16 Bodies with Songs

The Sounds and Politics of Interstitial Lyrics in Bengali Devotional Performance

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Abstract
Recent research on devotional song in South Asia has noted how the "oral-performative" sphere is a space of live interaction between singing and listening bodies, where dynamic transformation calls into question the ontology of the written text itself. This chapter concerns a type of devotional song in Bengal, *padābalī kīrtan*, where there exists a large repertoire of lyrics that are only sounded and actualized in performance. These interstitial lines expand on the images and affective import of each song text, and further advance the theological, didactic, and aesthetic aims of the repertoire. The absence of these lyrics in the published archive of padābalī kīrtan raises questions about the politics that defıne the relationship between written texts and the oral-performative sphere.

Keywords: devotional song, Bengal, orality, *kīrtan*

To think about the sounds of oral performance asks one to consider the body. As Linda Hess has suggested, the phenomenological contours of oral performance are "embodied, with givers and receivers physically present in the same place and time" (2015, 1). The idea of orality, though, might be further augmented by including the act of hearing in the time-space of an *oral-aural* context of communication. This formation underscores not only the singular voice that speaks or sings—through reference to the oral—but also focuses on the listener, the act of aurality, and the various extra-semantic sonic modes that accompany the performance of song texts. One way of studying the oral-aural mode in the context of South Asian devotional song is presented as the "oral-performative" sphere, a

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setting of dynamic live interaction between singing and listening bodies that Hess finds in the context of devotional sung poetry in North India (Hess 2015, 9). Such research on the oral-performative sphere has brought attention to the complicated relationships that exist between written song texts and sounded lyrics, noting not only the way that a textual archive is transformed in live performance, but also the manner that performance can transform the textual record itself (Doniger 1995, 56–64; Hess 2015, 6; Orsini and Schofield 2015, 1–27). Apart from transformation, though, what can be gleaned from performance contexts that do not draw from a pre-existing written body of song? In this case, how might the physical body serve as both an archive of song and medium for the affective aims of lyrical performance? The answers offered to these questions in the following discussion present ways to reconsider the interrelationships between religious sounds, print media, and the meanings found in song texts. The implications of this analysis involve the politics of ocularcentrism that has prioritized an archive of printed song texts in South Asia, a blind spot that has neglected a body of sounded lyrics that have been foundational to connecting religious communities through sound.

The following discussion turns to *padābalī kīrtan*, a genre of devotional sung poetry in South Asia, to study the intersections of the body, musical sound, and the mediality of song.[1] Padābalī kīrtan is integral to the sphere of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology and practice that followed in the wake of the all-important mystic in Bengal, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1533). Devotional song in Bengal is also linked with a larger sphere of public and private modes of *bhakti* (often translated as "devotion") in South Asia, a domain sometimes characterized as a "heart religion" that includes associations with "participation, community, enthusiasm, song and often personal challenge" (Hawley 2015, 2). In the domain of padābalī kīrtan—or simply *kīrtan,* as it is often known—there is an additional focus on emotion and affect, and the genre's lyrical repertoire works to invite the singer or listener to enter an emotional world inhabited by various divine personalities to share in this religion of the heart. Much of the sung poetry depicts the amorous acts of the well-known deities of Radha and Krishna, while other poetry focuses on the Bengali figure of Chaitanya. This song repertoire exists in two forms. The first is a large written archive that has passed from manuscripts to published anthologies over the past several centuries. The second repertoire of lyrics are only presented in performance, when singers insert segments of vernacular

1 Media and mediality, according to Patrick Eisenlohr, "refer to objects and processes that connect people, concepts, or social formations standing in relations of difference" (2015, 294).

text in between the lines of an original song. This second archive of song is thus only sounded; in performance, these relatively short lyrical interjections further expand on the images and affective import of the original song. They might be considered as liminal texts that are not found in the genre's written archive yet remain crucial to the sonic experience of kīrtan.

Singing and sounding these *interstitial lines*, as I call them, advances two aims in the contexts presented in this chapter.[2] In the first case, these lyrics translate older literary dialects into a more colloquial idiom, a process similar to what Christian Novetzke refers to as vernacularization, when linguistic registers, "expressive idioms … and all other spheres of affect" are located in new social spheres (2017, 6). These sounds, then, are fundamental to organizing communities through their mediality and the manner they impart religious messages through a shared linguistic register. A second feature of these sounded and interstitial lyrics is found in their links to evoking an embodied and affective response in singers and listeners. Though the written archive of song texts is linked with aesthetic theory from the sphere of Sanskrit theater and poetics, interstitial lyrics amplify and elaborate on these connections, often presenting new meanings not found in the original texts. One example discussed in this chapter is found in a specific segment of interstitial lyrics known as the *mātan*.[3] A cursory translation of this word is "absorption," but the term simultaneously refers to a particular fragment of song text, a rhythm played on the accompanying percussion instruments, a specific melodic structure, and an embodied response from audience members. The mātan mode of performance is most conspicuous in what is known as a *līlā kīrtan*—a multi-hour combination of song and storytelling that focuses on a "divine play" (*līlā*) of Radha, Krishna, or Chaitanya.

The general absence of interstitial lyrics in the written and published archive of padābalī kīrtan raises questions about a politics that inheres between the written and oral-performative sphere in Bengal. Because most of these lyrics are learned and passed on through forms of oral-aural transmission, they remain missing from the textual archive, and thus hint at the role of embodied knowledge as an archive for devotional song—bodies with songs. But more significantly, the omission of these interstitial lyrics from the published archive of padābalī kīrtan song points to the manner

2 Of course, the practice of interjecting additional lines of text such as praise verse or forms of vernacular lyric to add semantic, narrative, and affective resonance to a performance is found in a number of musical styles, such as Qawwalī (Qureshi 1986), Marathi kīrtan (Novetzke 2015), and Baul gān (Lorea 2016).

3 See Chakraborty (1995, 195) for more information on mātan and its role in padābalī kīrtan. Alternate spellings for this term include mātān.

they are entangled with forms of what Novetzke refers to as "sonic equality," a "conviction … that all people are equally entitled to hear words of salvation in their own everyday language" (2019, 91). Indeed, there was a shift during the second millennium in South Asia where vast amounts of ritual and devotional texts were translated in vernacular languages (Pollock 2006), thus making this knowledge accessible equally (or more equally) throughout the subcontinent. However, there is another implication found in the concept of sonic equality, Novetzke notes, as this mode does not immediately involve the transformation of a social structure to afford equality to all. As such, sonic equality refers to an equality that is rooted in sound, yet for some time might remain there, or perhaps only echo in the oral-performative frame without transforming the domain of unequal social structures. The implications of this line of thought in regard to padābalī kīrtan are twofold. On the one hand, it suggests considering how interstitial lyrics present devotional messages in the vernacular, thus entailing a form of (mostly) equal distribution throughout sound and social contexts. On the other hand, however, the spread and potency of this sounded mode has not been comprehensive, as these lyrics remain omitted from the written archive of padābalī kīrtan and thus highlight a politics that presents the written as the "authentic" form of the song repertoire.

The chapter focuses on two contexts where we find a specific type of interstitial line known as the *ākhar*, a three-part lyrical phrase that is interjected between song couplets. The first setting considers how modes of embodied instruction remain the locus for learning the repertoire of interstitial lines that is central to padābalī kīrtan by focusing on my studies with the kīrtan singer Kankana Mitra. A second context is a live līlā kīrtan performance by the singer Dyuti Chakraborty in 2012, where both the ākhar lyrics and the context of the performance reveal a range of meanings and affective modes that expand on the original song, known as the *pad*. The theme of the body remains a key part of both the written and sounded padābalī kīrtan song texts throughout this chapter. Not only do these lyrics require the body for performance and transmission; they also focus on how devotion and its aftermath affect the bodies of Radha, Krishna, and Chaitanya—three characters central to the devotional sphere of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought and practice.

Unwritten literature and embodied sounds

Reading research about interstitial lyrics might lead one to think that these lines enjoy a type of absolute ubiquity. Indeed, as the scholarship of Donna

Wulff notes, the communicative role of these additional lines in performance has led to the ākhar "becom[ing] virtually all pervasive, penetrating all styles of kīrtan from the most classical to the most popular" (1996, 76). An important caveat to this claim is that the pervasiveness of these lyrics is most evident in contexts of live performance, and their presence is missing in much of the written and sound recording archive of the genre. This point became apparent to me as I began dissertation research on the genre from the United States in 2011, eagerly accruing a variety of written and recorded padābalī kīrtan song forms. One set of lyrics that captured my attention was the song "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu*" (Oh Friend, do not touch me!), a staple of the padābalī kīrtan repertoire found across a number of media forms recorded in the twentieth century (Example 16.1). A specific performance that fascinated me was a version of the song featured in the Bengali film *Chandidas* (1932), a release that offered a depiction of the life story of the eponymously named composer (of this song and others) who was active in the fifteenth century. Produced by the Kolkata-based New Theatres Ltd., *Chandidas* featured the singer Krishnachandra De (1894–1962), a popular singer-actor in the conjoined spheres of Bengali theater, film, and commercial recording in the early twentieth century.[4]

The lyrics for "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu*" in De's rendition voice the perspective of Radha as a directive to Krishna: "Oh Friend, do not touch me! Keep away!" In a full-length līlā kīrtan performance this song depicts an episode when Radha has waited the entire evening for a prearranged tryst with Krishna in the forest. However, when he finally arrives, Radha sees signs on his body that he has been with another lover. From the smeared eye makeup to disheveled hair, the song's first couplet and refrain present a further question as Radha asks Krishna why he did not take the time to look in a mirror before their meeting. As I studied various recorded forms of this song in 2011,[5] the ākhar lyrics that would typically accompany this song in a live context were missing. One reason for this was kīrtan musicians such as De were adapting songs to the shortened forms of media production at the time, and not able to sing all the interstitial lines during the time frame of the sound recording. Therefore, my ability to be able to hear those lyrics would require face-to-face lessons with musicians in West Bengal.

4 For more information on Krishnachandra De, see *Krishnachandra,* edited by Bandopadhyay (2012).

5 De recorded at least two different versions of this song. One was recorded for the film's soundtrack in 1932, and a second was commissioned by HMV Records in 1933 to be released as a seven-inch commercial record. See the discography in Bandopadhyay (2012).

chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu oikhāne thāka/	Oh friend, do not touch me! Keep away!
mukura laiyā cāṁda mukha khāni dekha//	Look at your moon-like face in the mirror.
nayanera kājara bayāne legeche kālora upare kālo/	The collyrium of your eyes has stained your face; it appears as black on black.
prabhāte uṭhiyā o mukha dekhinu dina jābe āja bhālo//	Rising in the morning and seeing that face, [I thought] this day will be good.
adharera tāmbula bayāne legeche ghume dḷulu dḷulu āṁkhi/	Chewed betel leaf from your mouth has stuck to your face, and your eyes are half closed with drowsiness.
āmā pāne cāo phiriyā dāṁḍāo nayana bhariyā dekhi//	Look at me! Stand in front of me! Let me see you with my open eyes.
cāṁcara keśera cikana cūḍā se kena bukera mājhe/	Why is the glossy, curly hair of your topknot now on your chest?
sindurera dāga āche sarbagāye morā hale mari lāje//	Your whole body is stained with the marks of vermillion. If this happened to me, I might die of shame.
nīla kamala jhāmaru hayeche malina hayeche deha/	The blue lotus [Krishna] has become faded; his body has lost its glow.
kon rasabatī pāya sudhānidhi niṃḍi layeche seha//	Which rasabatī [gopī] has squeezed all the nectar from that ocean?
kuṭila nayane kahiche sundarī adhika kariyā toṛā /	The beautiful one [Radha] offers an excessive rebuke with a wink.
kahe canḍīdāsa āpana svabhāba chāḍite nā pāre corā//	Canḍīdāsa says that thief [Krishna] cannot change his nature.

Example 16.1 *"chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu"* (Oh friend, do not touch me!)[6]

I first learned the interstitial lines to songs such as "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu*" during extended periods of fieldwork and study living in Kolkata, when I would visit the Rabindra Bharati University professor and singer Dr. Kankana Mitra at her south Kolkata home each Sunday morning. It was during one of these visits in 2012 when she taught me one version of the interstitial lyrics used to accompany the song "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu*." If these interstitial lyrics were missing from published anthologies and sound recordings, one place where they could be found is in Kankana Mitra's notebooks, where she had documented her many years of padābalī kīrtan study. Using these notebook representations as mnemonics to unlock

6 Both y-phola and anthastha-ya are transliterated as "y" in this chapter.

the embodied knowledge of song, she taught me the following ākhar that would be inserted at the end of the first verse of the song. In this ākhar, Radha continues the theme of the mirror from the first verse, questioning how Krishna could think that she would be so naïve as to not notice his appearance:

pad: *chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu oikhāne thāka*
mukura laiyā cāṁda mukha khāni dekha

Oh, friend, do not touch me! Keep away!
Look at your moon-like face in the mirror

ākhar: *bali mukur sethāy chilo nā ki śyām*
naile kemone orupe ele
tabe yethāy badankhāni dekha
Oh Krishna, there was no mirror there?
How can you come [here] looking as you do?
Did you see your face there?

There is clearly a more colloquial and, one might say, even an angry voice in these interstitial lines. One form of mediation found in these lyrics is translation, as much of the original repertoire of kīrtan songs, such as the one just discussed, was written in various linguistic registers of pre- and early-modern Bengal. For example, Caṇḍīdāsa's "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu,*" like many songs in the repertoire, was composed in Middle Bengali, a linguistic predecessor of the contemporary spoken language of Bangla that was prominent between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (Thompson 2012, 3). Because Middle Bengali is not readily understood by contemporary audiences, interstitial lines of song such as the one above translate an older idiom into a linguistic form understood by contemporary audiences, a process that some trace to the late nineteenth century.[7]

These sounded lines do more than simply translate text, though. As Donna Wulff notes, these interstitial lines of text are also "internal interpretations [that] shape … and mediate the poem, allowing the audience to participate emotionally in the drama being sung and enacted" (1996, 76). When discussing the place of ākhar lyrics, Kankana Mitra described how these lines engage in a process of expansion, using the Bangla-language term *bistār*. The ākhar lines, Mitra suggested, reveal the "inner meaning" of the song,

7 See Chakraborty (1995, 179).

noting that "ākhar means bistār" and "the spread of the inner meaning of the verses."[8] One way this interpretation occurs in the ākhar lines above is through the manner that the singer chooses to focus on a particular theme in the original pad. In the ākhar above the elaborative work of the interstitial line presents Radha's indignation that Krishna could appear before her with little regard for his bodily appearance. The singer presents the words of an incredulous Radha who wonders how Krishna did not take the time to see his face—"there was no mirror there?" The body of Krishna, moreover, is an index of his infidelity, a point of aesthetic and theological import that becomes evident through the singing body of a kīrtan musician.

The textual work of the ākhar lyrics represents only one of the ways their sounds act. As I sat with Kankana Mitra learning these lyrics during a lesson in 2012, she taught me the ākhar lyrics that are interjected between the song's second couplet.

pad: *nayanera kājara bayāne legeche kālara upare kāla|*
prabhāte uṭhiyā o mukha dekhinu dina jābe āja bhāla//

The collyrium from your eyes has stained your face; it appears as black on black./
Rising in the morning and seeing that face, [I thought] this day will be good.//

ākhar: (*sakhi*) *āj āmār ki bhāgya*
prabhāte cāṁder dekhā pelām
tāya tāte kalaṅkara dāg

Oh friend, [I thought] how fortunate I am today
In the morning I saw the moon (Krishna)
[but] now there is only a scandalous stain [on that moon]

After singing the song's couplet, which expresses Radha's dejection on seeing another woman's mascara on Krishna's face, the ākhar presents the Middle Bengali text again in a colloquial register. Yet there is more at work in the melodic motion that animates this group of interstitial lyrics. Kankana Mitra taught me this ākhar section while seated behind her harmonium, accompanying her own vocal performance. The first line of the ākhar section immediately began to circle around a pitch range that was higher than what

8 Personal communication, December 1, 2012.

was used to accompany the original *pad*, as Kankana Mitra's lyrics voiced Radha's concerns and humiliation to her friend. The second part of the ākhar section continued this melodic approach, as the line *prabhāte cāṁder dekhā pelām* was accompanied with a rising melodic structure when Kankana Mitra's fingers moved upwards on the harmonium's keyboard. The melodic motion of an upward swell matched Radha's remembrance of how her day began with her auspicious vision of Krishna, only to have her hopes dashed. This gradual melodic movement is a convention of the ākhar section that links the rise in pitch to the emotional intensification that occurs through the progression of the lyrics, illustrating the connection between musical sound and these interstitial lines. Though it was not demonstrated in the pedagogical context of my lessons with Kankana Mitra, this rising melodic movement is also joined with an increase in tempo and rhythmic density of the accompanying instruments when such an ākhar section is performed with a full ensemble (see Audio sample 16.1 below).

The metaphorical work of comparing Krishna's disheveled face to the moon hints at one reason why ākhar lyrics are referred to as forms of "unwritten literature" (*alikhita sāhitya*) (Chakraborty 1995, 179). Because interstitial lines are not found in the manuscript archive, Mriganka Chakraborty's attempt to define these lines as forms of unwritten literature underscores a connection with the devices found in the sphere of literature, such as the common metaphorical link between Krishna's face and the moon. The ākhar examples discussed here belong to the first of two categories of ākhar lyrics. These examples are interstitial lines that a singer has learned from her guru and can trace back one or more generations in a lineage of kīrtan transmission. Kankana Mitra learned the two ākhar sections mentioned above for the song "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu*" from another prominent kīrtan guru in the Kolkata area, a former professor at Rabindra Bharati University, the late Manoranjan Bhattacharya, who likely learned them from one of his teachers. Often these types of lyrics are defined as a form of "traditional ākhar,"[9] a category that applies to all the lyrics discussed in this chapter. A second and less common form of ākhar lyrics is considered improvisatory. In this case, the singer will create lyrics during performance that elaborate on the text and meaning of the original song, a practice that is not without a certain amount of controversy as some question the value of this practice (see Wulff 2009). Despite the central place that interstitial lines of song enjoy in padābalī kīrtan performance, the category of traditional

9 This category was defined in this way by the kīrtan musician Rahul Das. Personal communication, August 24, 2017.

ākhars are not found in the written body of published song anthologies, a fact that points to a gap that exists between the written and oral-performative spheres in Bengali devotional song. What are the implications for these unwritten lyrics?

When surveying publications of Vaiṣṇava padābalī song anthologies, the omission of the interstitial lines of song might be one of the most obvious features. One reason for this is that many song anthologies published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were based on longstanding manuscript collections. The most pertinent example of this was the largest and most comprehensive manuscript collection known as the *Śrī Śrī Pada-Kalpataru*, or the "Wish-fulfilling Tree of Lyrics," a manuscript of Vaiṣṇava padābalī that likely reached its final manuscript form in the mid-eighteenth century. In its printed iteration, this five-volume anthology, which contained over three thousand songs, was published over the course of sixteen years (see Das and Roy 1322–1338 BS [1915–1931]), and the omission of interstitial lines in its pages seems to reflect the fact that these lyrics were not part of this earlier manuscript archive. Nevertheless, there were several manuscript collections compiled in the twentieth century[10]—when the practice of singing interstitial lines was surely extant—that chose to omit these interstitial lyrics.[11]

1. *pūrva-rāga* Infatuation	2. *māna* Pique	3. *prema-vaicittya* Separation in the presence of the beloved	4. *pravāsa* Separation based on a distant journey
5. *saṅkṣipta-sambhoga* Brief union	6. *saṅkīrṇa-sambhoga* Union mixed with contrary feelings	7. *sampanna-sambhoga* Developed union	8. *samṛddhimat -sambhoga* Complete and excessive union

Example 16.2 Eight Categories of the Amorous Mood

Instead of working to include forms of interstitial lyrics, song anthology editors seemed more interested in linking songs with a paradigmatic theoretical structure comprised of eight forms of the amorous or erotic mood (Example 16.2), which is known in the Gauḍīyā Vaiṣṇava fold as *ujjvala rasa* and based

10 The publication of padābalī kīrtan song anthologies became central to a larger recovery of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava knowledge and practices in the late nineteenth century. For more on the bhadralok recovery of features of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought and practice, see Bhatia (2017).

11 See, for example, Mukhopadhyay (2010).

on the work of the prominent Gauḍīya theorist Rūpa Gosvāmī and his sixteenth-century treatise, *Ujjvalanilamani*.[12] In short, padābalī kīrtan songs work to capture one of these eight forms of the amorous mood that Radha and Krishna experience in their līlās, with the further qualification that the devout singer or listener can also experience this emotion as well. The first four categories—from pūrva-rāga to pravāsa—are considered indicative of the mood of separation. Similarly, there are four subcategories of the mood of devotion when two lovers are united, each of these increasing in intensity from a brief (saṇkṣipta-sambhoga) to a longer duration (samṛddhimāna-sambhoga). The song "*chuṁyo nā chuṁyo nā bandhu*" would often be linked with the category of *māna* (pique) in published anthologies, as it embodies the sphere of separation that Radha felt because Krishna failed to meet for their rendezvous.

One example of this is found in the twentieth-century anthology collection known as *Śrī Padāmṛta-mādhurī* (The Sweet Elixir of Verse), edited by Nabadwipchandra Brajabashi and Khagendranath Mitra. The thousands of songs in this multi-volume anthology reveal a detailed process where songs were listed with minute attention to the eight-fold structure mentioned and further levels of analytical rigor (see Graves 2017, 18–20). Yet despite all the effort directed at this endeavor, there appeared to be little attention paid to the huge repertoire of interstitial lyrics that both of these editors clearly knew, sang, and taught. We might speculate that the omission of these interstitial lines from the written record underscores a politics of exclusion that often views forms of oral-aural expression as "lower" than the written (Kaviraj 2003, 525), and further hints at the unequal dimensions of sonic equality. In one final example, the next section studies a performance and song with clear connections to the eight-fold structure just mentioned, yet also highlights the ways that the embodied and sounded forms of interstitial lyrics expand on the meanings and categorical ontologies of the original pads.

Absorbed in songs of union

The song "*gaurāṅga cāṁder mane ki bhāb uṭhila* " (What feeling arose in the mind of the moon-like Chaitanya?) illustrates the second four-part grouping of amorous union discussed above (Example 16.3). Belonging to a sub-repertoire of Vaiṣṇava padābalī known as Gaura-candrikā, the song focuses on the Dān Līlā, an episode where Krishna adopts the role of a

12 For more on the *Ujjvalanīlamaṇi* (The Blazing Sapphire), see Delmonico (1990).

road-tax collector to meet with Radha and her friends away from Radha's family home. In a twist, however, this song presents the fifteenth-century figure of Chaitanya as the road-tax collector as a form of identity transposition that is meant to synchronize his identity with Krishna, a technique widespread in the Gaura-candrikā body of songs. In published anthologies, songs such as this that focus on the Dān Līlā are grouped together with lyrics that depict a number of episodes meant to evoke *saṅkīrṇa-sambhoga* (Union Mixed with Contrary Feelings), one of the eightfold divisions of the amorous mood.[13] The work of grouping song texts in this aesthetic category is another example of how editors linked the genre's lyrical repertoire with the body of Sanskrit aesthetics, thus mediating the experience of these published volumes.

gaurāṅga cāṁder mane ki bhāba uṭhila/	What feeling arose in the mind of the moon-like Chaitanya?/
nadīyāra mājhe gorā dāna sirajila//	In Nadia, Chaitanya began the Dān (tax episode).
āre moro āre moro āmār gorā dvijamaṇi/	Oh, my, our Chaitanya [Gorā], the gem of the twice born.
betra diyā āguliyā rākhaye taruṇī//	With sticks he kept the young women from proceeding.
dān deho dān deho bali gorā ḍāke/	"Give me the tax, give me the tax," shouted Chaitanya.
nadiyā nāgarī saba paṛila bipāke//	All the young girls of Nadiya fell into distress.
kṛṣṇa abatāre āmi sādhiyāchi dān/	As Krishna I played this fee-taking role before.
se bhāba paṛila mane [āmār] bāsughoṣe gān//	My mind fell into that feeling, sings Basu Ghosa.

Example 16.3 *gaurāṅga cāṁder mane ki bhāb uṭhila* (What feeling arose in the mind of the moon-like Chaitanya?)

One version of ākhar lyrics for this song emerges during a larger mix of song and storytelling in a multi-hour līlā kīrtan by Dyuti Chakraborty I attended in 2012. The setting for this līlā kīrtan performance was the village of Kanthi in West Bengal, where Dyuti Chakraborty and her kīrtan ensemble had set up in the middle of the central shopping district of the town. A tent had

13 See *SSPK,* Vol. II (1325 BS), 357. For example, other song themes that are related to Union mixed with contrary feelings found in this volume of the *SSPK* include, Krishna's Mahārāsa (305), and Naukā-bilāsa (375). These songs are also followed by lyrics that are used to depict several līlās that are associated with the division of the amorous mood that follows *saṅkīrṇa-sambhoga*, namely *sampanna-sambhoga* (Developed union), such as Hari Līlā (386) and Jhulan-Yātrā (441).

been provided by a local group that organizes kīrtan events and hundreds of people from the area had assembled for an evening performance. After a series of invocatory songs and chanted verses, Dyuti Chakraborty reached the song "*gaurāṅga cāndera mane ki bhāb uṭhila*." As is common, the progression of this song was interrupted not only by the inclusion of interstitial lyrics, but also by the insertion of lengthy storytelling segments. One example of this occurred after the third couplet of this song—"*dān deho dān deho*" (Example 16.3)—which, as mentioned, presents the image of the fifteenth-century Chaitanya adopting the tax-collection role of the mythical Krishna. Instead of focusing solely on this image, Dyuti Chakraborty presented a lengthy story from a body of Puranic literature in South Asia to describe the various groups approaching the demigod Brahmā for advice. The bridge between this storytelling episode and the song is made by term dān. In the context of Dyuti Chakraborty's līlā kīrtan performance this term simultaneously referred to a "tax," and thus Krishna's role as the road-tax collector, and a form of "ritual offering," another common meaning for the word.

The storytelling interlude began when two groups asked for the advice of Brahmā—the "grandfather" of the gods (*pitāmaha*). The first group was composed of the supernatural demigods (*debatās*), who, upon asking Brahmā for advice, received only the cryptic syllable "da" in response to their inquiry. This enigmatic syllable, Dyuti Chakraborty explained, was to be interpreted phonetically, as the demigods took this sound as an instruction for them to restrain (*daman karte*) their desires for sensual enjoyment. The second group to come before Brahmā were the so-called demons (*asura*), another supernatural category of beings known for being disruptive and challenging the demigods in Puranic stories. The demons also received the enigmatic syllable "da" in response to their inquiry, but, unlike the demigods, they associated this phonetic correlation with the Bangla word "*dayā*" (kindness or mercy), which they interpreted as an instruction to show compassion to others.

In Dyuti Chakraborty's narrative, the final group to approach Brahmā were the humans, who, after hearing the syllable "da," took this as an instruction meant to inspire them in acts of ritual giving (*dān*). Dyuti Chakraborty thus voiced the reply from the humans:

> Oh Brahmā, we are humans, and we have the tendency to constantly place demands before Chaitanya to fulfill our sensual demands. Give us this; give us that; give us wealth; give us knowledge; give us fame. Give, give, give—give us everything. But we never say, "Chaitanya, you take!" Brahmā said, "You are humans. What do you possess that you can give?"

This storytelling section then flowed into the ākhar section, which was spoken from the perspective of Chaitanya, suggesting what humans might offer:

ākhar:	1) [*āmār*] *dān deho deho dān*	"Give an offering, give an offering.
	2) *yākicchu āche karo tomāy*	Whatever you have, give that to me.
	3) *tomāder jībana yaubana kulaśīlamāna*	[Give] your life, youth, and familial prestige." [mātan]

The theme of the body emerged here in the final line of the ākhar section with the directive to offer one's "life, youth, and familial prestige" to Chaitanya. If one meaning of the phrase *dān deho* suggests a plea to make a ritual gift (*dān*=ritual gift, offering; *deho*=give), a second way to interpret this short ākhar line would be to note another meaning for *deho* as "body." Reading the interstitial line of *dān deho* as the act of "offering your body" presents another way to interpret the lyrical material that follows. In particular, the third ākhar line describes how one might offer one's "life, youth, and familial prestige"—three qualities that are of course linked to the body. This second perspective on the interstitial lyrics thus highlights the creativity of these sounded lines, as they present two simultaneous meetings: a focus on the theme of a road tax *and* the way that the devotee's body might be considered as a form of ritual offering.

The didactic conclusion offered in the third ākhar line was further reinforced through features of musical sound and emphasized through forms of embodied assent from the audience.

Audio sample 16.1

A recording of the original couplet, followed by the ākhar section under discussion.
Source: recording by the author.

Like the earlier example, the ākhar section here contained three short lyrical fragments that gradually implemented a rise in the pitch range as the singer progressed through each section. Two added elements in this example included an acceleration in tempo and an increase in the rhythmic density

in the accompanying percussion instruments. The third line of the ākhar section is known as the mātan, a term that refers to these musical elements and the state of absorption that the lyrical and musical components are meant to evoke. The musical and semantic motion here was to move the audience toward a state of absorption in the singer's message, which was activated through the ākhar lyrics and musical accompaniment. And in this performance, the audience responded with enthusiasm. When Dyuti Chakrabarty traced a circle above her head upon reaching the mātan, audience members raised their arms in the air and shouted "gaur hari-bol" (Chant [the names of] Chaitanya and Krishna!), a form of embodied approval of the singer's didactic message. Through upraised arms and loud voices, they affirmed the singer's conclusion that one should indeed offer one's body in service.

Conclusion

The presence of the body permeates the imaginal and material sphere of padābalī kīrtan lyrics. Bodies are transformed in the repertoire of song texts through the acts of infidelity, during emotions of pique, and in the midst of meditation and remembrance, to name a few themes discussed in this chapter. Yet this affective and transformative work also relies on bodies during acts of transmission and performance. Though virtually absent from the written record, interstitial lyrics mediate the experience of songs as they translate an older linguistic register into a more colloquial idiom, and thus work to enact a type of sonic equality as they translate devotional messages into a linguistic register understood by many. But more than simply offering translations, these ākhar lines further expand upon the structural wellspring of Sanskrit aesthetic theory that is given prominence in published anthologies. When singing the unwritten literature of ākhar lines, performers expand on themes found in the original song as they present new meanings from the text. The features of musical sound that animate sections of ākhar performance, such as the mātan, suggest that there is something integral to the sounded repertoire of lyrics that cannot be completely reduced to their original word forms. As Sudipta Kaviraj notes in relation to this repertoire, these "texts contain a possibility of meaning, but this meaning often waits on something that exists even before meaning begins—the sensuous, pre-semantic attractiveness of the aural or the musical" (2003, 525).

Musical and other performative conventions are part of the way that the sounds expand beyond their original written forms. At the same time, however, the omission of these interstitial lines of song from the written

record underscores part of the politics of exclusion that often views forms of oral-aural expression as "lower" than the written (Kaviraj 2003, 525). Despite the actualization of vernacular lines in performance, the other part of the idea of sonic equality asks us to consider how this sonic dispersal "does not necessarily require everyday social order to change" (Novetzke 2019, 91). The implications of this in the history of padābalī kīrtan lyrics, then, is found in their curious and continued omission from the written record. This exclusion is even more surprising on account of the fact that these interstitial lines, such as the ākhar, express and embody a set of profound meanings and affective messages for singers and audience members. In the present, then, these lyrics sound and exist only in the oral-performative sphere, as they remain tied to bodies with songs.

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