



C H A P T E R

2

A NATION'S SONG

*A mere fascination with music and a desire to retrieve what was lost more than a century ago took us back in time. Curiosity met fate and we ventured on an unexplored path, leading us to undiscovered treasures, and thus we stumbled upon the rich history of cylinders in India.*





## CYLINDERS IN INDIA

*The magic of cylinders and recorded sound had spread its wings across the four corners of India, and, a 100 years later, we came across the same magic running through the veins of Indian classical music with the discovery of working and non-working cylinders.*

Famous British ethnomusicologist A. H. Fox Strangways once wrote that a writer is often at a loss as to how to begin. This state of dubitation becomes more acute if the object one is working on is by and large considered to be either lost or non-existent. The uncertainty heightens if the object in question is considered unavailable in the public domain, either because it is locked in the vaults of sundry institutions or is obscured as a part of a private collection. Coming across Indian recorded cylinders and writing about them poses a similar challenge.

Perhaps this is the precise reason why Martin Clayton, a professor in ethnomusicology in Durham University, has chronologically put forward three solutions on the practical uses of historical field recordings in his article, 'A. H. Fox Strangways and the Music of Hindostan: Revisiting Historical Field Recordings'. The first is that such rare materials must be returned to the society from where they have originated. Secondly, these resources can be used in the study of musical continuity and its many changes. And lastly, such rare historical recordings, together with the publications based on them, can contribute to studies of the historical development of ethnomusicological methods and of the ways in which music has been recorded, transcribed and analysed. In the Indian context, where most of the field recordings took place outside the country, unless the first clause is satisfied, the other two are difficult to conceptualise, comprehend and complete.

Unfortunately, in the case of the Indian subcontinent, hardly any such early cylindrical recording — that has preserved the elements of greater or lesser cultures or those recording scientific, linguistic, anthropological, historical or ethnomusicological perspectives — exists in the public domain. However, the few — to our knowledge — that do, are either housed with foreign institutions or their museums such as Thurston, Strangways and Bake cylinders.

This situation raises certain questions. Taking Clayton's hypothesis into account, can we compel foreign institutions or their museums to return these Indian field recordings? Furthermore, is there any future for conducting studies on Indian recorded cylinders at this juncture in India, when more than a 100 years have passed since their making; more so, when none of these cylinders are physically available in any of the Indian institutions or museums for public knowledge and use? And, is there a chance of discovering any of them now, within our frontiers?

 **Facing page:**  
Edison's Concert  
Phonograph with  
concert size recorded  
Indian cylinders






Even though the answer to the first two questions is negative, we cannot deny the possibility of discovering cylindrical recordings of Indian repertoires within the subcontinent. Who knows, we might find them hidden in the dark abyss of some treasure trove — ignored, unexplored and virtually forgotten, or purposefully kept away from public access. Unearthing such historical evidence is a painful and challenging exercise, but if we succeed in doing so, the rewards would be enormous. It would be a great opportunity to study India’s cultural history and Indic musicology afresh. In fact, such a discovery would globally infuse greater enthusiasm into everyone that is fond of this subject.

The basic aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explore such possibilities. We would like to bring forth details of some of our recent discoveries of Indian recorded cylinders that are of great archival value. Our study also traces the historic perspective and associated developments related to the arrival of phonographs and cylinders in India.

Evidences indicate that between 1877 AD and 1899 AD — from the year of Sir Thomas Alva Edison’s invention of recording, to the commencement of the first commercial disc recordings of Indian repertoires in London — there existed a pre-commercial or non-commercial phase of cylindrical recordings in the Indian subcontinent. Although the production of such recordings continued parallel to commercial recordings even after 1899, all the cylinders discussed in this book belong to this era. These recordings have remained virtually unreported and unexplored till now. A few of them have the distinction of conserving possibly the oldest recorded voices, till date, of India, duly documented with precise dates of recordings printed on their boxes. We also present a cylindrical recording of the legendary late Bhaurao Kolhatkar, whose voice was recorded in India before commercial sound recordings commenced in the country, i.e., during 1902, through the efforts of F. W. Gaisberg. This great singer-actor of present-day Maharashtra was associated with the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. He passed away in 1901.

It is interesting to note that phonographs and cylindrical recordings were well known in the Indian subcontinent right from the time of their invention. “*Samāchār Chandrikā* was one of the first Bengali periodicals which announced the news of the invention of Edison’s phonograph. In its issue dated 9 January 1878 we read, ‘By the help of this machine words can be stored in its bottle and whenever one prefers he can open the cork and he can hear the words. Even after hundred or even thousand years, by reopening the cork, one could hear the same words.’ Obviously the reporter had very little idea about the working of a phonograph and the report today appears amusing. At the same time the reporter is quite modern in his terminology if we remember that recorded music is often called ‘canned music’, which is not very far from the idea of ‘bottle music’.

The news of the first live demonstrations of a phonograph in Calcutta was published in a Bengali periodical, *Sambād Prabhākar*. Here is a translation of a portion of a news from the issue dated 21 December 1878: ‘Messrs Herbert Harraden (son of Mr Samuel Harraden) has demonstrated in the Dalhousie Institute a machine named the phonograph invented by Mr Edison. In this tiny machine

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The upper section of  
a phonographic  
machine

any kind of words or songs can be inserted and later the machine can reproduce the same without any alteration. A large crowd gathered during the exhibition. A Hindi song rendered by Mr Dave Carson was clearly reproduced from this machine.”<sup>1</sup>





An advertisement from *Chitramay Jagat* (an early Marathi magazine), published in Pune, for sale of phonographs at ₹10 only, by B. V. Ghotker & Co., 30 Upper Chitpur Road, Calcutta

Another equally interesting and amusing incident was published in the March–April 1890 issue of *Paricharika*, a Bengali journal for women. The write-up says that “we have already referred to a musical or voice machine called the phonograph. The way it works could not but bring a smile to all of our women readers. This machine can exactly reproduce calls of dogs, cats, birds as well as songs or instrumental music. Babu Jagadish Chandra Bose, Professor of Science, preserved a couple of songs rendered by male and female members of the Brahmo community in the machine which had come to the Presidency College. These voices are expected to be preserved for another two hundred years. Even after one’s death, his songs, voice or words will be contained therein. There are a number of wax cylinders, within which the preservation is made. If necessary one can erase an earlier one (recording) and store a new song or voice of someone else. This has recently caused a great *tamasha* (amusement). Someone, a Babu, imitated the calls of dogs, cats and birds. These were preserved in a cylinder. Later, in the same cylinder, Babu Rabindranath Thakur’s [Tagore] song was recorded. It was purely devotional in recognition of the greatness of God. One day, the machine was singing that song and the listeners were attentive. Suddenly a dog started barking, when the singing had not yet come to an end. What a difference between a profoundly divine song and the barking of the dog! The earlier recording of the barking of the dog had not been properly erased and that is how the sudden barking of the dog surfaced.”<sup>4</sup>

It is also reported that the HMV Company published a pamphlet giving the history of phonograph recordings. This document mentions that Edison once recorded the famous indologist Max Müller reciting the first verse of the Rigveda, *Agni Meele Purohitam*. However, due to the unavailability of this pamphlet, we cannot confirm the authenticity of this event.

In the course of our research, we came across a Marathi advertisement, which marketed a phonograph priced at ₹10. This was published by B. V. Ghotker & Co., 30 Upper Chitpur Road, Calcutta. It asks the readers to “purchase immediately this new, cheap, multidimensional phonograph to listen to all kinds of vocal and instrumental music at your home. This is very strong and attractive instrument and can be easily carried to any place and can even be played during the journey... With this instrument you get double sided phonograph records, sound box and pin...” It should be noted that the advertising company wanted to advertise a gramophone but had inadvertently ended up advertising it as a phonograph. It is rather amusing that the photograph in the advertisement is that of a gramophone and not a phonograph.

Interestingly, the invention of this wonder machine, ‘the phonograph’, was taken in throughout the Indian subcontinent with great curiosity. Many foreign as well as Indian business interests were keeping a close eye on the great business potential the phonograph had to offer. In consequence, a good number of businesses dealing in phonographs and cylinders mushroomed across the country. In 1895, a famous, middle-aged advocate in Delhi, Maharaja Lal, thought of setting up a business concern. He acquired a modest corner shop at the Fountain in Chandni Chowk, Delhi. He dealt in a new commodity — the typewriter — which in those days was as novel as perhaps the computer was until a few years back. Later, his son Hira Lal was made in-charge of the firm, which bore the name of the founder and came to be known as Maharaja Lal & Sons.

**Facing page:**  
A collection of Indian recorded concert cylinders

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HIRA LAL



Hira Lal, the enterprising son of Shri Maharaja Lal of Delhi, who took a keen interest in importing and marketing phonographs and cylinders in and around North India from 1895 onwards

In his quest to trade in new wares, he bought a German-made phonograph where a voice could be recorded on cylindrical rolls. This popularly came to be known as the *churi*, as it resembled a collection of bangles. The phonograph itself was known among the masses as *churi-ka-baja*. This diversification of interest in the new area of sound recording indicated a great foresight that Maharaja Lal and his enterprising son, Hira Lal, exhibited in those early days. Also, let us not forget that the records in those days were in English or other foreign languages. The firm traded in phonographs and cylinders — both recorded and blanks — and also possessed the right to market and make cylindrical recordings of the famous singer Mohammed Hussain of Nagina, Bijnor, United Provinces.

When the Gramophone Co. Ltd first established one of its earliest offices and studios in India, Maharaja Lal once again foresaw the great future that awaited ventures in this new field. He was quick to establish contacts with the Gramophone Co. Ltd to organise the sale of their products in Northern India, apart from selling the same from his own shops at Fountain, which has come to be known as the Blue Room. With his great organising abilities, Hira Lal was soon able to show excellent results all over his territory. The Gramophone Co., Calcutta was so impressed with his work that Hira Lal was taken on by the company to organise the sales on its behalf in 1903. After Hira Lal joined the Gramophone Co. Ltd, it became necessary to fill up the vacancy in Delhi. Maharaja Lal left the firm in the able hands of his son Rang Behari Lal. Thirty-four years after founding the firm, M/s Maharaja Lal & Sons, the great founder and organiser Maharaja Lal passed away in 1929.

Rang Behari Lal proved another worthy successor to Hira Lal and took a keen interest in the business. A man of vision, he felt the need to expand activities and added several additional branches to the firm in different parts of Delhi. The firm was quick to realise its business potential and the year 1932 saw the inauguration of the first branch at Sadar Bazar under Faqir Chand, son of Hira Lal. This was followed by two more branches at Kashmere Gate and Connaught Place, which had recently emerged as business centres.

As the shop at Fountain was too small to act as the Head Office of this growing concern, a spacious showroom was acquired in Chandni Chowk in 1935. This new shop was made the Head Office, and it remains so till today. The organisation never changed its basic character of being a retail house. It still deals with musical instruments and is a living testimony of an era gone by.

If we move from the north to other parts of the country, we find that phonographs and cylinders were in great demand and their business was happily flourishing in East India. M/s T. E. Bevan and Company, 13 Old Court Street; M/s Harold and Co., 3 Dalhousie Square; and M/s Western Trading Co., 17 Chowringhee Road — all in Calcutta — were a few important English firms that regularly advertised the availability of phonographs and cylinders of various brands such as Edison, Columbia and Pathé. Their Indian counterparts such as M/s M. L. Shaw, 23/5 Dharmtala Street and M/s Dwarkin and Son, 267 Bow Bazar Street of Calcutta were also in the race.

M/s Dwarkin and Son, Calcutta was founded by Dwarkinath Ghosh, who repaired musical instruments. At the time of the establishment of the company, Dwarkinath was successfully marketing a small hand-pumped harmonium constructed by him. Popularly known as the Gramola Musical Depot, the firm dealt with the marketing

**Facing page:**  
The old showroom known as Blue Room of M/s Maharaja Lal & Sons at Fountain, Delhi





The inside of the lid of a cylinder box, stamped with the inscription: "T. S. Ramchunder & Bros, importer of musical instruments and phonographs, Kalbadevi Road, Bombay"

of imported phonographs and blank cylinders. In 1904, they advertised the sale of their own cylinder recordings, but it is presumed that they marketed H. Bose cylinders. In the absence of any evidence that proves that the cylinders were manufactured by them, nothing can be said about the quality or authenticity — whether the cylinders were theirs or belonged to H. Bose.

Another company — Universal Talking Machine Depot at 170, Dharmatala Street, Calcutta, founded by John Fleming — was engaged in the trading and marketing of imported phonographs and blank cylinders during 1904–05. They also claimed to market Bengali cylindrical recordings of Miss Dalim.

However, from 1900 onwards, the most popular brands of cylindrical recordings in Calcutta were H. Bose's records and H. Bose Swadeshi Records. Back then, they were in great demand. An entire chapter in this book has been dedicated to H. Bose and his recording activities, and so, we shall leave it for later.

In addition, Kidar Baksh Khan, 80 Bentinck Street, Calcutta; The Western Trading Co., 17 Chowringhee Calcutta; G. C. Mookerjee & Sons, 62 Bentinck Street Calcutta; S. M. Sen, Patuatoli Dhaka (now Bangladesh); Ghosh & Co. of Gorakhpur; Bihar Angel Press and Stores, Bihar; The Trading Co. of Mymensingh (now in Bangladesh); and The Das Talukdar Co. of Guwahati were some of the companies that were marketing imported phonographs and cylinders in East India. Among them, G. C. Mookerjee had the distinction of offering the phonographs at the cheapest rate.

In 1895, T. S. Ramchunder and Bros. — 26, Kalbadevi Road, Kalbadevi, Bombay (now Mumbai) — had already started the import and marketing of Edison phonograph machines and blank cylinders from America. As an incentive, the company also offered locally-recorded cylinders to various phonograph buyers. During the course of our research, we came across some cylinder box lids with inscriptions of the company stamped on the inside. It is difficult to ascertain whether the recordings contained in these cylinders were made by T. S. Ramchunder and Bros. or not, as there is a possibility of blank cylinders being sold in this way. Another important company was S. Rose and Company, Kalbadevi, Bombay, which dealt with imported phonographs and cylinders during 1890–95.

We also came across a few working as well as non-working concert size cylinders. At the top of one of the boxes, a sticker reads: 'Sheriar Aspandiar Phonograph Agency Kalbadevi Road, Bombay'. They were famous dealers of phonographs and cylinders in Bombay. In those days, the phonograph was sold for ₹30, a blank cylinder for ₹3 and an additional ₹3 was charged for recording a cylinder, as the process of recording was difficult and its technique was in the hands of European experts. Aspandiar, being a clever businessman, perfected this art of recording and visited the homes of customers or Parsi dramatic companies to record cylinders for them as per their choices.

Our study of the 19 working cylinders that we found during our research indicates that the recording in each cylinder begins with an announcement that they have been recorded by the Sheriar Aspandiar Phonograph Agency, Bombay. We identify them as Sheriar Aspandiar Working Cylinders (SAWC). Although the names of singers are not announced, all the cylinders

**Facing page:**  
A portrait of T. S. Ramchunder of Bombay

are in excellent physical condition, except five, which have developed cracks. The recordings too are technically sound. The details of the *boles* are mentioned in the following table:



TABLE A: CYLINDROGRAPHY OF SHERIAR ASPANDIAR  
WORKING CYLINDERS (SAWC)


Sr. No.	Cylinder Identification Code	Bole/ Other Announcements
1	SAWC-1	Chado-Chado Ji Mori Kalaiyaan/ O Mori Baiyaan/ Padun Main Paiyaan
2	SAWC-2	Yaar Jobaniya Nibhaana Hoga/ Gham Jo Hoga Bhulaana Hoga
3	SAWC-3	Khwaaja Le O Khabariyaa Humaari Re
4	SAWC-4	Aaya Karo Idhar Bhi Meri Jaan Kabhi Kabhi/ Aye Nikle Mere Dil Ke Armaan Kabhi Kabhi
5	SAWC-5	Mast Bhang Ka Lota
6	SAWC-6	Preet Lagayein Mori Ankhian
7	SAWC-7	Tu Kya Jaan Juda Ho Jaye, Raton Ko Neend Na Aaye
8	SAWC-8	Mori Laagi Sajjan Se Lagan
9	SAWC-9	Mera Joban Beeta Jaaye
10	SAWC-10	Batade Sakhi Kon Gali Gaye Shyam
11	SAWC-11	E Dil-e-Yaar Main Deewana Ban Gaya
12	SAWC-12	Khwaja Mori Naiyya Paar Laga De
13	SAWC-13	Kahe Kare Barjori (classical)
14	SAWC-14	Aayee Hun Main Rasiya
15	SAWC-15	Akeli Dar Lage Re
16	SAWC-16	Teri-Meri Gaadi Chale Mazedaar
17	SAWC-17	Pure classical
18	SAWC-18	Are Koi Aao, Piya Ko Bulao
19	SAWC-19	Ja-Ja-Ja Re (Duet — Male, Female)

Note: 1. SAWC — Sheriar Aspandiar Working Cylinders

2. All 19 cylinders announce their recording in the following words: "Sheriar Aspandiar Phonograph Agency, Bombay ke dwara record kiya gaya gaana."

3. All the above cylinders are Edison Concert Cylinders

4. One of the cylinder records has the announcement: "Bharuch ke mele mein gaaya gaya gaana." Bharuch is a city in Gujarat, India.

 **Facing page:** A circular sticker over the lid of a concert size Edison's cylinder box, indicating the name of the trading company — Sheriar Aspandiar Phonograph Agency, Kalbadevi Road, Bombay







VALABHDAS RUNCHORDAS



A portrait of Valabhdas Runchordas, the founder of M/s Valabhdas Runchordas & Co., Bombay — a major importer and supplier of phonographs, cylinders and talking machines in Bombay

Another important dealer of phonographs and cylinders in Bombay during this period was M/s Valabhdas Runchordas and Co., founded in 1902. “Valabhdas Runchordas joined the firm of Messrs. Churchil and Hoosein, of London, Manchester and Bombay in about 1898, and soon became a partner in that firm before leaving to set up his own business in partnership with financial support from Lakhmidas. He finally left it to set up his own partnership firm with financial support from Lakhmidas Rowjee Tairsee, a wealthy landowner.

When established, the offices of Valabhdas Runchordas & Co., were situated at 19 Hummum Street, Fort, Bombay, with the firm being chiefly concerned with the import of various commodities including hardware, cycles, medicines and soap. To expand its business Valabhdas Runchordas & Co., took up agencies of The National Phonograph Co., New York, the Columbia Phonograph Co., General, London and Pathé Frères of Paris. Within a year, Valabhdas Runchordas & Co., had become the major importer and supplier of phonographs, cylinders and talking machines in Bombay.”<sup>5</sup> In South India, some of the famous phonograph dealers were Wrenn Bennett & Co., Ltd., Madras, H. M. the Nizam’s Dominions, Secunderabad and Messrs Spencer & Co., Madras. One of the main dealers of phonographs and cylinders in Burma was Messrs Misquith & Co., Rangoon.

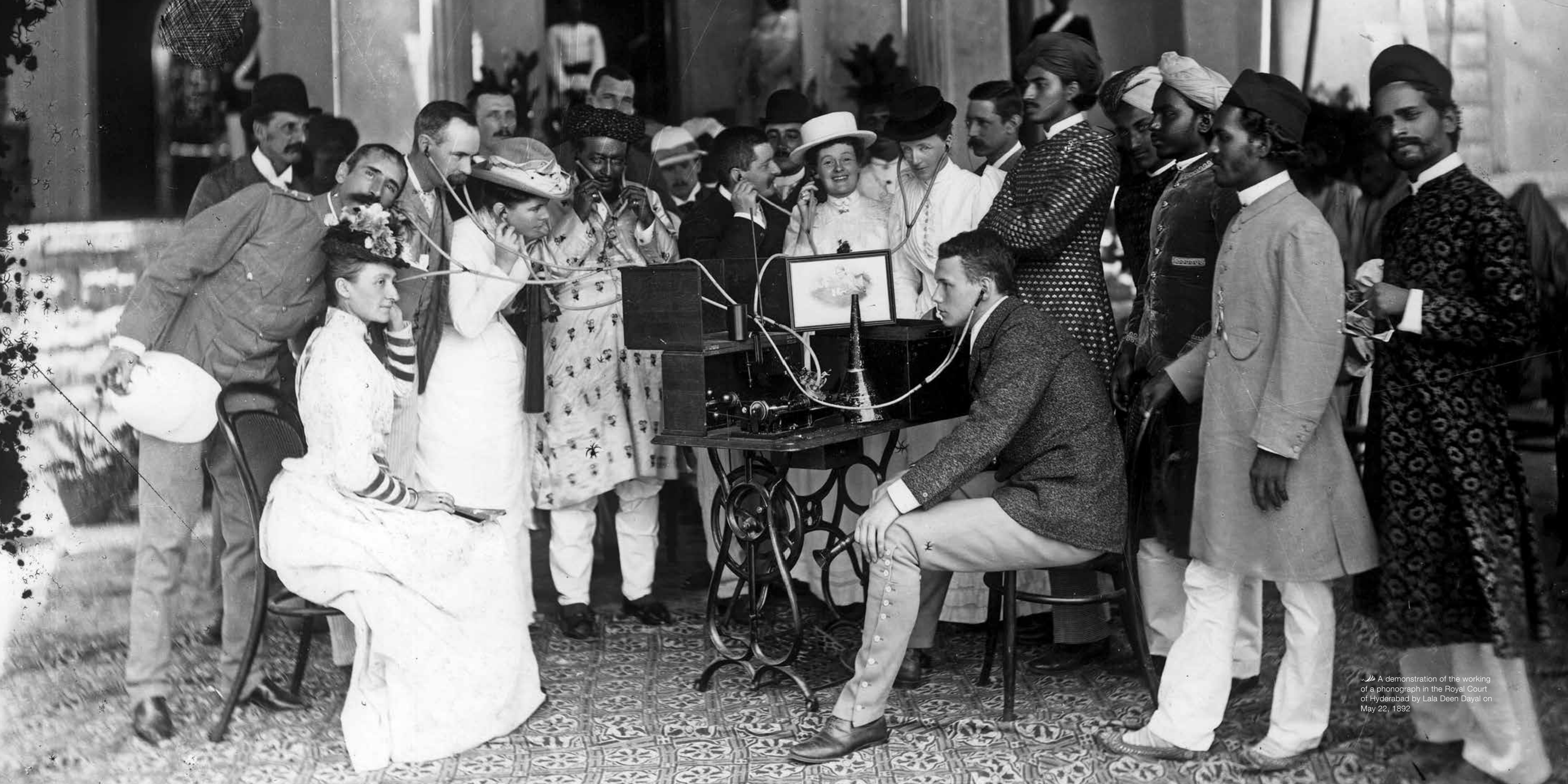
Soon, as the availability of the instrument improved locally and the news about it spread far and wide, the Indian populace, at the aristocratic and local levels, began enjoying the fruits of this miracle machine. A famous photographer, Lala Deen Dayal, captured the demonstration of the working of a phonograph in the royal court of Hyderabad on May 22, 1892. Similarly, prior to 1898, during an exhibition in Raja Ram College of Kolhapur, Maharashtra, the chief of Miraj, Sriyut Balasaheb Mirajkar, recorded certain renderings of *natya padas* in the voice of Bhaurao Kolhatkar of Kirloskar Natak Mandali.

By now, in the Indian subcontinent, the possession of phonographs and cylinders had become a status symbol for those who could afford it. Apart from scientist J. C. Bose, the famous dramatist Amarendranath Datta of the Classic Theatre of Calcutta, too, had procured a phonograph to record dialogues and songs of the plays. These recordings were used by him for rehearsals.

The spread of this invention to semi-urban and rural areas was also duly noted. Nalinikant Sarkar, famous poet and journalist of Bengal, in his reminiscences, described the demonstration of a phonograph. This, he recalled, was in a village fair in Bengal during the time of Holi (the Indian festival of colours). The machine was placed inside a tent and the price of admittance was one paisa, recounts Sarkar. He adds, “A crowd had gathered outside the tent. I also went in and took a seat. By my side were two or three persons occupying their own seats. In the front there was a small box. There were a number of holes in the box. From each of these holes came out a rubber tube. Each of the tubes ultimately forked

out into two smaller ones—something like the stethoscope used by physicians. They plugged into my ears the endings of this twin tube. Within a few seconds the machine started to sing, *Ār ghumāyo nā mon, māyā-ghore āar katakāl rabey achetan*. [‘O my mind, do not sleep any more, / For how long would you remain unconscious in the web of illusion?’]. What an inexplicable sensation that was, what a pleasure! The elders told me this is called a phonograph.”<sup>6</sup>

**Facing page:** A group of Sheriar Aspandiar concert size cylinders with recordings of Indian repertoires



A demonstration of the working of a phonograph in the Royal Court of Hyderabad by Lala Deen Dayal on May 22, 1892



While the display and working of phonographs was enjoyed by many in India, a section in the international as well as in the Indian community were keenly aware about the potential of this machine in acoustically conserving the cultural ethos of a nation. In fact, Western scientists, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists were keen to explore the non-Western musical world by two equally important “technical innovations of the late 19th century: the inventions of the phonograph in 1877 by the American scientist Thomas Edison, and the development of the cents system of pitch measurement in 1885, by English physicist and phonetician Alexander J. Ellis. The phonograph facilitated fieldwork, offering pioneering comparative musicologists the possibility of playback from which to transcribe and analyse. The cents system, by which the octave is divided into 1200 equal units, made possible objective measurement of non-Western scales. In ‘On the Musical Scales of Various Nations’ (1885), Ellis concludes that ‘the Musical Scale is not one, not “natural”, nor even founded necessarily on the laws of the constitution of musical sound, so beautifully worked out by Helmholtz, but very diverse, very artificial, and very capricious’ (p.526). This finding brought into question the superiority of Western tempered tuning and led the way to an open-minded cross-cultural comparison of tonal systems.


**M**usicologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century quickly took advantage of these technological advances, recording small samples on wax cylinders which they added to their collection of musical artefacts — instruments, song notations and photographs. Many early cylinders were collected during general ethnological fieldwork.”<sup>7</sup>[sic] Even though phonographs with recording and playback capabilities were commercially available in the market since 1888, the above-mentioned practice formally commenced when phonographs were first used for field recordings by Jesse Walter Fewkes in March 1890. Fewkes was an American scholar and used this machine for recording the voice of Passamaquoddy Indians while researching their lives. The use of the phonograph thereafter continued for field recordings till about the 1950s.

This endeavour resulted in a rich collection of cylindrical recordings, which are now conserved in archives such as The Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna (Establishment: 1899); The Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv (Establishment: 1900); Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture, USA; The Archive of Traditional Music at the University of Indiana and National Sound Archive, a wing of British Library, London. Unfortunately, as far as Indian field recordings are concerned, almost all cylinders are housed in foreign museums and till date, India does not have any museum of sound archive to conserve such ethnomusicological documents for posterity.

However, as a result of studies and the perusal of collections of Indian recordings with foreign institutions, today, the world acknowledges the existence of the group of cylinders (mentioned below) related to the Indian subcontinent.

The oldest among these is the O. Abraham and Erich M. Von Hornbostel’s collection in possession of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv. This cache has recordings of Gujarati instrumental music and music by *gurkhas*. These cylinders were recorded during 1902 and are identified by reference code no. C-665/346.

This is followed by 137 wax cylindrical recordings (C-624) known as the Madras Museum Cylinders. Recorded by Edgar Thurston and his associate K. Rangachari

 **Facing page:** A non-working IWCR-4 cylinder of Balajee a.k.a Bala Guruji





during 1905–1910, the collection conserves recordings of songs and instrumental music, including tribal and art music from the southern parts of India. Thurston was a doctor turned museum curator and worked as the Superintendent of the Madras Government Museum from 1885 to 1908. Anthropology was his first love and he extensively studied the castes and tribes of South India, which culminated into the publication of a seven-volume work titled, *Castes and Tribes in Southern India* (1909). He is famous for his work on the Todas, a South Indian tribe. In fact, he has recorded examples of several compositions of Toda poets during his field recordings, which remain a rich source of acoustic ethnopoetics.

We also come across 26 cylinders of the Berthold Laufer collection on India, recorded during 1908. This collection was originally held by Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. Out of these 26 cylinders, a few are in Bangla, bearing theatrical music from the Sikkim-Darjeeling belt. Along with flute music, some of the recorded cylinders are on the music of Hindus, representing the Sikkim-Darjeeling belt's love songs and theatrical music. It also has some recorded cylinders with the music of Tibetans of this region. These are mostly drinking songs, love songs, ballads and women's songs. Then there are Nepalese recordings, recorded in the same territory, consisting of flute music, marriage rites and ceremonies.

**W**e also come across a group of nine wax cylinders known as the Taraie cylinders (C-674). Believed to be recorded in the Indo-Nepal border (Terai) region, some ethnographers, however, assign the origin of the cylinders to the Tarai region of Madhya Pradesh in central India. These recordings have been made by an unknown recordist.

In addition, there is also a collection of 13 Baluchi cylinders (C-663) that were recorded in 1911 in Balochistan (now in Pakistan) by an unknown field recordist.

The National Sound Archive (NSA) — a wing of The British Library in London — is another significant repository of Indian ethnographic cylinders. It houses some of the most important ethnographic cylinders of Indian origin called Strangways cylinders. It is a collection of 97 cylinders with the identification code C-72 for the cache.

Arthur Henry Fox Strangways was born in 1859 and worked as a schoolteacher at Wellington College until 1910. Music was his first love. His visit to India in 1904 attracted him to Indian music. He was also inspired by reading the great Sanskrit musicological treatise *sangeet darpan*. Even today, his book, *The Music of Hindoostan*, is recognised as the best-known study of Indian music by a non-Indian. The book is also considered to be a classic of early 20<sup>th</sup> century comparative musicology. During his field trips to India in 1910–11, Strangways collected musical pieces and his book deals with approximately 500 such samples. Thirteen out of these are extremely important, as they are transcribed from wax cylinder recordings referred to in his book. These cylinders preserve the music of the Gond tribes of Raipur, Panan tribes of Trichur, music by Garhwalis, lullabies, Punjabi *ghazals*, *shehnai* by Havildar Rashu and Naik Nawab, *dhol* by Sipahi Miranbaksh, Samaveda chants, etc. His collection of high quality recordings were made in Raipur, Madras, Trichur, Tanjore, Allahabad, Jhelum and Poona (now Pune).

**Facing page:**  
A non-working  
WCR-3 cylinder  
of Dattatray Bapu

Strangways experienced some peculiar difficulties while recording Indians which he narrates in his book. He recalls, "At Allahabad I came across some Garhwālis, who had been got down from Mussouri in the *Himālaya*... They said they could not




sing in the day-time because they were thinking about their work, so we had a very merry evening in a hot tent from nine o'clock to past midnight. There was great competition to sing into the phonograph and have their performance given back to them; but unfortunately only one phonogram (cylinder) has survived the railway journey.”<sup>8</sup> Strangways’ recordings also extensively covered the art music of India such as *raga* — *Sohini* played on sitar in Bhavnagar, *raga* — *Khamaj Teental* played on *shehnaï* at Allahabad and a composition of *Thyagaraja* in *khamaj* played on violin.

Strangways had a deep understanding of the psychology and aesthetics of Indian music, which is reflected in his magnum opus, *The Music of Hindoostan*. In the introduction of the book, he has stated that “[m]usic in India, as elsewhere, is of a varying excellence; and it is as rare perhaps to hear the best there as it is in Europe [...] Europe, certainly England, thinks poorly of a religion that does not result in a good life: while India fixes its attention on the quality of the religion, the amount of realization and of vision it contains, and leaves the good life to follow as a natural consequence. India is still living the age of Faith. It is no accident, therefore, that the nearest analogue we can find to its music is that which culminated in the work of the Cinquecentists.”

He appreciated the fact that Indian music, which had its roots in ancient India, was no way inferior to the music of the western world. He observed that “India has had time to forget more melody than Europe has had time to learn.” He was equally pained and unhappy to watch Indians imitating the Western style of music and musical instruments, and thus he lamented, “If the rulers of native states realized what a death-blow they were dealing at their own art by supporting or even allowing a brass band, if the clerk in a government office understood the indignity he was putting on a song by buying the gramophone which grinds it out to him after his day’s labour, if the Mohammedan ‘star’ singer knew that the harmonium with which he accompanies himself was ruining his chief asset, his musical ear, and if the girl who learns the pianoforte could see that all the progress she made was as sure a step towards her own denationalization as if she crossed the black water and never returned—they would pause before they laid such sacrilegious hands on Saraswati. Excuses may be made for such practices, but there is one objection fatal to them all; the instruments are borrowed. We do not hear much about Roman music because it was so easy for them to get Greek slaves; and the importation of the gavotte and the minuet killed the English morris-dancers. To dismiss from India these foreign instruments would not be to check the natural, but to prune away an unnatural growth.”

Strangways’ work *The Music of Hindoostan*, without doubt, is called the most famous work of comparative musicology by a British author on Indian music. However, the basic concept of comparative musicological studies has undergone a sea change during the last 100 years, and it is acquiring new dimensions and definitions as the time is changing. During the 1950s, it was ethnomusicology which gave it a new meaning. Now various innovative fields — Cybernetics (the study of Control System), Information Theory (information generated, transmitted and stored), Structuralism (the identification of the structural rules governing cultural phenomenon), Ethnopoetics, Aesthetic Anthropology, Micro-ethnographic Analysis of musical events and biological studies of human musicality by studying brain motor correlations leading to studies in nature-nurture framework — are challenging the basic concept of comparative

 **Facing page:**  
Non-working  
cylinders — IWCR-5  
and IWCR-8 — of  
Shankar Gopal Dongre





musicology as it existed during the time of Strangways and which, then, was looked through the myopic lens of eurocentricity and European superiority. In fact, Indian archival music — preserved either in cylinders or in discs — needs a detailed study vis-à-vis emerging concepts of these innovative branches of the cultural-musicology.

Another important group of 510 cylinders, known as Bake cylinders, were recorded by Dutch field recordist Arnold Adriaan Bake from 1925 onwards. Bake was a scholar of Sanskrit as well as Indian music and worked with Dinendranath Tagore (grand-nephew of Rabindranath Tagore). Bake studied Bengali at Shantiniketan in Bengal and also translated the Sanskrit musical treatise *sangeet darpana*. These cylinders cover recordings from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. Identified as C-52, this collection is also housed in the National Sound Archive, London.

One of the most important recordings made by Bake in 1931 is that of Samavedic chants rendered by the Namboodiri Brahmin community of Kerala. Bake is also credited with recording the musical performance of the great instrumentalist Shri Venkatagiriappa along with his young disciple Mysore Doreswamy. This is the only recording of this great guru who had once declined HMV's offer when they approached him to record his voice.

Bake was a visionary and understood the importance of preserving the elements of the greater as well as lesser cultural traditions of India. His recordings, therefore, contain representatives of both these elements. Despite being a serious scholar, Bake was an equally jovial person. "The fun element was part of [his] character. In spite of his impressive size and demeanour, not to mention his awe-inspiring scholarly reputation, he loved to toy with words (especially "Spoonerisms") and to make jokes. Once, he told us, he had arrived in India and had been held up by the customs officials — they had no objection to his bringing in, what was then, sophisticated recording equipment, but found objection to the description, which stated that the equipment was for 50 cycles (now more commonly known as hertz). [Bake] would say, with a smirk, that the equipment was approved, but that the cycles (i.e., bicycles) were refused entry."

However, if we look at Indian museums, institutions and publications on archives of Indian music or Indian ethnographical works, we find no mention of any such ethnomusicological cylinders — of field or art music recordings — available in the public domain. Therefore, the question arises: were our ancestors unconcerned about the need of preserving our musical heritage through phonographs and cylinders? Or were they satisfied with the non-recordings of various masters by recording companies? We can safely presume that many of them must have observed that the foreign as well as Indian companies were not preserving the best of our heritage and were solely busy pursuing their commercial interests. However, in search for any evidence supporting their personal and private endeavour to preserve the voices of ignored masters, one can easily blame them for their failure. But, this is not the truth.

Through our research, we have been able to prove that they understood the need to preserve India's musical heritage acoustically. In fact, they recorded many artistes on cylinders who were otherwise ignored

**Facing page:**  
Non-working  
cylinders — IWCR-10  
and IWCR-11 — of  
Ganapati Vasaikar

by recording companies, and therefore they tried their best to preserve these renderings for posterity. They even strived to garner community support to ensure that our musical heritage and vulnerable *chees* would be preserved acoustically, in view of the lack of concern exhibited by various contemporary recording companies. This can be understood better if we look at the efforts made by some of these men.



VISHNU NARAYAN BHATKHANDE



Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936), a great Indian musicologist and visionary

For example, let us examine the role of Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936), who was a great Indian musicologist. During the second session of the All India Music Conference held at the Congress Pandal in Delhi on December 14, 1918, it has been recorded that he said, “The time has now arrived when the educated classes should take up the subject [i.e. study of music] in hand earnestly and proceed to give it its due position and importance.” One of the essentials suggested by him was to have “[a] faithful record of all the available master-pieces of our old composers in the possession of our first class experts for future guidance.” He further added, “Rampur has in its possession the largest stock of Horis and [Dhrupads] of the famous Tan Sen School. I have already requested His Highness the Nawab Saheb our worthy President, to permit phonographic records of those ancient master pieces to be taken for the benefit of the country and I am glad to say that he has been graciously pleased to grant my request.”

The above resolution was seconded by Rai Sahib Chaudhri Raghbir Narain Singh, the Taluqdar of Astora (Meerut), and he stated, “I quite agree with Professor Bhatkhandey in thinking that it is of the highest importance that phonographic records of the state artists should be obtained at a very early date, so that music may retain its original purity for ever. I hope the sense of patriotism in the artists will make them realise that they will be doing a great service to the motherland by placing their best at the disposal of the academy through these records.” [sic] In fact, the creation of a National Academy of Music at Delhi was one of the main proposals put forward during this conference.

There were many reasons for making such an appeal for phonographic recordings of musicians. One reason gets reflected in the averment of Shri K. N. Shivapuri, Joint Secretary of the Second All India Music Conference. He said, “... our workers have to hasten to preserve in a permanent form, by means *e.g.* of gramophone records, the existing art of singing, the best specimens of which rest with aged artists whom the implacable hand of death may snatch away any moment. The finest part of Indian music is incapable of notations. The shades of notes, the graces, the gradations, the modulations, the gamakas, cannot be put down in सारगम. They have to be learnt by the ear and must be learnt from the gramophone when the artists are dead and gone. Our workers have to arrange that these artists come together in Conference and consent to record their art. Their inborn prejudices and narrow-mindedness which prevent them from parting with their art must be conquered. They must be made to realise the superiority of a national interest over a private interest. And they must be made to see that the greater the spread of education in Music the greater will be demand for their services, that by being givers in the first instance they will certainly be takers in the next.” [sic]

The appeal was made in 1918 when the Indian sound recording industry had already completed 16 years. The Indian markets were flooded with recordings of various artistes. A look at the number of records by the end of March 1911 — barring some unknown, non-commercial cylindrical and disc recordings — indicate that the Indian market had almost 8,500 gramophone records under various labels — 3,219 records under Gramophone labels, 1,539 under Beka, 740 under Pathé, 258 under Sun Disk, 648 under Odeon, 592 under James Opera, 578 under Ramaphone/Ramagraph, 586 under Singer,

**Facing page:**  
A non-working  
cylinder IWCR-7 of  
Master Krishna of  
thumri — Khamaj





**Left:** A group photograph of the members of the Gayan Uttejak Mandali, founded by the late Kaikhushroo Navroji Kabraji on October 1, 1870. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936), seventh from left (standing), joined the Mandali in 1883 as a student on a payment of ₹3 as a monthly fee and received training from the late Raojibuwa Belbagkar and Ustad Vazir Khan. In 1895, during the jubilee concert of the Mandali, Bhatkhande performed in *raga* — *Yaman* and *Jhinjhoti*. When Bhatkhande wanted to preserve the music of some of the great masters of his time on the phonograph, it was the Gayan Uttejak Mandali who provided the phonograph to him for recordings on cylindrical blanks.

*Reference: An unpublished note of Dr Sharatchandra Vishnu Gokhale*






152 under Lyraphone and 234 under Zonophone. It makes one wonder that despite the Indian market being flooded with recordings of various artistes, what caused the conveners of the Second All India Music Conference to make such an appeal, 16 years after the commencement of commercial sound recording in India?

The reason, perhaps, was that if we go through the impressive list of veteran musicians who participated in and assisted this conference, we will barely find any that were recorded acoustically. Let us look at the list of such luminaries and try to clear this notion. This exhaustive list includes the names of Ustad Allabande Khan of Alwar, Ustad Ali Hussain Khan, Ustad Karamut Khan, Ustad Kallan Khan, Nihal Sen (Sitaria) and Ustad Fida Hussein Khan (Sitaria) — all from Jaipur; Ustad Munawar Khan, Ustad Wahid Khan (Binkar), Ustad Morad Khan (Binkar), Ustad Latif Khan (Binkar), Ustad Karim Khan (Binkar), Ustad Masit Khan (Binkar) and Ustad Bundoo Khan (Sarangia) — all representing Indore; Bhai Ghasita, Bhai Mastan Singh (Israj player), Bhai Gopal Singh (Pakhawaji), Bhai Chela, Bhai Mulkha, Ustad Mehboob Khan (Rudra veena player), Ustad Barkatulla Khan (Sitaria), and Ustad Mamman Khan (Sur sagar player) — all from Patiala; Pandit Manmohan Lal (Sitaria) from Dholpur, Ustad Zakaruddin Khan from Udaipur, Shri Gangaram (Tabalchi), Ustad Fyaz Khan, Jamaluddin Khan (Binkar), Shri Ganpatrao Vasaikar (Shehnai player) and Master Shri Krishna Narayan — all from Baroda; Shri Vishnubuva, Shri Narayanrao Karlekar, Balabuwa, Ustad Saadat Khan (Jal tarang player) — all from Gwalior; Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan (Binkar) from Jhallawar — son of Ustad Musharraf Khan of Alwar, Ustad Nazir Khan, Ustad Hydar Khan, Ustad Nihal Sen, Ustad Muhammed Hussain Khan, Ustad Ali Reza Khan, Ustad Fida Hussain Khan (Sarodia) all from Rampur and Pdt. Gusain Bhagwat Kishore (Harmoniumist), Ustad Ala-diya (Pakhawaji), Ustad Chand Khan (Sarangia), Ustad Ramzan Khan, Ustad Nathoo Khan (Tabaliya), Ustad Bandey Khan (Tabaliya), Ustad Samman Khan (Dhrupadia) — all from Delhi. Due to old age and illness, the great Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan of Rampur — a direct descendant of Mian Tansen, did not attend the conference, but his paper on 'Kanra Varieties' was read there. However, very few from the names listed above were recorded before 1918 by various recording companies. This was sheer apathy and unconcern on the part of such companies.

Another visible reason for such an appeal appears to be the lack of enough persuasion by the recording majors. Many musical greats of that time were reluctant to part with their knowledge and art easily because of their conservative outlook. Or they faced constraints in parting with their art, as they were serving some Raja, Maharaja, Nawab or Zamindar whose permission was necessary and difficult to get. They also feared that a two- to four-minute recording cannot do justice to their art of singing and for many, it was a challenge to present their renderings of longer duration in a perfect but concise and encapsulated form. But it was not impossible to persuade them to agree for a recording. When

 **Facing page:**  
Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan of Rampur — a direct descendant of Mian Tansen

Bhatkhande obtained the permission of the Nawab of Rampur to get *horis* and *dhrupads* of the famous Tansen *gharana* recorded, it was the royal directive that made famous musicians such as Ustad Wazir Khan and Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan agree to be recorded. Unfortunately, recording companies failed to undertake such steps.




Also, the concept of establishing a National Academy of Music as mooted in the Second All India Music Conference and furthered in subsequent All India Music conferences held at Banaras and Lucknow — till 1925 — failed to take definite shape despite repeated requests to philanthropists for financial assistance. This shattered the dream of the conference to record rare musical renderings in possession of state musicians. As a result, we lost the immense opportunity of conserving these fine pieces of musical art of the Indian subcontinent for posterity. Perhaps recording companies could have taken a timely call, but they failed miserably.

But despite these failures, Bhatkhande did not give up. He had a premonition, and so he made certain phonographic recordings of some of the reputed artistes whom he could persuade to cooperate such as Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan and his brother Ustad Umed Ali Khan, sons of Jaipur doyen Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan of the famous Manrang *gharana*. In fact, Vadilal Shivram — a music director and composer of Gujarati Theatres, and a disciple of famous *sarangi* player Ustad Nazir Khan — during his stay at the Ustad's residence at Bhindi Bazar, Bombay, came in contact with Ustad Mohammed Khan, the elder son of Ustad Nathan Khan. Ustad Nazir Khan was an accomplished *sarangi* and accompanied the great vocalist of Rampur *gharana* Ustad Inayat Hussain Khan. The trio of Vadilal, Nazir and Mohammed were appreciative of the work of Bhatkhande. They were aware of his contribution to Hindustani art music and also knew about his desire to develop a unified code for Hindustani classical music by unifying differences among various *gharanas*. Although an accomplished singer, Ustad Mohammed Khan was not performing in *mehfils* due to a bad throat. One day, Vadilal and Mohammed Khan were passing by Bhindi Bazar when Mohammed Khan spotted a young lad named Ashiq Ali Khan. He told Vadilal that Ashiq Ali possessed information on music that would interest Bhatkhande, and so introduced the two.

Subsequently, Vadilal introduced Ashiq Ali Khan to Bhatkhande, which proved to be fruitful and both exchanged their knowledge and developed a level of admiration for each other. With the help of Ustad Ashiq Ali, Bhatkhande noted down almost 250 compositions in notational form and cultivated the proficiency to perform and reproduce them in a masterly way. This news reached the famous Mohammed Ali Khan of Jaipur, and he immediately rushed to Bombay. He asked Bhatkhande to perform a piece of music that he had learnt from Ashiq Ali. Referring to his notebook, Bhatkhande performed a rendering so beautiful that not only did it astonish the old master but also enraged him. In a fit of anger, he rebuked Ashiq Ali, and asked him to explain the reason why he had shared his family's treasure with an outsider (Bhatkhande) without his permission and knowledge.

Bhatkhande apologised to the great master for learning the secret musical compositions belonging to his *gharana* without his prior permission. He further explained the reason for doing so and also his vision of achieving a unified and harmonious code of musical renderings in Hindustani music by doing away with differences among the various *gharanas*. This impressed the old master and Bhatkhande was not only allowed to learn more but was accepted as a disciple by the Ustad. He was also allowed to phonographically record his sons — Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan and Ustad Umed Ali Khan. Unfortunately, these cylinders did not survive, as they were stored somewhere without the knowledge of Bhatkhande. In fact, some are of the opinion

 **Facing page:**  
A disc of Ustad Ashiq  
Ali Khan and Ustad  
Umed Ali Khan





G.C.-4-12648, a Gramophone concert record rendering a song from *Sangeet Sharada* in the voice of Professor S. S. Manohar, Bombay

that these cylinders were destroyed. It is said that Bhatkhande made some 300 cylindrical recordings of this *gharana* but perhaps all met the same fate.

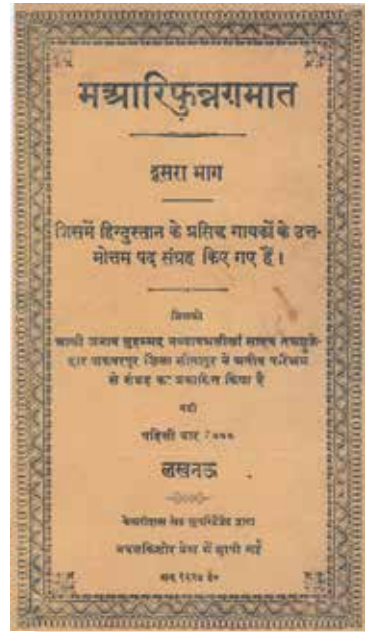
Today, we cannot present these cylinders, but we can definitely present the *gayaki* of Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan and Ustad Umed Ali Khan through gramophone records made under the Jien-O-Phone label. These are record numbers JP 818 (OMF3746), presenting a classical song *Jaan Bachan* in the voice of Ustad Umed Ali Khan and record number JP 818 (OMF3894), presenting a classical *jugalbandi* in the voice of Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan and Ustad Umed Ali Khan. M/s Janki Nath Kumar & Bros. of Anarkali, Lahore (now Pakistan), established by Shri Janki Nath Kumar in early 1920, is credited for preserving the voice of these great artistes. In due course of time, this company became one of the primary dealers of the products of the Gramophone Co. Ltd in Lahore. In 1932, when Gramophone Co. Ltd introduced the 'Private Recorders Scheme', the company introduced its Jien-o-phone Record Label. Michael Kinnear in his book *The 78 r.p.m. Record Labels of India* traces Jien-o-phone record's JP series up to number 122. He writes, "The JP-101 series sourced from Columbia Gramophone Co. Ltd. continued through to at least JP-122, but may have progressed beyond that number, however, the details of this series have not been found." Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan and Ustad Umed Ali Khan's records are under JP-818 series proving the point that the JP series continued much beyond 122.


It shall be improper if we do not give credit to the efforts of Janab Mohamed Nawab Ali Khan, the Taalukdar of Akbarpur, U.P. He took personal interest, and with great difficulties, persuaded Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan to share his music. Thus, he managed to create and conserve the notation of the rarest *gayaki* of the Tansen *gharana*, which was in the possession of this octogenarian Ustad. In the second part of his book *Mariffunnagmaat*, he has published almost 135 such notations — the rarest being that of *hori* — *Maluha Kedara Dhamar*, *hori* — *Kukab Dhamar*, *dhrupad* — *Lachari Todi Chautaal* and *dhrupad* — *Laxmi Todi Jhaptaal*. In addition, the book also presents rare notations of renderings of Ustad Nazir Khan of Muradabad, Nawab Chhaman Sahab (Nawab Saadat Ali Khan of Rampur), Shri V. N. Bhatkhande, Ustad Abban Khan of Saharanpur, Ustad Amir Khan of Lucknow, Bhoonu Solan, Ustad Munne Khan of Lucknow, Ustad Raza Hussain Khan of Lucknow, Ustad Mohamed Hussain of Lucknow and Ustad Muzaffar Khan of Delhi. As far as recordings of these greats are concerned, we almost lost the voice of all these Ustads except for Ustad Munne Khan of Lucknow (Nicole label) and Ustad Mujaffar Khan (Gramophone Concert label). Unfortunately, it is not known why Nawab Ali Khan did not preserve the renderings of these great Ustads on cylinders through private recordings.

However, to a great extent, one extremely important reason for the non-recording of India's musical bests also lies squarely on the shoulders of various sound recording companies. They, by and large, were represented by experts having least interest and inclination towards Indian music. This was also coupled with the non-supportive attitude of the British administration and lack of enthusiasm among the Western scholars.

**Facing page:**  
A working cylindrical record IWCR-10 in the voice of Professor S. S. Manohar

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, for European powers, especially Britain, colonial expansionism through imperialistic design was a major policy goal. The West was pursuing its interest vigorously so that it could possess India intellectually as well as economically. Although this intense scholarly interest of the West in India was



 *Mariffunnagmaat*, (Part Two), a book written by Janab Mohamed Nawab Ali Khan, the Taalukdar of Akbarpur, U.P. and published by Navalkishor Press, Lucknow (1924), contains rare notations of many famous Indian musicians; Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan of Rampur, Ustad Nazir Khan of Muradabad, Nawab Chhama Sahab (Nawab Saadat Ali Khan of Rampur), Shri V.N. Bhatkhande and many more such artistes are featured in its pages


unprecedented, it lacked the same intensity for Indian music. The basic reason for this indifference was that Indian music “did not immediately appeal aesthetically to Western tastes, as did the exquisite embroidery, inlay, exotic landscapes, miniatures, temples, colourful legends, and elegant structures of Sanskrit grammar. Indian music presented aesthetic difficulties and challenges, having an altogether more complex cultural ambience, alien to Western ears.”<sup>10</sup>

In fact, Western scholars were deeply interested in Indian language, literature and architecture but when it came to Indian music, they found it too complex to easily delve into. For them, it was highly grammatical, complex and out of frame vis-à-vis the set patterns, paradigm and theatrical framework of western music. W. Ousley, in his work *Anecdotes of Indian Music* (1797), records this dilemma. He says, “A considerable difficulty is found in setting to music the Raugs and Rauginees, as our system does not supply notes or signs sufficiently expressive of the almost imperceptible elevations and depressions of the voice in these melodies; of which time is broken and irregular, the modulations frequent and very wild.” Further, many scholars were more concerned about the antiquities of the ancient Indian civilisation and also held the view that impact of Mohammedans transformed the ancient Hindu music. But they failed to understand and appreciate the positive impact of Islam on Hindu music and the evolution of a new Ganga-Jamuni tradition.

Even, “the attitude of colonial officials to Indian music during the British Raj differed from that of musicologists or gramophone executives during the same period. Each of these groups, representing Western interest in the music of India, had their own political, intellectual, and economic agendas. For the bureaucrat in his role of colonial ruler, it was to foster vernacular education for the natives. For Western musicologists in their roles as intellectual power brokers, it was to ‘scientifically’ control and define the intervals of Indian scales, or reduce Indian melodies to staff notation. For the gramophone executives it was the financial pressure to understand the market for a music of which they had little or no understanding.”<sup>11</sup> Most of the early commercial sound recordists did not appreciate Indian music. “As often as not, in anecdotal accounts by Europeans, [Indian music] was characterized as little more than a caterwauling row! They [the singers] possess such admirable lungs that they are able to continue without diminution through a long night; their screeching notes break in upon all conservation, and come upon the sense with so little harmony, that it is difficult to avoid rushing into the street with both hands to your ears.”<sup>12</sup>

Even Jack Hawd, an agent of The Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd, in a letter dated June 17, 1902, wrote to his London office that “the native music is to me worse than Turkish but as long as it suits them and sells what do we care! It did sell, and ushered in a new and important era in the history of Indian music, not least because it brought the music of the *kōtha* (courtesan’s salon) to the mass market.”<sup>13</sup>

It should be pointed out here that the earliest Gramophone recordings, as mentioned by Hawd, brought the music of the *kōtha* to the masses and made it immensely popular among them. This in turn attracted more buyers and created a demand, which was too commercially appealing for the recording companies to look elsewhere. They responded and began recording and selling more such records for handsome profits.

 **Facing page:**  
A working cylinder of *dhrupad* IWCR-14 in the voice of Govardhandas





However, what suffered badly in the commercial frenzy of this era was the opportunity to record and popularise the great musical art of Indian masters, who soon, one after the other, left for their heavenly abode before they could be recorded. As a consequence, today, all we are left with is a written history, which just refers to and remembers them in text, but is devoid of their sound. This remains a grand failure, the blame for which ought to be shared by all concerned — whether Indians or foreigners.

The early recording expeditions (not missions) spearheaded by Fred Gaisberg — the first foreign sound recordist in India — were an appreciable and pioneering effort that can be equated with any ethnomusicological field work of the contemporary world. But his general aversion and apathy towards Indian music caused irreparable loss to art music of India. He and his contemporaries never looked at their work as cultural missions and did little to preserve the complete musical heritage of India.


To substantiate and support the above conclusion, it would be worthwhile to delve into the life history of Fred Gaisberg, one of the most important sound recordists for India. Gaisberg was born in 1873 on New Year's Day in America. His father, Wilhelm Gaisberg, was a bookbinder and worked for the Government Printing Office in Washington. Wilhelm married Emma Klenk in 1871 and they had eight children. Fred's precocity with music and love for the piano earned him a scholarship from the city of Washington and he started taking music lessons from a brilliant teacher named Henry Xander.

These were the days when The Columbia Phonograph Co. (Licensees of the North American Phonograph Co. of Edison) was founded in January 1889 by E. D. Easton and Paul Cromlin — two ex-stenographers of the Supreme Court. They advertised and primarily used the phonograph as a dictation-taking machine. The company also desired to diversify and apply the technology in the field of home entertainment. When they set out to record musical pieces, the company required a piano accompanist to play with the artistes chosen for the recordings. Fred Gaisberg, who was still in school, heard about this and grabbed the opportunity, with the aim of earning some pocket money during the summer of 1889. Interestingly, the company selected John York Atlee, a whistler. He and Gaisberg made a few cylindrical recordings together, the most famous among them being 'The Mocking Bird'. It announced: "The Mocking Bird" by John York Atlee, Artistic Whistler, accompanied by Professor Gaisberg.'

Fred was only 16 at this juncture and his name getting jokingly prefixed with Professor proved to be prescient for him. In the days to come, Fred became an internationally acclaimed sound recordist of his time. This also was the starting point of Gaisberg's career in sound recording that commenced with the recording of sound on a cylinder.

However, in 1891, when Edison decided to market his phonographs at US \$150 per piece for the first time as a home entertainment machine, the Columbia Phonograph Co. was struck by a serious financial problem. But the genius of Gaisberg saved the company from complete financial ruin. They rented out a large number of machines to exhibitors in various fairs, where each phonograph came equipped with 10 sets of ear tubes to be used by 10 people at a time to hear Gaisberg recorded cylinders.

For a short while in between, Gaisberg left The Columbia Co. and worked with Charles Sumner Tainter, who was experimenting with a new type of paper cylinder coated with Ozokerite and was building a system to develop multiple sound

 **Facing page:**  
A working cylinder  
of *dhrupad* IWCR-15  
in the voice of Miss  
Damayantibai  
of Bikaner



recordings. However by 1893, he made a comeback to The Columbia Co. and was involved in the recording of many famous cylinder artistes such as Daniel Quinn, Jonny Meyers, George Gaskin, Len Spencer and Billy Golden. By now, Gaisberg had developed the capacity to produce commercially successful recordings and had perfected the art of striking a balance between the artiste and the repertoire.

In some time, Gaisberg joined Berliner at 1410, Pennsylvania Avenue. Berliner's use of a new plastic material — Powdered Shellac and Bursitis — for manufacturing discs attracted a few investors from Philadelphia. Soon the first gramophone recording studio was set up in 1897 at Philadelphia, which was headed by Gaisberg. He opened the studio over a shoe shop located at Twelfth Street. Here, Gaisberg was given considerable autonomy in selection of artistes and repertoire but with a condition that the result of such a venture must lead to commercial success and profit. Gaisberg used this opportunity to its maximum and recorded the opera greats Giannini and Maurice Farkoa — the greatest singer of Chansonettes in the world.

Supporting his decision to record the best of his time, Gaisberg argues that, “[i]ts novelty alone accounted for the gramophone's great popularity, since the repertoire recorded at this time covered only popular and comic songs, vales, and marches in their simplest settings. The records were single-sided, 5” and 7” in diameter, with a playing time of 1 ½ to 2 minutes. A fee of two to three dollars per song was paid to singers, and sales-royalties to [artistes] and music publishers were undreamed of. We pirated right and left without remorse.”<sup>14</sup>

Fred's recording policy was working well and soon, with the ex-chief of Columbia Co., Calvin Child, he was working for Gramophone's new studio in New York. Child was a visionary and taught Fred to produce novelty recordings by selecting appropriate artistes and their repertoires. In his company, he could record the free-thinking philosopher Robert G. Ingersoll, the evangelist Dwight L. Moody, the celebrated after-dinner orator Chauncey Depew, America's greatest living actor Joseph Jefferson, and an equally celebrated actress Ada Rehan, who recited several scenes from classic English dramas, including those by Shakespeare.

However, if we analyse the contribution of Fred Gaisberg, we find that through his experience — as a musician as well as a trained technician in the field of sound recording — he benefitted American and European music and their cultural history tremendously. But the same conclusion cannot be drawn in respect to recordings of other foreign countries. Fred Gaisberg was a boon and as a sound recordist he proved to be both, a connoisseur and a conservator of the world of Western music. However, for rest of the world, i.e. non-Western countries, he was neither a connoisseur nor a reliable conservator. Whatever could be conserved acoustically by him in this part of the world was merely an asystematic commercial task. In fact, Fred Gaisberg had no ear for Oriental music. In his book *The Music Goes Round*, he brands Indian music as 'anaemic', Japanese music as 'simply too horrible', and the idea of music in China as a 'tremendous clash and bang'.

One of the apparent reasons for his general dislike for non-Western music was his lack of acquaintance with the language and music of these countries. His non-Western recording expeditions were devoid of proper planning. Most of the times, Gaisberg ventured into these places without any background



YASHWANT MIRASHI BUWA



Yashwant Mirashi Buwa, a disciple of Gayanacharya Panadit Balkrishnabua Ichalkaranjkar

knowledge of their music and without appropriate local guidance or support. He had a superficial interaction with natives and he could not make any inroad into their social life. In *A Matter of Records, Fred Gaisberg & The Golden Era of the Gramophone* by Jerrold Northrop Moore, his observation that “[i]n the bazaars of India I have seen dozens of natives seated on their haunches round a gramophone, rocking with laughter, whilst playing Burt Shepherd's laughing record; in fact this is the only time I ever heard Indians laugh heartily”, is an indication of how distant he was from Indian realities and their social behaviour.

When he went to St Petersburg for recording local artistes, his local agents — Blumenfeld, Raphoff and Lebel — were not of much help because they had done little to recruit artistes. So Gaisberg and his teammate Sinkler Darby had to draft themselves as their own agents. The story was not a lot different in the Indian context as well. In *The Music Goes Round*, Gaisberg writes, “We entered a new world of musical and artistic values. One had to erase all memories of the music of European opera-houses and concert-halls: the very foundations of my musical training were undermined. I soon discovered that the Anglo-Indians, whom we contacted and who were acting as our agents and factors, were living on another planet for all the interest they took in Indian music. They dwelt in an Anglo-Saxon compound of their own creation, isolated from India. They had their own cricket and tennis clubs, teaparties and bridge, “Sixteen annas to the rupee.” The native bazaars never saw them, and even the Eurasians aped them to the extent of tabooing all Indian society.”

Not surprisingly therefore, Fred Gaisberg's arrival in India was not accompanied by any research about Indian music or its renowned artistes. He, in fact, was leading a team that was under financial pressure to understand the market for a music they had virtually no understanding of. He was representing a Western interest with a clear economic agenda. On his arrival to India, he appeared perplexed and surprised. So much so that he had to seek guidance from the Superintendent of Calcutta Police as to who to record. In *The Music Goes Round*, Gaisberg states, “I met the Superintendent of the Calcutta police, who placed at my disposal an officer to accompany me to the various important entertainments and theatres in the Harrison Road.” About his experience, he further records, “In my search for [artistes] I attended theatres, parties and fêtes. Never again will I be able to summon up an equal enthusiasm for Indian music.” What a mockery of the situation! A musical treasure of an ancient civilisation was placed in the hands of a novice for conservation, who had no respect for it.

In view of the above, it can be understood that to expect Fred Gaisberg to record the best of the available music of contemporary India would be not only be unjustified but also something beyond his calibre. What India needed was a person such as Strangways, who could have done real justice to Indian music, had he been in the helms of affair in India with either the Gramophone Co. or any other contemporary sound recording company.

Let us now discuss what is new in this field so far as India is concerned. Readers will recall that in the beginning of this chapter we were positive in our assertion that there are possibilities of unearthing Indian cylinders from within the boundaries of India. These recordings, in the recent past, may have been ignored, unexplored or virtually forgotten. But over the years, through our painstaking research,



A gramophone record no. G. C. 19-12334 of Yashwant Mirashi buwa

we have been able to unearth many such hitherto obscured cylindrical records. These rare records are seeing the light of the day for the first time in many years through this work and more precisely through this publication. For the sake of convenience, we have categorised them in the following groups:

1. The H. Bose Records: perhaps the only physically surviving concert size cylinder (recorded on a Pathé blank) in the voice of Peara Saheb of Metiabruz, Calcutta. We have discussed the details of this cylinder in a separate chapter.
2. A group of almost 200 Abha Cylinders of four inch, six inch and concert size. Forty of these cylinders are in working condition while 28 have pencil inscriptions on their boxes. A few of them with pencil inscriptions can also be played. From this combination, five working cylinders are found to have inscription indicating their actual dates of recording. These five have the distinction of being the oldest dated and documented voice recordings of India found anywhere in the world. A complete chapter has been devoted to them later in this book.
3. Nineteen working concert size Sheriar Aspandiar working cylinders (SAWC) — refer Table A of this chapter.
4. In addition, we have also found 15 non-working Indian wax cylindrical records (NW-IWCR). These cylinders are in mouldy condition and represent musicians from Maharashtra. Table B gives details of them.
5. We have also been able to discover a group of 20 working cylinders (Table C) carrying the music of various renowned artistes of India. These include many whose voice and music were previously considered permanently lost.
6. A group of six- and four-inch size brown wax Rajasthan cylinders of unknown artistes. Due to faint voices surviving therein, it is difficult to study and elaborate on them.

With regards to Table B (refer to page 90) i.e. the list of non-working cylinders, names of artistes such as Balgandharva, S. S. Manohar, S. G. Dongre, Master Krishna (Krishnarao Phulambrikar) and Ganpati Vasaikar are well known among music lovers in India, while names such as Bala Guruji, Dattatraya Bapu, Shankar Bhagwant Borkar, Gopalrao Date, Dhondopant and Annaji Ranjangaonkar are not commonly heard. We are more than sure that these artistes must have played an important role during their time. But due to neglect and poor preservation, these cylinders have become mouldy. Sadly, with this, despite the efforts of our forefathers to record and preserve these voice scripts for posterity, we have lost the sonic evidences of our heritage, once and forever.

One among the above is a non-working cylinder of Master Krishnarao Phulambrikar (1898–1974). He was a celebrated disciple of Bakhalebuwa and joined Gandharva Natak Mandali in 1916. He remained attached to Marathi stage and classical music performances. Some important musical plays where he participated include *Swayamvar*, *Draupadi* and *Kanhopatra*. He also joined Prabhat Film Co. as a music director and gave music in films such as *Dharmatama*, *Manus*, *Amarjyoti* and *Shejari*. Fortunately, many records of this master, under various labels, are still available.



With regards to the 20 working cylinders listed in Table C (refer to page 91), we are dedicating individual chapters on most of the artistes and their cylinders, which our readers can go through in the ensuing pages. However, some of them who are not dealt with separately are discussed here.

We have been lucky to find a cylinder of Gayanacharya Pandit Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjkar (IWCR-9). His voice recording is faint and almost inaudible. Even though we can hear only a bit of this great master's voice, this discovery is a milestone achievement in the conservation of the musical heritage of India.

Balkrishnabuwa was born in 1849 at Bedag and his father was a small-time musician. His early life was full of struggle and penury. He learnt music from Bhaubuwa Kagwadekar, Ramakrishna Deva of Dhar and Vasudeva Buwa Joshi of Gwalior — who was a disciple of the famous Hassu Khan of Tansen lineage. In fact, it was the Gwalior school that provided him with the unadulterated *gayaki* of this *gharana* and he cultivated simplicity, clarity and attractiveness in his music.

He was followed by a number of renowned disciples. These included some revered names such as Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Anant Manohar Joshi and Yashwant Mirashi Buwa. Mirashi Buwa was born in 1883 and was an accomplished singer who started his career with Marathi theatres and subsequently taught at the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Poona.

Balkrishnabuwa was a strict disciplinarian. It is said that once Ustad 'Baba' Sinda Khan — son of famous *khayalia* of Gwalior Ustad Amir Khan — visited him in 1917 in Bombay to pay his respects. He introduced himself and reminded him about his father, who was a close friend of Buwa. Balkrishnabuwa had undergone a surgery for some eye ailment. Therefore, he asked Sinda Khan to sing so as to establish his lineage and association with Ustad Amir Khan. Baba Sinda Khan had no option but to sing and convince Buwa, which he successfully did.

It is said that Baba was a pure vocalist but he also used to invariably carry a string instrument with him.

We have also been able to discover two cylinders of *dhrupad* in the voices of Govardhandas (IWCR-14) and Miss Damayanti Bai of Bikaner (IWCR-15). Not much is known about them and it appears that they lived in the present state of Rajasthan in the era under discussion.

Another important working cylinder is that of Professor S. S. Manohar of Mumbai who has sung a song from the play *Ramrajyaviyog* with the *bole* — *Man Maze Bhadakuni*. The play *Sangeet Ramrajyaviyog* was written by Annasaheb Kirloskar and the recorded song in the play has been rendered by the character of Manthara, who was a maid of Queen Kaikayee — one of the three queens of King Dasharath of Ayodhya. Manthara is an infamous and crooked character of Ramayana and is blamed for instigating Queen Kaikayee to seek Ayodhya's throne for her own son Bharata rather than the eldest and legitimate heir to the throne, Rama, son of Queen Kaushalya.

Professor S. S. Manohar was an accomplished singer and was recorded by the Gramophone as well as Beka Grand Recording Companies. William Conrad Gaisberg recorded him on behalf of the Gramophone Co. Ltd., Calcutta, from May 1906 to mid-1907 in Bombay. Most of his recordings depict



TABLE B: CYLINDROGRAPHY OF NON-WORKING INDIAN WAX CYLINDRICAL RECORDS (NW-IWCR)

Sr. No.	Name of the Artiste	Recording Details	Song Type	Category	Company Label	Assigned Cylinder No.	Remark
1	Balgandharva	Kiti Sangu Tula	Dramatic song	Saubhadra	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-1	Cylinder is mouldy
2	S. S. Manohar	Kiti Komal Tanu	Dramatic song	Veertanay	Not Available	(NW) IWCR-2	Cylinder broken
3	Dattatray Babu	-	-	-	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-3	Cylinder broken
4	Balajee alias Bala Guruji	Tarana	Classical	Unknown	Edison	(NW) IWCR-4	Cylinder is mouldy
5	Shankar Gopal Dongre	Dramatic Speech	Dramatic speech	Drama — Panipatcha Mukabla	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-5	Cylinder is mouldy
6	S. S. Manohar	Baghuni Upavana	Dramatic song	Saubhadra	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-6	Cylinder broken
7	Master Krishna	Surat Mori Ka Bisar Gayee	Classical	Khamaj thumri	Edison	(NW) IWCR-7	Cylinder is mouldy
8	Shankar Gopal Dongre	Dramatic Speech	Dramatic speech	Unknown	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-8	Cylinder is mouldy
9	Shankar Bhagwant Borkar	Sutla Pitrudishecha Vara	Dramatic song	Ramrajyaviyog	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-9	Cylinder is mouldy
10	Ganapati Vasaikar	Sanai	Instrumental	Raga – Piloo	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-10	Cylinder is mouldy
11	Ganapati Vasaikar	Sanai	Instrumental	Unknown	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-11	Cylinder is mouldy
12	Shankar Bhagwant Borkar	Tarana	Classical	Raga – Des	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-12	Cylinder is mouldy
13	Gopalrao Date	Speech of Sumersigh	Dramatic speech	Bhaubandaki	Columbia	(NW) IWCR-13	Cylinder is mouldy
14	Dhondopant	Fakirachi Seva	Dramatic speech		Columbia	(NW) IWCR-14	Cylinder is mouldy
15	Annaji Ranjangaonkar	Kashi Madan	Dramatic song		Columbia	(NW) IWCR-15	Cylinder is mouldy

Note: 1- NW-IWCR — Non-Working Indian Wax Cylinder Records

2- As the cylinders were broken, details have been taken from inscriptions available on the lids of the respective cylinders



TABLE C: CYLINDROGRAPHY OF WORKING INDIAN WAX CYLINDRICAL RECORDS (IWCR)

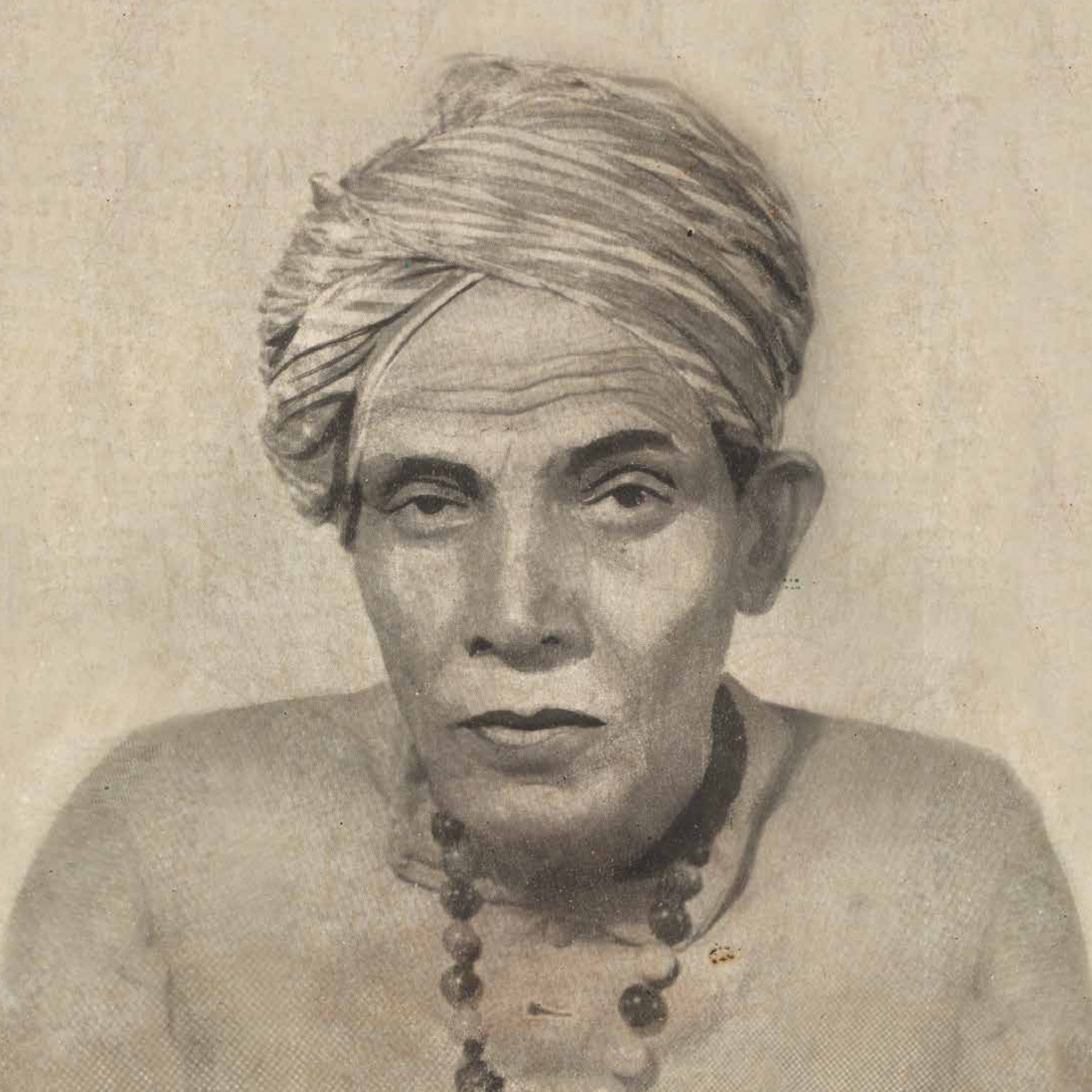
Sr. No.	Name of Artiste	Song Title	Song Type	Category	Company Label	Assigned Cylinder No.	Condition
1	Balgandharva	Arasik Kiti Ha Shela	Dramatic song	Saubhadra	Columbia	IWCR-1	OK
2	Balgandharva	Vada Jau Kunala	Dramatic song	Saubhadra	Columbia	IWCR-2	Cylinder is mouldy and scratchy
3	Balgandharva	Aan Baan Jiyamein Lagi	Classical	Pvt.	Columbia	IWCR-3	OK
4	Bhaurao Kolhatkar	Panchatund Nararund Maladhar	Dramatic song	Shakuntal	Columbia	IWCR-4	OK
5	Bhaskarbuva Bakhale	Aaj Nandalal Sakhi	Classical	Raga – Bhairav	Edison	IWCR-5	Cylinder is mouldy and scratchy
6	Vishnu Digambar Paluskar	Janaki Nath Sahay	Bhajan	Tilak Kamod	Columbia	IWCR-6	Broken cylinder (in two pieces)
7	Joglekar (Narayanrao)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Columbia	IWCR-7	Cylinder is mouldy only <i>Alaap</i> at the end of recording
8	Alladiya Khansaheb	Bare Saiyyan	Classical	Raga – Nanda	Columbia	IWCR-8	Cylinder is mouldy and scratchy
9	Balkrishnabua Ichalkaranjekar	Unknown	Classical	Unknown	Columbia	IWCR-9	Cylinder is mouldy and scratchy
10	Prof. S.S.Manohar	Mana Maze Bhadakuni	Dramatic song	Ramrajyaviyog	Columbia	IWCR-10	Cylinder is mouldy and scratchy
11	Gauhar Jan	Aan Baan Jiyamein Lagi	Classical	Pvt.	Columbia	IWCR-11	Very good
12	Allabandi (Jaipur)	Kamar Patli	Dramatic song	Bazm-E-Fani	Pathé	IWCR-12	Excellent
13	Peara Saheb	Mere Nayna Se Nayna Milay	Classical	Pvt.	H.Bose's Record No. 578	IWCR-13	Yet to be heard
14	Govardhandas	Rajan Ke Raj Maharaj	Classical	Dhrupad	Columbia	IWCR-14	Good
15	Miss Damayanti Bai of Bikaner	Prabal Dal	Classical	Dhrupad	Columbia	IWCR-15	Good
16	Balgandharva	Sahaj Kashi Khelavite	Dramatic song	Mooknayak	Columbia	IWCR-16	Poor
17	V.D. Paluskar	Balam Re	Classical	Raga – Bihag	Columbia	IWCR-17	Excellent
18	Unknown	Speech on film	Speech on film	Speech on film	Edison	IWCR-18	Poor
19	D.G.Phalke	Speech	Speech	Speech	-	IWCR-19	Excellent
20	Unknown	Tablyache Bol	Instrumental (Tabla)	Tabla Solo	Edison	IWCR-20	Good


Note: 1- IWCR — Indian Wax Cylinder Records







Facing page: A portrait of Gayanacharya Pandit Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjkar  
Above: A working cylinder of Gayanacharya Pandit Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjkar (IWCR-9)



 A disc record no. G.C.-8-15263 of Sitar-gat (instrumental) of Baba Sinde Khan

songs pertaining to Marathi dramas. They are from *Sharda* (GC-4-12648); *Mritchkatik* (GC-4-12646); *Vir-Tanaya* (GC-4-12650); *Shapsambhram* (GC-4-12658), etc. The Gramophone Co. also recorded some of the *raga* renderings in his voice. These include *Bhairavi* (GC-4-12666), *Lalit* (GC-4-12660), *Kedara* (GC-4-12661), etc. The Gramophone Co. also released a few 12"-sized Gramophone Monarch Record of Prof. Manohar.

On this note, we'd like to end this chapter. However, we are confident that this closure opens up many possibilities of a new dimension, definition and direction in the field of hitherto eclipsed aural history of the Indian subcontinent. The following chapters therefore, are our maiden but humble attempt at demystifying, decoding and deliberating upon fresh perspectives in the field of cylindrical recordings of the Indian subcontinent. We present them before our readers with regards and respect. 

 **Facing page:**  
A portrait of Ustad 'Baba' Sinde Khan — son of famous Khayalia of Gwalior Ustad Amir Khan