006): 150–

66, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11407-006-9019-z.pdf>.

186 Bharati, "The Pope's 'Culture of Inclusion': What Does It Have to Do with Bharati?" (2014), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati*, <https://subramaniabharati.com/2014/10/30/the-popes-culture-of-inclusion-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-bharati/>.

187 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 48, 57.

188 Ibid., 175–78.

189 Tanika Sarkar, "Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram,' 'Anandamath,' and Hindu Nationhood," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006): 3959–69.

190 A very familiar way of saying "come." It corresponds to the pronouns *tui* (thou) and its plural, *torā*.

191 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 298–99.

192 From what I have read of the Śākta texts, I gather that while they are radical in their approach, they have still not been able to break out of the caste system. Thus, Nazrul's statement is significant.

193 Sanskrit for "Do not fear!" *Mā* means "do not" in Sanskrit, and is not to be confused with the Bangla word for mother.

194 "Kamal Dasgupta: The Greatest of the Music Directors of the Sub-continent" (2005), courtesy of Bangladesh Today, in *Kājī Najrul Islām* (blog), http://nazrul.com.bd/nazrul/artists_experts/misc/kamaldasgupta_music.htm.

195 Kamal, Subal, Sudhira, and Indira Dasgupta (singers), *Ore Āy Aśuci* (1937), in Record No. N9946: HMV. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UE7jDRMcErc>.

196 The word *Deś* also means "country." The popular version of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Vande Mātaram* is composed in this rāga.

197 Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*, 120–21.

198 Also known as *Jīvaṇ-Mukti* (Salvation while Living). Bharati, *Deivam-Thathuvam*, 167.

199 Jnanendra Prasad Goswami (singer), *Mā go, Cīnmayī Rūp Dhare Āy* (1941), HMV, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfZbPKGVI80>.

200 Bharati, C. *Subramania Bharati*, 46.

201 Bharati, *Desiyam*, 48, 57.

202 Ibid., 86; Swarnavel Eswaran Pillai, *Madras Studios: Narrative, Genre, and Ideology in Tamil Cinema* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2015), 112.

203 Somak Biswas, "From Noble to Nivedita: Sister Nivedita and Her Passages through India, 1895–1911," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (2014): 790–97; Srirupa Roy, "'A Symbol of Freedom': The Indian Flag and the Transformations of Nationalism, 1906–2002," *Journal for Asian Studies* 65/3 (2006): 495–527; Susmita Pramanik, "Nivedita: The Lady with the Lamp—an Incarnation of Empowered Woman," *International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and Literature* 5/8 (2018): 9–20.

204 Bharati, "Bharati—Gnāna Guru" (2014), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati*, <https://subramaniabharati.com/2014/12/10/bharati-gnana-guru/>; Biswas, "From Noble to Nivedita."

205 Roy, "A Symbol of Freedom."

206 This term, which means "Turk," is inappropriate in the current context, and I do not advocate its use today. However, as in the case of the caste-based names I mentioned earlier, Bharati does not seem to have used this word in a derogatory sense, since he speaks of inclusion and freedom.

207 D. K. Pattammal (singer), "Thayin Manikkodi Pareer" (1947), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29iSuaaIU2E>.

208 Bharati, "The Integrity of Bharati's Songs: Words and Music" (2012), in *Mahakavi Subramania Bharati*, <https://subramaniabharati.com/2012/12/28/bharatis-music-3/>; N. Islam and Md. Shamsul Arefin, "Nazrul's Contributions in Equality and Egalitarianism: Twenty First Century Perspective" (2017), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3079968>; Bharati, C. *Subramania Bharati*, 46.

209 Islam and Arefin, "Nazrul's Contributions in Equality and Egalitarianism."

210 Bharati, "The Integrity of Bharati's Songs."

211 McDermott, "A 'Muslim' Poet in the Lap of a 'Hindu' Mother," 297–98.