

The four unsung stanzas of Vande Mataram: Why govt directive on singing full National Song has kicked up a storm

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Vande Mataram (meaning mother, I bow to thee) was composed in Sanskritised Bengali by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1875. Wikimedia Commons

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The Union government's January 28 directive on singing **all six stanzas of the National Song**, *Vande Mataram*, at official functions has sparked objections from Muslim organisations in India.

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The directive, which notified the first set of protocols for singing the National Song, stated that the full version of *Vande Mataram* — lasting 3 minutes and 10 seconds — must be played before *Jana Gana Mana* when both are part of official functions, and that the audience shall stand in attention when it is performed.

So far, at all public functions, we only get to hear the first two stanzas of *Vande Mataram*. Some of the later parts of the composition contain religious imagery, which have been a source of contention.

The government, however, repeatedly brought up the “dropped” stanzas, including in Parliament, as it commemorates 150 years of the National Song. The latest move appears to be in line with that larger push. Here's a history of the composition of *Vande Mataram* and why objections are being raised about the latter four stanzas.

The composition

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Vande Mataram (meaning mother, I bow to thee) was composed in Sanskritised Bengali by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1875. Six years later, it was included in his novel Anandamath, which tells the story of the late-18th century Sanyasi Rebellion — a series of armed uprisings against the rule of Mir Jafar and his East India Company overlords.

Vande Mataram emerged as a rallying cry during the Swadeshi movement (1905–08), becoming closely associated with the freedom struggle.

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An October 1937 letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to Subhas Chandra Bose expressed apprehension that the song could provoke Muslims owing to its Anandamath background. But he added that the outcry was “manufactured” by “communalists”.

A Congress Working Committee resolution from October 1937 recommended that whenever Vande Mataram is sung at national gatherings, only the first two stanzas should be sung. It noted that there was nothing in the first two stanzas to which any one can take exception, and that the latter stanzas were not well known.

Indeed, the first two stanzas describe the beauty of the motherland — its fertility, its waters, its greenery. And in 1950, these stanzas were adopted as India’s National Song.

While the Constituent Assembly accorded the song equal honour and respect alongside the National Anthem, there had been no compulsory etiquette, posture, or legal requirement associated with singing or reciting it. The government’s move now looks to change this.

The objections to the song

The opposition to Vande Mataram from Muslim scholars is rooted in the interpretation that the song's imagery of "Mother India" as a goddess violates the basic Islamic tenet of strict monotheism, which forbids followers from worshipping anyone other than Allah.

Then comes the issue of the latter stanzas. The third stanza talks about "crores and crores" of arms ready to bear swords in the defence of the motherland.

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The fourth says the motherland's image is carved out in every shrine, and the fifth likens the motherland to goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

This invocation of Hindu goddesses has sparked objections from Muslim scholars.

The latter parts of the song, according to historian Tanika Sarkar, "become a call to war where Muslims are the adversary in the Anandmath, and the motherland here acquires the form of a Hindu goddess that alienates Muslims".

What have Muslim organisations said so far on the directive?

The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind and All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) have condemned the directive from the MHA. The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind said the direction was a "blatant attack" on the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution.

The AIMPLB objected to it, saying it was against secular values, contrary to Supreme Court judgments, and directly conflicting with the religious beliefs of Muslims.

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In a statement, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind president Maulana Arshad Madani said Muslims do not prevent anyone from singing or playing Vande Mataram, but some verses of the song are based on beliefs that portray the homeland as a deity, which contradict the fundamental belief of monotheistic religions.

"Since a Muslim worships only one Allah, forcing him to sing this song is a clear violation of Article 25 of the Constitution and several judgments of the Supreme Court," he wrote.

In a statement, AIMPLB general secretary Maulana Mohammed Fazlur Rahim Mujaddidi called the government's decision unconstitutional, against secular values and directly conflicting with the religious beliefs of Muslims. He said the decision is "completely unacceptable to Muslims".

"A secular government cannot forcibly impose the beliefs or teachings of one religion upon followers of other religions," he said.

The political debate

In December 2025, Parliament held a debate to mark 150 years of the National Song.

In Lok Sabha on December 22, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused Jawaharlal Nehru of truncating the song under pressure from the Muslim League. "In 1937, Mohammad Ali Jinnah opposed it. Instead of condemning the slogans of the Muslim League and expressing loyalty towards Vande Mataram, he wrote to Netaji Subhas Bose, agreeing with Jinnah. He wrote that the context of Anandamath can irritate Muslims," the PM said.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi countered him by quoting additional lines from the same letter in which Nehru said the "outcry against Bande Mataram is to a large extent a manufactured one by the communalists". Nehru also criticised the Muslim League's "low type of communalism" in the letter.

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During the debate, DMK MP A Raja quoted historical evidence to suggest that Vande Mataram and its author Chattopadhyay's works had religious overtones.

"So, there are reasons to come to the conclusion that Vande Mataram, at least a few stanzas of it, are not only against the British, but also Muslims. R C Majumdar correctly said, 'Bankim Chandra converted patriotism into religion and religion into patriotism,'" Raja said.

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi, had argued that forcibly imposing Vande Mataram goes against the Constitution. "If you call Bharat a Devi, you are turning nationalism and patriotism into religion," he said during the debate in Lok Sabha.

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