

An In-Betweenness of Being:¹

Assembling Media in an Archive of the Senses

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Abstract: *This paper is a subjective journey that looks at what goes into intermedial archiving across space, cultures, and time with reference to Arnold Bake's 1930s recordings of kirtan in Bengal. While taking up various facets of archival media from wax cylinders and photographs to VHS recordings and digital tapes, along with texts, letters and notes, the focus is on the dancing body in kirtan, the song sung, the text behind the song and the song that is translated into text, the listeners and the surrounding environment, moving back and forth in time and space and all of it held together by affective nodes of feeling as in reality there is no separation between the art, the artist and the listener. Written from the perspective of practice-led research, the paper thus becomes an exploration of the affect at work at the intersection of intermedial and intersubjective exchanges raising certain key questions related to the limits of any single media and the potential limitlessness of transformation and meaning-making that can come through the crossing of the borders of media and hierarchies of knowledge which separate them.*

I am watching on my computer a digitised VHS tape of *kirtan* from a village in Birbhum district of West Bengal named Mainadal,² glitched in several places, its colours faded and the sound dusty.³ The scene is crowded; a group of men, clad in *dhotis*, bare-bodied, are dancing to the rhythm of the *khol* or clay drum, the drummers are dancing too. There are men and

women standing around, watching. The dancers have formed a ring and are singing “Byom byom Shib nache.” My eyes are fixed on one man in the centre of that ring, moving with extreme dexterity and grace, his arms and his left leg raised like Nataraja or Shiva the cosmic dancer. Every time he gets lost in the crowd, I find myself seeking him out.

The event is taking place during the Janmashtami-Nandotsav festival celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna, on the temple grounds of the Mitra Thakur family, which they call Thakurbari.⁴ This is a prominent Vaishnava family of Krishna worshippers, followers of the fifteenth-sixteenth century Bhakti saint of Bengal, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), and they have been celebrating this and every other festival in the Vaishnava tradition of Bengal for more than five hundred years.⁵ But it is not just this old history rooted in Mainadal that is the reason for their prominence; for generations the Mitra Thakurs have been a family of master *kirtaniyaas*, brilliant practitioners and teachers of the art of *kirtan*, and people flock to their temple for partaking in the rituals and food as well as the music and dance. Listening to *kirtan* is in itself an act of piety; there is no real separation between the art, the artist, and the listener in this practice. Is this dance then an enactment of a ritual or a performance of an art form, or both?

This essay is woven around the dancing body at the centre of the ring as well as the song to which they are dancing and the text behind the song and the song behind the text. The place where and the time when this ritual/performance is taking place is also woven into it. Meanwhile, there are threads about the record of the performance in the shape of the digitised VHS tape and about the archive which holds this record and other older records/recordings of Mainadal. Hence, the record, the recorded, acts of recording and archiving, and the archive as the place which keeps the record, all come together here making this essay into an experience

in intermediality. They come together but do not necessarily form a whole. We are in a state of “in-betweenness,” an expression I borrow from the film studies scholar Vebhuti Duggal.⁶ She writes about cinema, but her way of breaking down the processes of intermediality, of moving between and assembling various media, is something I feel close to in my way of working as an art practice-led researcher.

The Dancing Body

The year of this VHS tape was 1994. Janmashtami, the night of Krishna’s birth on the eighth day of the moon in the waning cycle in the monsoon month of Sraban of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, overlaps with August or September in the Gregorian calendar. In 1994, Janmashtami had fallen on 29 August. Nandotsav would be the next day. Hence the sequence of the dancers dancing “Byom byom Shib nache” would be from 30 August 1994. The dancing body in the centre of the ring was actually someone I knew. Not quite him, but his twenty-years-older self, for I met him during their Janmashtami-Nandotsav celebration in 2014. He was Nitai or Nityananda Mitra Thakur, one of the most striking *kirtaniyaas* of the Mitra Thakur family at the time. In that year, the Janmashtami *tithi* had fallen on 18 August. I saw him perform live the next day, during Nandotsav, on 19 August 2014.

The reason I was in Mainadal was because I was following some recordings made by a Dutch scholar of music and ethnomusicology Arnold Bake (1899–1963) in Bengal in the 1930s and travelling to places on the trail of his sounds.⁷ I had been tentatively developing this work from as early as 2003 and then it started to take a more certain shape as part of the work of The Travelling Archive: Field Recordings and Field Notes from Bengal,⁸ a project I shared with others.⁹ In 2013 I had started working on my doctoral thesis on Arnold Bake’s Bengal recordings at the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University.

Bake had a fascination for *kirtan*, which must have stemmed from the fact that even before he came to India for the first time in 1925, his teacher of Bengali at SOAS, W. Sutton Page, had asked him if he had heard of Chaitanya. “When I confessed my ignorance,” Bake writes, Page had said to him that unless he knew about Chaitanya, he would not understand the culture of Bengal, even Rabindranath Tagore.¹⁰ “The longer one stays in Bengal, the more strongly one perceives the truth of that statement,” Bake wrote in 1948. His interest in Sri Chaitanya, especially in the music of the Vaishnavas, the forms, styles, and rhythms of *kirtan*, had stayed intact until the end of his life. In 1956 when he came to India for the last time, he had expressed the wish to go to Manipur to study *kirtan*. Bake had first heard the Mainadal singers in a place called Ilambazar in Birbhum district in 1931 and was enchanted by their *khol* playing. He took their details and went to Mainadal in 1933, during their Janmashtami-Nandotsav festival on 14–15 August and made some recordings on wax cylinders with his phonograph. It is Bake’s not-so-easy-to-listen-to recordings, the interesting though cryptic metadata attached to the recordings in the archives and his letters home describing his experiences in Mainadal that had taken me—rather, us, as I was going with some colleagues and friends—to Mainadal first time in August 2014. The second was in October 2014 and third time was in January 2016.¹¹ On this third visit, having become friends with some members of the Mitra Thakur family, they gave us some video files, which they said had some recordings from past festivals. They did not describe the contents of the files; they were themselves not sure about what was in them. The files were lying with me while I was busy working on my doctoral thesis. As I was on the verge of finishing my writing, I was going through my own archive which had built up over the years—my own recordings, photos, videos, and things I had collected—that I found those files. My computer would not open them, so I had to convert them from DAT to mp4.

What I saw impacted me greatly. I was looking at hours of footage from the Janmashthami-Nandotsav festival of Mainadal in 1994; I was seeing some of the young musicians Arnold Bake had recorded back in 1933 now half a century later, at the close of their lives. I was also seeing the older generation whom I met on my first visit, in their youth. I was really seeing the past of the future and the future of the past in this footage. However, out of these hours of footage, my eyes were fixed on Nitai's dancing body, his arms and left leg raised like Nataraj or Shiva the cosmic dancer.

Nitai is there throughout the film. He was about 28 in 1994 in a dual role; he was acting as the outsider-interviewer, asking senior members of his family about their past and future. As the insider, he was also taking part in the rituals, dancing in agile steps, his body light and airy. In 2014, Nitai was 48 or so, and had evolved into a mature and versatile *kirtaniyaa*. His body had changed, he was more poised, performing the *purbaraag* in slower movements which were delicate and beautiful and there was more *abhinaya* or acting and gestures,¹² more facial expression and a fluidity of gender as he played both male and female, sliding from one to the other. He was singing the story and acting out parts. What is important is that this is the artist I had first met. In the video, I was seeing him as a young man. There was another starker reality which made this Shib-nritya so significant to me. I was watching this dance in 2021. I was standing in the future of 2014 now. Nityananda Mitra Thakur had meanwhile died, in 2015. He had died while performing *kirtan* and, as life would have it, he was performing the Shib-nritya that they perform after Rasleela in their tradition. Nitai's dancing body had collapsed on the floor, and he was gone in no time. In a way he was following his father, the master *kirtaniyaa* Nadiananda Mitra Thakur (1929–1978), who had also suffered a stroke while performing and died within a few days. When you know these

details, from oral history, from written records, from audio recordings, from live experience, then times past, present, and future get horribly tangled up in this moment in the digitised VHS tape from 1994, when Nitai spreads out his arms and lifts his left leg and dances the dance of Nataraj, when Shiva is performing his tasks of creation, destruction, and preservation, all at once.

However, had we not known all this background, if we had not experienced Nityananda Mitra Thakur live in Mainadal in 2014, if we did not know about his father and had not heard his recorded voice, had we not experienced Mainadal, also in Arnold Bake's recordings and writings, had we not read the writings of Mitra Thakurs or been in regular communication with some of them, then how would the footage from 1994 speak to us?¹³

Many Texts, Many Ways of 'Reading'

The metadata attached to Arnold Bake's recordings in the archives are rather minimalist. He did not flesh out his notes with details. However, he regularly wrote letters home, mainly to his mother and mother-in-law from which we can find some details of what happened in the field. For example, take this letter written on 16 August 1933 to his mother. Arnold Bake and their assistant Ganapati had set off for Mainadal in a bullock cart.

The landscape was very beautiful, more hilly than here, with mountains on the horizon (no real mountains—I think about 300 meters) and such beautiful green with the river winding through it and the heavy clouds in the sky, and the colours of the evening. As soon as the bullock cart driver knew the way by himself, the [accompanying] clerk and I took a shortcut by foot through the rice paddies, which made us arrive at least half an hour earlier in Mainadal

than the vehicle. It is an average size village, many signs of decline [?], but very charming. It turned out that Naba Gopal Mitra Thakur, whose address I had, was out doing groceries, but his younger brother Govinda received me most pleasantly and said it was no problem at all if I stayed, and that he would find a place for me. [...] There is a small school, and five or six of the young men who are educated there live together in a small attic above a cow stable. Two of them were 'evicted' from their little corner so that I could take the entire attic to the left of the staircase, while the students stayed together at the right side. This was not an issue because two students had left just a day earlier. It had a clay floor [....] My pleasant little attic was anything but quiet. Naturally, everyone came to look at me. It was a continually changing tableau of curious faces popping out from the staircase. In addition, the students on the other side were quite busy practising their beats, or just reciting the patterns, or with their drums, all the while conversing loudly. The drummers worked their hardest until midnight [....]

The head of the school where I stayed was an old man, Hari Das M. Th., who played the drums very well, so he could give me a good rundown of the different very complicated beats used in the *kirtan*. The beat of the *kirtan* music is very complex and very important. As such, I'm very happy that as a start I've been able to write down this clear overview and record it on the cylinders. The voice is seen as the man and the drum as the woman, and the unity between the two is what the music strives to achieve. The recording did not go very smoothly, and I was afraid that with all the distractions and procrastinating I wouldn't succeed in recording all 18 of 19 beats. But it worked out in the end. After recording two cylinders they, of course, thought

it much more fun to have the different members of their family take their turns with something different. I had to tactfully make sure this didn't happen, because I didn't bring so many cylinders, and the rhythmic pattern of *kirtan* is, as a foundation for studies, the most important thing.¹⁴

It was a big event, yet in Mainadal, the community had no memory of it. They had a photo Bake took of Kaliyakanta as a boy but had possibly never wondered where it came from. Kaliyakanta was the father of Nirmalendu Mitra Thakur who has been one of my main teachers in matters of the songs they sing in Mainadal and the rhythms they play. In his above-mentioned letter to his mother of 16 August, Bake continued to write:

Govinda promised to call me in the night, and he did. But I'd already woken up by the pipes and drums of the naubat, who sounded their instruments from the temple courtyard on auspicious moments. But I was not allowed in yet. The image of Krishna was only taken outside from its place in the temple. When the baby was outside at last, I was allowed to come....

Beautiful writing with an eye for detail. We get a sense of what was going on when this big white man visited this remote village of Bengal. He should have left a lasting impact on the place, but the place did not seem to keep a record of his visit. But were there no traces at all? How do we read traces of the past, how do we listen to them? After all, Bake's visit led us to visit Mainadal and that in turn not only impacted us, but insiders in the village too, as well as the archives which house Arnold Bake's recordings. Maybe sometimes we just need to wait to know how an event has impacted us.

On my first visit, I had asked about the song “Badashi” and the Mitra Thakurs described it as one of their most prominent and popular songs. It is a *daagigaan*, they said. What is a *daagigaan*, *daag* meaning mark and *gaan* being a song? One which marks the Mainadal repertoire perhaps, one which marks them as singers from Mainadal and one which marks the listener and draws them in into the core of its sound with a certain familiarity. The audience asks for Badashi, and they are not satisfied until they hear it. A whole session on Badashi could take up to an hour, Nirmalendu Mitra Thakur had said to me. If you sing the whole set, then you end with “*Tvamasi mama jīvanam / Tvamasi mamabhūṣaṇam*”, which people love to hear.

In the context of Arnold Bake’s Bengal recordings, several texts have come out of the encounter between the archive and the field. Let us take the example of Badashi.¹⁵ After 2014, I had informed the World and Traditional Music section of British Library Sound Archive in London about finding the Mainadal that Bake had visited. My main interest was that the Mitra Thakurs got to listen to their own songs. Interestingly, that set a whole stream of activity in motion for them. They got working on Bake’s Bengal recordings, started their own research project, and ended up making changes to their catalogue. In the process, the song Badashi also went through a curious journey. The song’s file number in the British Library catalogue is C52/1910. Its name used to be “Badashi yadi kincid api”, that is how it was till 2016 or so. But now the name is “Padavali kirtan: Gitagovinda (Sarga 10, Gita 19).” The detailed description is as follows:

Jayadeva; Sarga 10, Gita 19 in raga Desavarali, tala Astatalabhangi (32 matras), sung by Nabagopal Mitra Thakur with khol accompaniment by

Advaita Candra Mitra Thakur. A longer version of the piece was recorded by Bake in Joydev Kenduli in January 1932.

Now, there is no mistake in this. It might even be better as a name and description. However, we have this thing about *daaknaam* and *bhaalonaam* in our Bengali language. *Daaknaam* is the name you are called by at home, by those who know you more intimately. *Bhaalonaam* is the formal identity you carry to the outside. With the name “Badashi” taken out of the metadata, it feels like the *daaknaam* of the song, the name by which locals know it, has been erased. To what purpose, it is hard to know. Perhaps the Sankritised name gives it more weight in the post-colonial archive? However, sound artist Cathy Lane who has worked for many years in the Outer Hebrides trying to listen to sonic traces of the past, has written about how “mapping is an act of power.” “There is a fundamental difference between the flat mapped place-names and the same names spoken between Hebrideans,”¹⁶ she wrote. The name “Badashi” continues to live in the spoken world of Mainadal. At least that much a blessing.

From the British Library’s restudy of Arnold Bake’s Bengal recordings, further recordings have come out accompanied by further texts. Nirmalendu Mitra Thakur responded to this same song “Badashi,” sung by his much older cousin Nabagopal Mitra Thakur for Arnold Bake in 1933. Nirmalda, as I have come to call him since our first meeting in 2014, is a great repository of knowledge and a beautiful singer who has also become a teacher to me. From that first meeting, we have talked about this song many times and made recordings of our conversation and his singing and explanation. He was also recorded by the ethnomusicologist Christian Poske on 21 July 2017. The British Library catalogue now has the following description of his recording:

Composition from the Gītagovinda of Jayadeva: Sarga 10, Gita 19, lines 1-4:
Lyrics: “badasi yadi kiñcidapi dantaruci āre kaumudī, harati darati miramati
ghoraṃ, sphura dadharasīdhave rādhe taba badanacandrama, āre rocamati
locanacakoraṃ” (in their interpretation of Jayadeva's poem, the performers of
Moynadal have added the words “āre”, “rādhe” and “āre” to the original text).
This recording comprises two song interpretations of these four lines. The first
interpretation is slow and serene, using the eight tālasādtāl, doḥ, jotsamtāl,
śaśīśekhara, gañjal, bisampañcatāl, rupak and samtāl for the first two lines of
the lyrics....

Despite all the diacritical marks, Nirmalda sings the song in the most Bengali way. I asked
him to explain the meaning of this sentence from the above archival note: “in their
interpretation of Jayadeva's poem, the performers of Moynadal have added the words ‘āre,’
‘rādhe’ and ‘āre’ to the original text.” On 2 February 2023, we were having this conversation
over the phone, and he began to sing by way of explanation instructing me to record: “Record
kore naao,” he said.

Badasi yadi kiñcidapi dantaruci kaumudī

Harati daratimiramatighoraṃ

Sree Radhe [here he begins to embellish the song moving away from
Jayadeva's text]

Ekbaar hese kathaakao lo dhoni [now he is singing in Bangla]

Dure jaak mor monoglaani

Ekbaar hese kathaao kao lo dhoni

Dure jaak mor monoglaani

Such is the art of Bangla *kirtan*, those are the ornamentations. He moves with ease from the original Sanskrit to Bangla and back, adding words, going into dialogue with the audience. You would picture the audience moving in appreciation, raising their hands, joining in with “Radhe Radhe” calls, in devotion. Such things are very hard to write down. They must be experienced as sound and performance, through listening, with what historian Gautam Bhadra would call “piety.” “Partaking of the *rasa* (the Bangla word is pronounced as *rawsh*) of this story is conditional—the listener must come with reverence for the story and with the belief that listening to it is an act of piety,” he wrote in his essay on the narrative form *kathakataa*, which is also an oral tradition of storytelling in Bengal, similar to *puthi-path*.¹⁷

I smile as Nirmalda sings these Bangla lines; they are so beautiful! He says that is the *aakhor*, you know.

***Aakhor* or Annotation**

In *kirtan*, *aakhors* are “texts” born at the time of performance. They are spontaneous annotations, sung to communicate the Sanskrit text in a more accessible language. The dancing body of Nitai and the song “Byom byom Shib Nache” had aroused a question in me. I am a lay listener, faithless, and ignorant of matters of religion and mythology. What do I know about such songs? How will I understand? I feel the need for some *aakhor*, some annotation. Again, Nirmalda comes to my rescue. We talk on the phone on 30 March 2023, and I record our conversation.¹⁸

This is a hardcore Vaishnava practice, why are they singing a song to Shiva, I ask Nirmalda. There was no problem in singing the song of Shiva, or Shib as we say in Bangla, he explained. To us Shib is a *param Baishnab* [Vashnavite] or a highest devotee of Krishna.

How come? I asked. Their Shib was not Tantric, he told me. The way he spoke, it appeared to me that it was a matter of unquestioned belief. I found it too complex to understand. Nirmalda said we would have to discuss this in another session some other day. In this song that we are singing, Nirmalda said, we are not only talking about the dance of Shib (“Byom byom Shib nache”) but we are singing about the entire cosmos. Everyone is rejoicing the birth of Krishna. Brahma is dancing, Indra is dancing, Shiva is dancing, as the cowherds are also dancing—there is no end to our *ananda* (happiness). Then he sang some more songs about Shib from their *kirtan* repertoire. For example—and here he was citing a composition of Chandrashekhar of Kandra, Bardhaman—there is this song when Ma Yashoda (Jashoda in Bangla) is typically afraid to let her child Krishna go to the woods with the other boys. Krishna’s friend Sridama (or Sreedam as we say in Bangla) tells Jashoda that there are these protectors who are around when Krishna goes to the field or the woods, one is a strong man and appears to be in rage; his body is smeared with ashes. The cowherds have no idea who this might be. He comes riding a bull and on his left side is a woman. He offers flowers and the water of the Ganga to our little Gopal or Krishna. Ganga, in Vrindavan? Jashoda asks. Yes *ma*, Sridam says, it is strange; he has matted hair, shakes his head, and water keeps flowing (he is referring of course to the story of the birth of the Ganga from Mahadev or Shiva’s dreadlocks) and with that they wash your Gopal’s feet. And the woman? Well, *ma*, you are so proud of your wealth of cows and how you can feed curd to your boy, but you can do that with only two hands, can’t you? With one hand you lift your child, with the other you feed. This woman can feed him with her ten hands! So, don’t you worry *ma*, they are there to protect our little Krishna, there can be no harm.

It was a beautiful song that Nirmalda was singing. He moved at ease from singing to explaining. He told me about some other *padakartaas* (composers) and their compositions,

namely Shashishekhar of the same Kandra family and Shibai Das (whose origins he could not tell me). I listened but it is not easy to grasp the depth of this knowledge which they have been holding for generations. They wear it so lightly.

As always, I was truly glad we had this conversation centred around the beautiful, dancing body of Nitai whose charm does not wear off for me and whom I cannot help missing, even regretting we did not make the most of our very brief encounter with him. Yet, it is also in such moments when we talk about him that Nitai comes alive and stands in our midst. I see him dancing and singing with joy, as the one who always stood out in a crowd. Like a liminal presence, present by absence.

In That In-Betweenness of Being

Arnold Bake's recordings have given birth to new recordings, writing, photos, and films. His recordings have led me on to new places and people, new relationships have formed. Not just for me, but for example, also Milan Mitra Thakur, my artist friend in Mainadal who has begun to archive the place and their practice in earnest since 2014, for themselves. Perhaps they would do this anyway, especially in this time of the mobile phone, camera, and social media when everyone is an archivist. But I believe that taking the ancestral voices to Mainadal eight decades after Bake's visit also set some things in motion for them. Especially as within eight months of our visit, their precious cousin, Nityananda or Nitai, passed away, and it was an untimely death. Nitai held great promise. His death therefore brought such darkness to Mainadal that it has been hard for the Mitra Thakurs to come out of it.

Once we had a house full of people

One by one they left

Now the courtyard blazes in sunlight
A lone crow circles above
Once we had a house full of people
Teacups brimmed over with laughter
We pressed the pulse of the sun
To know the time of day
Evening came with the scent of dust
In our full rooms
There were no sleepless nights
Once we had a house full of people.

– Milan Mitra Thakur, 24 June 2021¹⁹

Is it the sound of the record carrying the ancestors' voices which led Milanda to muse thus over the passage of time? I cannot speak for him, but I can say something about myself.

When we were in Mainadal for the second time in October 2014, Nityananda Mitra Thakur had called us from his home in Suri and said, "Ah! You are in Mainadal? I wish I was there." Five months later, in March 2015, I had called Nitai one afternoon to ask if he could put me in touch with anyone in Mongoldihi where Arnold Bake had also been. Nitai's phone went on ringing. Then someone picked it up and said, we are in the crematorium for Nitai because he died last night during a performance. I thought I heard wind and fire on the phone. And now, each time I look at the dancing body of Nitai, I can hear fire and wind melding with the sound of "Byom byom Shib nache" and the beating of the *khol*.

Milanda had said, Thank God! You came and recorded him in 2014. An utterly impermanent life gained some kind of permanence in a piece of digital recording. Permanence of what, however? We have a record that Nityananda Mitra Thakur, aged 48, performed *purbaraag* in the Mainadal Thakurbari on 19 August 2014. Does that recording also make permanent Nitai's absence and his family's grief for him?

Notes

¹I am grateful to Professor Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta for her interest in and support for my work and for inviting me to write in their journal. As always, I turned to Milan Mitra Thakur and Nirmalendu Mitra Thakur to understand the songs, sounds, and history of their world of *kirtan*. I also thank Alakananda Guha for our conversations while writing this essay. Acknowledgments are also due to the anonymous reviewer for comments and suggestions.

²*Kirtan*, literally meaning praise, takes various forms in Bengal. When sung collectively by Hindu Vaishnava *bhaktas* or devotees of Krishna, Radha and the fifteenth–sixteenth century saint, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, in endless chant of the Lord's name, often accompanied by *uddanda nritya* or dance with hands raised, with some devotees playing the *khol* or clay drum and others *kartaal* or cymbals, it is the *naamsankirtan*. Then there is also the more elaborate and evolved style of singing of stories from the life of Krishna, Radha, and Sri Chaitanya. This is the *lila kirtan*, which is performed by weaving *padaas* or songs written by the Vaishnava *padakartaas* or poets from the twelfth century onwards, in Sanskrit, Brajbhasha or Bengali with commentary, narration, and storytelling. There are various styles of *kirtan* singing in Bengal, namely *Manoharshai* or *Manhoharshahi*, *Reneti*, *Garanhati*, and *Jharkhandi*, representing different geographical regions (*parganas*). In Mainadal, there is also the *kirtan* which is sung as ritual, for events such as *Nandotsab*, *Niyam Sheba*, *Sandhya Arati*, *Mangal Arati*—the events are fixed and so are the songs to be sung. *Kirtans* are long, elaborate sessions of singing, and Arnold Bake has left us some samples of sound from Mainadal—some songs and several *talas* or beats. He also recorded *kirtan* in Mongoldihi, Calcutta, and Kenduli; after Rabindrasangeet, this was the only other genre which he tried to systematically learn and perform.

To know how scholars have studied *kirtan*, see Mitra (1947), Sanyal (1989), Chakraborty (1995), Sarbadhikary (2015), Bhatia (2017), Graves (2009), Graves (2017), Graves (2017).

³ For the film, see here <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/found-film-mainadal/>, accessed 3 April 2023.

⁴I have been consistently troubled by the question of inconsistency in how I write Bengali sounds for the non-Bengali reader. For example, Nandotsav is pronounced Nandotshob in Bangla; in fact, elsewhere I have written Nandotshob. But even if I write in this way how to write the roundness of our sound, the soft and hardness of our 't's for example? When I write *kirtan*, I am aware it can be read differently by different speakers/readers. Hence, I leave the

inconsistencies as they are, for that has been one of my main arguments that we do need to move across media to get a fuller experience. What is for speaking and listening cannot always be written down with the same accuracy and even if we do write with many signs and newly invented letters, the sound does not necessarily reach the uninitiated. I try therefore to accept my limits and limitations, with humility.

⁵ Legend has it that one Nrishinghaballav Mitra Thakur arrived from Rajur village near Katwa-Kandra in Bardhaman, with an idol of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, to this remote place in Birbhum, which was more a jungle at the time, around 1593, in order to spread the name of his god. He had become a disciple of Mongol Thakur, a contemporary of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and was sent by his guru on this mission. Then bit by bit the name spread, through songs they wrote, dance and ritual they practiced. The idol got a temple, the temple a village and the village their god. It did not happen in one day, of course. At the time when Bake had come here, the music had reached its peak. The name, of the Mainadal *kirtaniyaas*, had spread far and wide, students came from distant places even in Sylhet and Manipur, to their *tol* or school to stay and take lessons. From then to the time when we went, there has again been so much change.

⁶See Duggal (2021).

⁷Arnold Bake was an early scholar of South Asian music and one of the pioneer ethnomusicologists who played a major role in the development of the discipline in the first half of the twentieth century. His field included many parts of undivided India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. See Linden (2018), Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (1990), Tingey (1985), Poske (2020). For my work on Bake, see here <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/moushumis-arnold-bake-research/>, accessed 4 April 2023.

⁸See The Travelling Archive www.thetravellingarchive.org, accessed 4 April 2023.

⁹See <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/exhibition/the-presence-of-sound-2013/>, accessed 3 April 2023.

¹⁰See Bake (1948).

¹¹To know about my many trips to Mainadal and exchanges with some of them over many years, read, see and listen here <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/category/mabr-kirtan-and-kirtaniya/>; <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/related-research/letter-from-mainadal-at-the-time-of-covid-19/>; <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/record-session/lesson-from-nirmalda-bolpur-17-june-2018/>, all accessed 3 April 2023.

¹²<https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/record-session/mainadal-birbhum-19-august-2014-nityananda-mitra-thakur/>, accessed 3 April 2023.

¹³Listen here to a song sung in the Mainadal temple by family members after Nityananda Mitra Thakur's death. <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/related-research/letters-from-mainadal/>. Also, so far as their history is concerned, I have tried to listen to the specific story of Mainadal from the Mitra Thakurs' own writings in Bengali. From 2014, the family has been bringing out an annual journal, *Malancha*, at the time of their Nandotsab festival (in

August), which details their family history and the history of Mainadal, among other things. I have also looked at Thakur (1423 BS) and Thakur (2021).

¹⁴Letter from Arnold Bake Collection, Special Collections, Leiden University Library. I was on a Scaliger Fellowship to work at the Leiden libraries in 2015, when I took photos of the letters. Later I worked for about a year with my Dutch friend Jan-Sijmen Zwarts, who translated portions of Bake's letters for the purpose of my research.

¹⁵ I have written the name of the song as Badashi as that is how the original catalogue entry was, and so that is the name I had carried with me when I went to Mainadal for the first time and that is how the Mitra Thakurs also pronounce the name, with the 'sh' sound and not 's'.

¹⁶See Lane (2016).

¹⁷See Bhadra (1993:256).

¹⁸Listen to audio insert in Postscript section of <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/found-film-mainadal/>, accessed 3 April 2023.

¹⁹Originally written in Bangla and posted on Facebook on 24 June 2021, I asked Milan Mitra Thakur for permission to translate and keep the poem in my writing, which he generously agreed. Here is the original:

আমাদের ঘরভর্তি লোক ছিল

আমাদের ঘরভর্তি লোক ছিল একসময় / কমতে কমতে আজ / রোদভর্তি মস্ত উঠোনে / একটি মাত্র কাক / এখন ঘুরে বেড়ায় / আমাদের ঘরভর্তি লোক ছিল একসময় / হাসির ফোয়ারা ছুটত চায়ের আসরে / সূর্যের নাড়ি দেখে সমস্ত কাজকর্ম সারা হতে হতে / ধূলোর গন্ধে সন্ধ্যা হতো / রাত হতো আরও ঘন / একঘর লোক অনিদ্রা কেমন / টের পেত না কেউ / আমাদের ঘরভর্তি লোক ছিল একসময়।

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