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Two Gramophone Records, One Word Changed, and the Whole Anthem Question

THE HINDU

30 August 2026 ·

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Two Gramophone Records, One Word Changed, and the Whole Anthem Question

 The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The Constituent Assembly settled the anthem question through a statement by its President, not a resolution of the House. Was avoiding a vote on Vande Mataram an act of wisdom or an evasion that left the question permanently open?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

The Hindu

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The National Anthem and National Song are Prelims staples usually learned as two bullet points. This piece supplies what toppers have and others lack: **the mechanism of the settlement**. Jana Gana Mana's status rests on a **statement, not a resolution**, and Vande Mataram's "equal honour" formula was crafted precisely to avoid a vote. That procedural detail is examinable in GS2 as much as the history is in GS1, and the **Haripura session** material doubles as freedom-struggle content.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The song. Vande Mataram, written by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** and published in **Anandamath in 1882**; first sung at a Congress session by **Rabindranath Tagore in 1896**. Through the **Swadeshi** years it became the movement's battle hymn, and Congress reports of the 1920s, some edited by **Jawaharlal Nehru** as the party's General Secretary, refer to it as the "National Anthem" of proceedings.

The restriction. The later stanzas address the motherland as a goddess, imagery that many Muslim Congressmen could not conscientiously sing. In **October 1937 the Working Committee, meeting at Calcutta** and advised by **Tagore himself**, confined official singing to the **first two stanzas**, which contain no deity.

The session. Haripura, Gujarat, February 1938, the **51st session** of the Indian National Congress, presided over by **Subhas Chandra Bose**, president-elect. The ceremonial journey from Haripura village to the pavilion was itself a spectacle of political imagination: Bose carried in a chariot **drawn by 51 bullocks**, one for each session, through a route decorated by panels that **Nandalal Bose** painted at Gandhi's request, with **Sarojini Naidu** recording that the Haripura Vande Mataram was "exquisitely sung", and **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay** praising the singing of a Bengal troupe including **Mahatma Gandhi's favourite bhajans** alongside the song.

THE ANALYSIS

The first gramophone, 1938. Bose, Jha argues, was not content with reaffirmation by gesture. The Congress gave the task of a definitive recording to **Timir Baran**, who composed the **complete Vande Mataram in an orchestration conceived in the character of a military march**, across **both sides of a twelve-inch disc**, against the usual ten-inch format, because all six stanzas demanded it. **The label read: BANDE MATARAM. SAMPOORN. Complete.** And then, in case the point was missed, the assertion of completeness was **repeated in Devanagari, Bangla and Nastaliq.**

*Four months after the Working Committee restricted the song to two stanzas, the party's president-elect issued a recording whose label says, three times, in three scripts, that **this is the whole song**. Jha's careful conclusion: Vande Mataram "was not being introduced to the Congress. It was being reaffirmed."*

The second gramophone, 1949. A new recording of **all six stanzas**, on a **twelve-inch His Master's Voice disc**, label: **INDIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM**, in bold capitals. "There was no ambiguity," Jha writes. This while the Constituent Assembly was still deciding, and after **Nehru's Cabinet had in 1948 'tentatively' chosen Jana Gana Mana**, whose orchestral character suited state occasions.

The settlement, January 24, 1950. In the Assembly's final sitting, President **Rajendra Prasad** made a **statement**, having explicitly considered and rejected the route of a House resolution:

*The composition consisting of the words and music known as of India... and the song **Vande Mataram**, which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom, **shall be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana and shall have equal status with it.***

The third label. After 1950, the record changed again: **no "Sampoorn", no "Indian National Anthem"**. It now read "**Indian National Congress Anthem**". The question, as Jha ends, remains in the gramophone grooves.

The 1955 sharpening. In a **Prime Ministerial statement of November 25, 1955**, Nehru described Vande Mataram as a "**Special National Song**", departing from the language of equal status where **Jana Gana Mana opens** state functions and **Vande Mataram may close** them. The distinction between

Anthem and Song, Jha notes, thereby acquired its working shape, **without any constitutional, legal or legislative basis then or since.**

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

Vande Mataram was written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and published in Anandamath in 1882.

Rabindranath Tagore first sang Vande Mataram at a Congress session in 1896.

The Congress Working Committee at Calcutta in October 1937 restricted official singing to the first two stanzas.

Tagore was consulted on the 1937 decision confining performances to the opening stanzas.

Haripura, February 1938, was the 51st Congress session, presided over by Subhas Chandra Bose.

Nandalal Bose painted the Haripura panels at Mahatma Gandhi's request; Bose rode a chariot drawn by 51 bullocks.

Timir Baran orchestrated the complete 1938 Vande Mataram recording, labelled Sampurn in three scripts.

The Constitution was adopted on November 26, 1949; the Assembly's final sitting was January 24, 1950.

Rajendra Prasad's statement of January 24, 1950 declared Jana Gana Mana the National Anthem.

The same statement gave Vande Mataram equal honour and equal status; no resolution was voted.

Nehru's Cabinet had tentatively preferred Jana Gana Mana in 1948 for its orchestral suitability.

A Prime Ministerial statement of November 25, 1955 termed Vande Mataram a Special National Song.

The Anthem-Song distinction rests on statements, not on the Constitution, statute or resolution.

*"Jana Gana Mana was **adopted by a resolution** of the Constituent Assembly" is the standard wrong sentence. **No resolution was moved or voted.** Prasad chose a statement precisely to avoid a division of the House on the two songs. Likewise, do not write that the Constitution names either song: **it is silent on both**, which is the entire point of Jha's closing line.*

THE DEBATE

The settlement as statesmanship. A vote would have forced the Assembly to rank two symbols carrying religious readings, weeks before the republic began. The statement achieved equal honour with zero dissent recorded, and the formula has held for three quarters of a century.

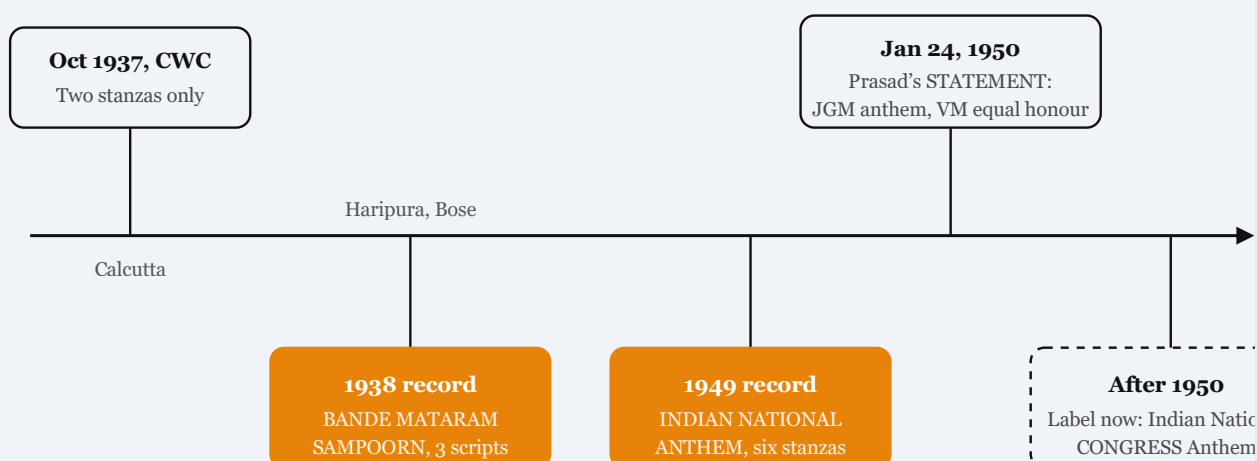
The settlement as deferral. A status resting on a statement can be contested forever, because nothing was ever decided by the body empowered to decide. The periodic public campaigns to elevate or mandate Vande Mataram are the bill for the vote never taken.

Jha's position, held lightly. He editorialises little, letting the labels do the arguing. But his framing sentence carries the judgment: the distinction “is not constitutional, legal or legislative”, and the question “remains in the gramophone grooves”, which is to say, in culture rather than in law, which may be exactly where the framers wanted it.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

Physical objects are underused evidence. A record label is a **contemporaneous, dated, public claim** about status, made by people spending money on shellac, and its three revisions track the official mind more honestly than later memoirs. For an answer on any contested symbol, the method transfers: find the **artefact that had to commit**, a label, a masthead, a letterhead, a currency note, and read the revisions.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



One song, three labels. The orange boxes are the physical records; the plain boxes are the decisions that forced each relabelling.

TAKEAWAY BOX

Sampoorn was an argument, not a description.

Anandamath 1882, Bankim Chandra; Tagore first sang it at Congress in 1896; CWC Calcutta October 1937 restricted singing to two stanzas after consulting Tagore; Haripura 1938, 51st session, Bose, 51 bullocks, Nandalal Bose panels; Timir Baran's orchestration; Constitution adopted November 26, 1949; Prasad's statement of January 24, 1950 made Jana Gana Mana the Anthem with Vande Mataram in equal honour, with no resolution voted; Nehru's 1955 statement termed it a Special National Song.

The Anthem-Song settlement is a study in constitutional technique: a statement chosen over a resolution to secure a symbol without a division. Evaluate it as statesmanship and as deferral, and know that the distinction has no basis in the Constitution, statute or any voted resolution.

If a national symbol's status rests on a statement nobody voted on, is it weaker or stronger for that?

Source: Two Gramophone Records, One Word Changed, and the Whole Anthem Question — Ujjyari.com | Free
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• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in *The Hindu*, Akhilesh Jha reconstructs the status of Vande Mataram through physical evidence, two gramophone recordings of 1938 and 1949 whose labels changed from declaring the song complete to declaring it the Indian National Anthem to declaring it neither, showing that the anthem question was contested, revised and finally settled not by any legislative resolution but by a statement of the Constituent Assembly President on January 24, 1950, a distinction with no constitutional, legal or legislative basis that nonetheless endures in the grooves of national life.



SUPPORTING

- At the Haripura session of 1938, Congress president-elect Subhas Chandra Bose had the complete Vande Mataram recorded in an orchestration by Timir Baran, released with the label Bande Mataram Sampooran, complete, an assertion repeated in Devanagari, Bangla and Nastaliq at a time when the Congress had restricted official singing to the first two stanzas.
- The 1937 Working Committee decision, taken after consulting Rabindranath Tagore, confined performances to the first two stanzas because the later stanzas' imagery sat uneasily with Muslim members, so Bose's Sampooran recording was a deliberate act of reaffirmation, not an innocent release.
- By 1949 a second recording of all six stanzas carried the label Indian National Anthem, and within a year the label changed again: after the January 24, 1950 statement declaring Jana Gana Mana the National Anthem with Vande Mataram honoured equally, the words Sampooran and Indian National Anthem both disappeared, leaving Indian National Congress Anthem.



COUNTER

The counter-reading is that the 1950 settlement was not evasion but statesmanship: a House vote on the two songs would have forced members to rank symbols freighted with religious readings, and Rajendra Prasad's statement, which the Assembly accepted without dissent, achieved equal honour without a divisive division, exactly what a constituent body should prefer.



WAY FORWARD

Jha's implication is that the distinction between Anthem and Song, sharpened by a Prime Ministerial statement in 1955 treating Vande Mataram as a special national song for occasions of its own, should be taught as what it is, a considered political settlement recorded in statements rather than statutes, and that the physical archive, labels, records, proceedings, is where such settlements are actually legible.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Trace the journey of Vande Mataram from Anandamath to the Constituent Assembly statement of January 24, 1950, and explain the constitutional distinction between the National Anthem and the National Song. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Akhilesh Jha, writing in The Hindu, does the historian's trick of reading a large constitutional question through a small physical object: two gramophone records of Vande Mataram, cut in 1938 and 1949, whose labels changed as the nation's answer changed. The journey from Sampooran to Indian National Anthem to Indian National Congress Anthem is the anthem debate, pressed in shellac.

BODY

The song's political history begins long before the records. Written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and published in Anandamath in 1882, first sung at a Congress session by Rabindranath Tagore in 1896, Vande Mataram became the anthem of the Swadeshi movement and, by the 1920s, a fixture of Congress proceedings whose reports, some edited by Jawaharlal Nehru as party General Secretary, referred to it as the National Anthem.

The difficulty was equally old: the later stanzas address the motherland as goddess, imagery many Muslims could not sing. In October 1937 the Working Committee at Calcutta, advised by Tagore, restricted official performances to the first two stanzas.

Haripura in February 1938, the 51st session, presided over by Subhas Chandra Bose, is where Jha's first gramophone enters. Bose commissioned the full song, orchestrated by Timir Baran in a quasi-military arrangement, recorded across both sides of a twelve-inch disc, and the label read Bande Mataram Sampooran, complete, the completeness asserted in three scripts.

Read against the 1937 restriction, the label was an argument: the whole song, not the permitted fraction. Partition, war and the Constituent Assembly reshaped the question, and Nehru's Cabinet tentatively preferred Jana Gana Mana in 1948, partly because its music suited orchestral performance and state occasions.

The second record, cut in 1949 with all six stanzas, still carried the label Indian National Anthem. On January 24, 1950, in the Assembly's final sitting, President Rajendra Prasad made a statement, deliberately not a resolution, declaring Jana Gana Mana the National Anthem and providing that Vande Mataram shall be honoured equally with it and have equal status.

The record label promptly changed a third time.

CONCLUSION

Two conclusions carry into an answer. First, the Anthem-Song distinction rests on a Presidential statement of the Assembly and a Prime Ministerial clarification of 1955, not on the Constitution, statute or resolution, which is why Jha calls it a distinction without constitutional, legal or legislative basis.

Second, the settlement worked: equal honour without a vote spared the new republic a division on sacred symbols, and the fact that the question still surfaces in the grooves of public life is evidence not of failure but of how much the settlement was asked to hold.

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