

FOREWORD: TODI IN THE FOREST OF SONG

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How lovely are the songs that accompany Todi as she enters the forest depicted in the rāgamāla painting opening this foreword! Todi the goddess, Todi the enchantress, Todi the singer with a vīna draped about her body, Todi endowed with beauty, which she transmits to and through the stories that accompany her as an avatar for rāga, the form into which melody and narrative pour in the music of India and beyond across South Asia. Song inhabits the forms that emerge in the representations and narratives that follow Todi into the forest, even in this rāgamāla miniature from a village in West Bengal, geographically far removed from Kangra in the foothills of the Himalayas but connected by music and stories to the singing of women.

It is particularly fitting that Todi lead us through the foreword to Kirin Narayan's journey of song in the everyday creativity of women singers and storytellers in Kangra. In so doing, Todi also expands the very forests of Hinduism that resonate with song and proffer form to music. Todi comes to inhabit song, to shape herself as an avatar for music, thus evoking the vastness of music's ontologies. It is this vastness that the singing goddesses of the Himalayan foothills also inhabit with their everyday creativity.

Todi's many musical forms and avatars notwithstanding, there are several that are especially suggestive for the big issues of music that unfold

across the pages of this book. Clearly, the Todi entering the forest in the rāgamāla from the village in West Bengal is richly endowed with musical form and meaning. The genre of painting and representation we see here, rāgamāla, further specifies this Todi as a rāga, even more specifically as a rāgini, acknowledging her female attributes.

Rāgas and rāginis contain and express differences in gender, and rāgini Todi makes it very clear why this is so. The rāgamāla images that represent the musical and narrative forms of rāga express gender clearly and meaningfully. Todi, as we see in the folk painting that opens this foreword, carries a vīna over her left shoulder. The vīna is not just any musical instrument; rather, it is the instrument that is most closely connected to Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess associated with learning and the arts, particularly music. So important is her association with music, moreover, that Sarasvatī herself is most commonly depicted playing a vīna, for example in the shrines that spread across India to honor her during her festival season in mid-winter, Sarasvatī Puja. In some interpretations, Sarasvatī's body and the anthropomorphic body of the vīna are considered the same: the goddess is music, and music is the goddess.

The vīna that Todi holds as she enters the forest is quite traditional, which is to say of more profoundly historical meaning in North India, and it therefore draws our attention to historical narratives that accompany the representation of rāga through other narratives, those of sacred origin, which, too, would honor the musical presence of Sarasvatī in the painting from the village in West Bengal. Stories always accompany rāgamāla paintings, and in counterpoint with the visual images they expand the universe of rāga's representational meanings and the forms in which they appear. Characteristically, the stories that describe Todi in the forest revel in her beauty. Let's listen to two of the best-known stories about rāgini Todi, while experiencing, even hearing, her rāgamāla image at the same moment (cited and translated in Kaufmann 1968, 550).

Chaupayi's story: The Almighty has made a wondrous creature in Todi. He appears to have spared no charm and grace in this act. Holding the nectar in her hands, she stands in a garden, and the world around her is filled with deep love. Hearing the enchanting sounds of Todi, herds of deer lose their way. The beauty of Todi is so enchanting that eyes drop after a glance at her. Nearby is a

pond of clear, sweet water, sacred as “Gangajal” [waters of the Ganges; sacred water]. Taking her to be his own, Sarang extends his hands and beckons her to his side.

Doha’s story: The lover always dwells inside her eyelids, but the lover has become an ascetic in his heart. Her mind is as confused as the deer, and she stands still in one spot in the garden.

If Todi can assume all these forms—and, of course, many more—as *rāga* and *rāgamāla*, her kinship with the singing goddesses to whom Kirin Narayan listened with such obeisance in Kangra intensifies. Everything associated with Todi locates her in a universe cohabited by goddesses who sing as a means of aspiring to beauty and to life. Singing intensifies their lives, connecting the everyday to the universe they share through the creativity of song. These goddesses—Todi, Sarasvatī, their earthly sisters in Kangra—make and remake that universe with their songs and stories. They fill the universe with their songs, yet again evoking symbolic ontologies of sound and music, the sounded *um* that contains the harmony of the universe, its complete soundedness. The *um* also grounds the universe and its songs, bringing it back to earth in the everyday. The *um* is, for example, the primary note of each *rāga*. It is with Todi as she enters the forest; it is crucial for the form that she and her narrative avatars give to the *rāgini* that bears her name. Song and story converge in the *rāgini*, affording it the forms, too, to which we attach the abstract terminology of music, realized as technical symbols, learned practices, and absolute meanings. To share the forest with Todi and the singing goddesses, it behooves us also to turn to music and to find its forms in song.

Todi is an especially eloquent storyteller. In her long history as a *rāgini*, she has assumed many forms, invited many to admire her in the narrative forests resonant with her songs. She invites many *rāgas* to join her, to weave their stories into hers. The vocal avatars with whom she consorts surely include the women of Kangra, the goddesses whose songs fill the everyday worlds that unfold in the stories filling the pages of the book that follows. Todi’s songs are gentle, yet profound, their stories at once lovely and complex.

All accounts of Todi’s presence in Indian music history acknowledge that she has a remarkable presence. As a *rāg* (the North Indian form of

rāga), she owes the importance of that presence to her familial genealogy, for she is one of the noblest members of the family, or thāta, of rāgs to which she also gives her name, Todi thāta. The family of rāgs that bears her name has a particularly interesting lineage. We know of it as a distinct thāta since at least the fifteenth century, but Todi as a rāg would enjoy an extensive familiarity with another rāg of considerable presence, Bhairavi, for the next four centuries or so, when Bhairavi—also a rāgini, representing Bhairavi worshiping Lord Bhairava on Mount Kailasa, often with cymbals in her hands—would go her own way in North Indian classical music but retain a scalar filial relationship in South India. The scales—the bare notes that we extract from countless stories sung by Todi and Bhairavi, North and South—are intriguing both for what they say and for what they do not say. Above all, what they say tells us a great deal about kinship. Perhaps in its simplest form, we could represent Todi’s ascent as a scale with the following Indian (sargam) notation and its Western equivalent, locating the primary note of *sa* on middle C (Jairazbhoy 1971, 97–99):

Rāg Todi

sa—re (komal)—ga (komal)—ma (tivra)—pa—dha (komal)—
 ni (śuddha)—sa
 C—D♭—E♭—F♯—G—A♭—B—C

The sargam notation for Bhairavi is intriguing because of both similarities and differences, the latter resulting from liberty in performance practice, for example when the fourth pitch, *ma*, is occasionally played in an ascending pair with *ma tivra*:

Rāg Bhairavi

sa—re (komal)—ga (komal)—ma—pa—dha (komal)—ni (komal)—sa
 C—D♭—E♭—F—G—A♭—B♭—C

Rāgs do not actually exist in such stripped-down forms, not least because they are characteristically played differently in ascent and descent, and because pitch content often belies more significant relationships. So much is at once the same and different. The Todi that is part of our story here, however, is notable for the ways in which her relationships ask us

to think about the ways sameness enters difference and then enters into historical counterpoint.

Todi makes it abundantly clear that the sameness with rāg Bhairavi is the source of a particular attraction. Todi and Bhairavi are both old and important rāgs, as are the thātas of whose lineage they are a part. Of particular interest, moreover, are rāgs that form in the narrative and musical spaces that conjoin Todi and Bhairavi. Rāgs that fill these spaces enact a type of ambiguity that complicates the gendered roles of Todi and Bhairavi as rāginis. Todi is distinctive among rāgs because its historical time of performance (late morning) is not confirmed by theories of time from the theoretical treatises, which instead associate it with the middle of the night or the middle of the afternoon (*ibid.*, 99).

It is into such spaces of ambiguity that Todi invites new rāgs, as if to seduce new songs and stories into her forest. No rāg has responded more fully to this invitation than Bilaskhani Todi. We might expect this rāg to affirm his kinship to Todi, but in fact his pitch content tells us that his closest relationship is to Bhairavi thāta. The naming of Bilaskhani Todi—tradition claims that Bilas Khan, the son of the great sixteenth-century musician and composer at the Mughal court, Tansen, sang the rāg as an alternative to Bhairavi while mourning his deceased father—stresses its syncretism and hybridity. Muslim tradition enters the narratives of Hinduism; male and female forms of rāg sound the potential of their union. Todi, in obeisance to Bhairavi, makes possible the proliferation of songs and stories.



At the very core of the Big Issues in Music series is a musical ontology that is aesthetically singular and culturally plural, thereby challenging conventional European notions that music is a sonic object aesthetically autonomous and identifiable as music. By engaging the challenges posed by the big issues of music, we also embrace the potential to open the ontological questions in critical new ways, indeed, revealing the very ways in which music is more than itself. Kirin Narayan's years of intensive listening and ethnography in the foothills of the Himalayas lead us to the domains in which music is more than itself with a rare and captivating eloquence, albeit one we have come to expect from her. In the songs that unleash the everyday creativity of Kangra, she draws together the stories

that shape folktale and that are shaped by the rich fabric of stories that endow the narrativity of South Asian oral expression with life. That confluence is once again evident, indeed, captivating, in the women whose lives, as singing goddesses, bear witness creatively to the expressivity of well-being. Narayan's book captures the everydayness of creativity in stunningly beautiful ways, which are ultimately inseparable from the vocal creativity in the narratives of the book itself. The confluence is complete, and new ontological dimensions accrue to the creativity of these singing goddesses.

We experience the songs and stories of Kangra with Kirin Narayan as listeners and learners, attuned also to the disciplinary voice of one of anthropology's most engaging thinkers and influential critics, and it is precisely for these reasons that *Everyday Creativity* serves to demonstrate where the big issues of music have some of the greatest potential to emerge. Her approach to music guides the listening reader across disciplinary boundaries, revealing the capaciousness of music's big issues as shared spaces that belie common academic labels and subject categories.

It may seem a contradiction to suggest that the big issues of music begin in the everyday and that they may be small, even intimate and personal, before they begin to do their disciplinary and discursive work. The stories and songs that the women of Kangra draw from their lives and shape through their memories, however, inevitably find form in the realm of the personal. It was no less the case with Todi, who may occupy a mythological world spanning centuries, but who comes alive for us in the forest she makes her own in the rāgamāla painting, to which historians also refer as a "miniature." In the hands of a skilled musical portraitist like Kirin Narayan, the miniature becomes the portal through which we pass to encounter the big issues. Let us move, then, through the portal of Todi and her forest into the spaces that open beyond in the lives of the singing goddesses whose songs fill the pages of the book that follows.

We begin with one of the most expansive ontological domains of musical thought, voice and song studies. Voice studies constitute a very important issue in music scholarship in the twenty-first century, while song studies have historically been a critical core to folklore and oral literature scholars. Historiographically as a folklorist and ethnographer attuned to narrative, Narayan is acutely engaged with the areas of oral literature

and religious studies that emerged in modern scholarship in the late eighteenth century with Johann Gottfried Herder's work on folk song, *Volk-slied*, which Herder coins first in 1773, calling the fields of everyday life and world music into being. Narayan's work finds form in this disciplinary lineage, and it does so from one of the most important traditions, the studies of *gīta*, song, in South Asian studies, which is as influential today as ever. It is in her discursive negotiations in Kangra—the spaces of overlap between Hindi and the local dialect she shares with the women of the region—that Narayan draws folklore and oral literature studies into the big issues, and in so doing, she remedies something long neglected in music scholarship, especially the rich traditions of philology and ethnography that these contribute to music history, theory, and ethnomusicology.

Kirin Narayan's revitalization of the intellectual history of voice and song studies further leads the reader to the core issue of ontology: with each song and with each story created in a goddess's everyday world, she challenges the reader to think about what music is, not just in an ethnographic setting that is epistemologically different, but in a history of complex religious exchanges that lead us to think profoundly about music in different ways. In richly evocative ways, the book is an intellectual history of and about ontologies that are distinct from those of the Euro-American tradition. That history grows from the foundational texts and narratives of Hindu myth, but becomes richer through the ways Islam and Buddhism, as well as the local dialects of a sacred engagement with nature, cross the Kangra Valley again and again. The ontological tension between the women as tradition bearers and the historical *longue durée* of South Asian/Central Asian/East Asian culture emerges in this book with stunning beauty.

The third big issue that Kirin Narayan luminously develops is the everyday presence of smallness and its multiple dimensions: intimacy, local kinship, creativity, and, above all, beauty. From the very beginning, she makes a powerful claim for a deep understanding of the small issues, even in a world of scholarship that sometimes seems more and more preoccupied with globalized big issues. Throughout the book, the big issues come alive in the small issues, not least because of the loving portrayal of the individuals and intimacies of subjects and authors. In and of themselves, the big issues of music in the pages that follow may not be new in every sense,

but the ways in which Kirin Narayan draws them together, as the songs of village women gathering at the confluence of waters issuing from the Himalayas, hence drawing together experience from a vast universe, are possible only when the big issues of music are allowed to fill the expansive spaces of everyday creativity.

References

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