

To Jane

Indian Music and the West

GERRY FARRELL



OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS



This book has been printed digitally and produced in a standard specification
in order to ensure its continuing availability

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

© Gerry Farrell 1997

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

Reprinted 2004

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
And you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

ISBN 0-19-816717-2



CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Acc No. 006399

Call No. 780-954 FAR

Date: 16-8-04

Contents

Preface to the paperback edition	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Note on transliteration	xii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Europeans and Indian Music in the Late Eighteenth Century	15
Chapter 2 Indian Music, Notation, and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century	45
Chapter 3 India in Western Popular Song	77
Chapter 4 The Gramophone Comes to India	111
Chapter 5 Three Journeys to the West	144
Chapter 6 Indian Elements in Popular Music and Jazz	168
Chapter 7 World Music and South Asian Music in the West	201
Conclusion	219
Appendix: Selected Discography for Chapters 6 and 7	221
List of Sources and Bibliography	222
Index	235

elsewhere in the song. The opening is like an oriental tag for the song that follows, a gesture without which the Indian ambience of the song would not come through, despite the subject-matter of the lyrics.

Elsewhere in the collection this same polished orientalism is evident. The song 'The Temple Bells' is in the key of E minor, and includes several oriental musical tags, such as the drone-like E pedal in the bass, the appoggiaturas, and the modal, stepwise quality of the melody line (Ex. 3.8). The insistence of the repeated chords and the rising and falling sighs of the melody match the equally hot lyrics, which come with the usual oriental symbols: 'And her beauty makes me swoon, as the Moghra trees at noon intoxicate the hot and quivering air.'⁷²

'Kashmiri Song' went on to become one of the most popular parlour songs of the early twentieth century. It was performed and recorded both as a song and as an instrumental piece by, among others, Yehudi Menuhin, Xavier Cugat, Maggie Teyte, John McCormack, and (of course) Rudolf Valentino.⁷³ It was a work that crossed the classical/popular divide, and became a symbol of romantic and forbidden love in the Raj, as well as a musical evocation of the mysterious East.

In some of Woodforde-Finden's other settings, notably of Towne's 'A Lover in Damascus', it can also be seen that although the oriental song had changed musically, the same imagery is still being employed as that used by William Reader 100 years earlier:

Far across the desert sands
I hear the camel bells
Merchants have come from alien lands
With stuffs and gems and silken bands
Back where their old love dwells.⁷⁴

The Western imagination would continue to trek across the romantic sands of the Orient, transported by song, well into the next century. At the same time, Indian music was about to be discovered by the West back in India, and in a very different way.

⁷² Hope 1902: 4.

⁷³ Cohen-Stratner 1988: 201.

⁷⁴ Towne 1904: 1-4.

CHAPTER 4

The Gramophone Comes to India

'This talking machine is the marvel of the twentieth century'¹

In a photograph in a 1906 publicity catalogue, a woman stands cradling the gleaming horn of a gramophone. She is bedecked in her finery, silk, bangles, pearls, and ear-rings, and the folds of her sari are finely pressed. Closer inspection shows the garish varnish on her nails. She gazes away from the camera, lending a stilted, almost wooden look to her posture. Clearly she had been told to stand this way. Is the gramophone or the woman the centre, the focus, of this image? The gramophone sits grandly on a Victorian table. Its horn and winding handle evoke none of the comical resonances that they would in the present day; this is not some clumsy contraption for the reproduction of crackling nostalgia; this machine is the acme of Western inventiveness, the almost miraculous purveyor of sound on small black discs, a commodity loaded with potent technological and cultural power. The gramophone is a symbol of affluence, of the advent of the twentieth century, and before the cinema and TV, the first manifestation of a musical mass medium.

The woman is Gauhar Jan. She was a *tawā'if* (courtesan) from Calcutta and a well-known exponent of classical and light classical vocal music. She was also one of the first major recording artists in India. At the turn of the twentieth century, Gauhar Jan and other musicians like her found themselves standing at the intersection of two worlds, both musically and culturally.

By the twentieth century, older forms of musical patronage at the courts of *rajās* and *nawābs* were disappearing fast. Such patronage had been in decline throughout the nineteenth century, due to the political and social changes wrought by the British Raj, and by the twentieth century it had all but disappeared. The demise of courtly benefaction was accompanied by the slow, but inexorable, drift of populations from the country to the city. The vast railway

¹ Advertisement for gramophones by Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. in the first decade of the twentieth century.

network which had been established by the British in the 1850s played a crucial role in economic, demographic, and cultural change. It also had an effect on music and musical styles. The railways brought new mobility for performers, and led to a greater cross-fertilization of styles and genres. Neuman has also suggested another important musical outcome of the social effects of railways and other forms of mass communication such as the telegraph: the establishment of *gharānās* (households), guild-like organizations representing the style and performing characteristics of particular musicians and their disciples. In various ways the *gharānā* system set the mould for many important musical styles in the twentieth century. Above all, they provided a cultural legitimacy for music after the demise of the courts.²

The new patrons of music were the urban middle classes, and the locus of musical activity shifted from the courts to large urban centres such as Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras. Within the span of one generation, Indian musicians could look back to a vanishing world of princely patronage, and forward to a new commercial environment fraught with economic and artistic uncertainty. The place of work was no longer the rarefied court, with its legendary wealth and sumptuous luxury, where 'common men were not allowed in',³ but the urban *kothā*, theatre, recording studio, concert stage, or one of the many Western-style music schools that were being established at the time.

The early days of the gramophone industry in India marked a new phase in the story of Indian music and the West. It is a period that throws into sharp relief the meeting of technology and traditional music. Historically, this is a fascinating period, because the gestation of a musical mass medium and the cultural as well as the economic complexities involved can be observed on an almost day-to-day basis through the correspondence and marketing publicity of Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. (GTL). Here is a music market in the process of being created from scratch, based on a music and culture that Western executives did not understand. Consequently, the music on early recordings is as much a creation of Western technology as a representation of traditional music genres. Similarly, the illustrations in publicity catalogues show how the West thought India could be sold back to itself. In the early days

of the gramophone, Indian music was, in a sense, re-created to fit Western ideas of marketing.

For the first time Indian musicians entered the world of Western media. They were no longer curiosities written about by a few eighteenth- or nineteenth-century enthusiasts, who either collected songs as memorabilia or concentrated on Sanskrit texts that no longer had any relevance for performing musicians; nor were they simply the subjects of early ethnomusicological enquiry. Indeed, prominent musicologists and folklorists of the time, like A. H. Fox-Strangways, were scathing about the use of commercial gramophone recordings and other Western musical imports, as they appeared to threaten their colonial role as self-appointed guardians of the world's musics. As Fox-Strangways lamented in 1914:

if only the clerk in a government office understood the indignity he was putting on a song by buying a gramophone which grinds it out to him after a 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 . . . they would pause before they laid such sacrilegious hands on Saraswati.⁴

Writing some decades later, Curt Sachs, describing the development of the Berlin Phonogram-Archiv and the use of sound recording in the history of ethnomusicology, does not mention the vast wealth of commercial recordings that were already in existence by that time.⁵

The first gramophone recordings of Indian music may have become, in retrospect, of interest to ethnomusicologists (although to this day they have received little attention in the literature), but musicological study was not a reason why the recording industry descended upon India. Despite the complex, difficult cultural circumstances in which they were produced, these recordings were not 'field' recordings, but the Asian vanguard of a massive commercial enterprise which was already well established in America and Europe, a business concerned with cornering lucrative, untapped markets.

The twin media of photography and recorded sound turned Indian music and musicians into saleable commodities. Through the coming of Western

² Neuman 1990: 168.³ *Ibid.* 170.⁴ Fox-Strangways 1914: 16.⁵ Sachs 1962: 13–14.

technology, the financial and economic potential of musicians within India changed radically. In the social realm, recorded sound brought many forms of classical music out of the obscurity of performance milieus such as the *cākēlā* (courtesan quarters of cities), with all their social stigmas, on to the mass market and into middle-class homes. The gramophone, and later film and radio—all inventions of the West—irrevocably altered Indian music in the twentieth century.

Yet it is telling that early recording trips to India were termed ‘expeditions’. Commercial concerns or not, the recording companies were still exploring a dark continent of musical experience. Through the medium of recording, Indian music was discovered by the West once again, just as it had been by orientalist and compilers of Hindustani Aairs, and would continue to be, throughout the twentieth century, in ever-changing commercial and cultural contexts.

The Social and Musical Context of Fred Gaisberg's First Recordings in India

The first recordings of Indian music by GTL were made in London in 1899 at their Maiden Lane studios. The artists were a Captain Bholonath, a Dr Harnadas, and someone identified only as ‘Ahmed’. These recordings included examples of singing and recitation, and their commercial potential could not have been great.⁶

When Fred Gaisberg went to India in 1902 with Thomas Dowe Addis and George Dilnutt of GTL to make recordings, there were already local operators importing gramophones and doing rudimentary recordings, and by the middle of the decade several other European operators would be working in the Indian market.⁷ Gaisberg's trip followed successful recording trips to Germany, Hungary, Spain, Italy (where he recorded Caruso), and Russia. For the Indian trip Gaisberg designed ‘portable’ recording equipment which used a weight-driven motor.⁸ His expedition was in response to the growing market for gramophones in India, and to consolidate GTL's interests there and throughout Asia. In the same period Gaisberg went to China and Japan

to record. Correspondence in the EMI archive reveals the forward planning and logistical problems encountered during the period leading up to Fred Gaisberg's first Indian recordings in 1902. GTL's agent in Calcutta was John Watson Hawd. Hawd was aware of the potential of recording ‘native’ musicians, and was constantly urging the London office to send an expedition, because he knew that they must move quickly to gain a secure foothold in the market and head off other operators.⁹ In February 1902 Hawd wrote: ‘There will be a big business here when we have goods enough and it is best to own the territory then we know it is well worked.’¹⁰ But in April he cautioned: ‘The country is so large that it will take a long time to cover it and as yet we have no dealers to speak of.’¹¹ Indeed, much of the correspondence of 1902 is concerned with establishing markets, trade marks, and franchises through lawsuits. The nature of the music to be recorded is rarely mentioned, and when it is, it is clear that Hawd's knowledge and interest in Indian music operated on a purely business level.

However, GTL did not send Gaisberg as quickly as it might have wished. In January 1902 the London office wrote to Hawd:

I am planning to send out Gaisberg to you on the first of February to make records in your vicinity . . . I am going to have him make haste to go there direct and to do work thoroughly and well, and I predict as a result getting a very large business. We will now take up the Indian business on thoroughly business lines and put it on a firm and good foundation.¹²

But by June of the same year, Gaisberg had still not set out, and Hawd wrote in exasperation:

Is he [Gaisberg] really coming? . . . of course I don't care only I had made arrangements with artists which are now cancelled and I am not going to trouble again until he has really landed for by the time he arrives the pooja [religious feast, devotion] will have commenced and nothing can be done till after December.¹³

Hawd also adds, darkly: ‘About 12 to 14,000 people are dying in this territory weekly now of plague.’ Perhaps not the best circumstances in which to launch a recording industry! Nevertheless, Hawd had promised his local clients native recordings by December.

⁶ Kinnear 1994: 3–7.

⁷ *Ibid.* 9–10; Gronow 1981: 251–2.

⁸ Gaisberg 1942: 52.

⁹ Kinnear 1994: 10–11.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 13 Apr. 1902.

¹⁰ EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 13 Feb. 1902.

¹² *Ibid.* 1 Jan. 1902.

¹³ *Ibid.* 3 June 1902.

Hawd's letters also provide glimpses of the way in which artists were recruited, the manner in which the ebb and flow of Indian cultural life interfered with business plans, and the burgeoning status of the gramophone among the Indian upper classes:

We are, however, arranging for a room for record making and if it is possible we shall get some native singers, but as this pooja lasts for two months, yet we are not sure we will be able to succeed. We have several wealthy rajas who are interested in the gramophone that have volunteered to help us in every way possible.¹⁴

The expedition finally arrived in Calcutta at the end of October 1902. Gaisberg himself describes their arrival and first recordings in India in *Music on Record* (1942), which consists largely of reproductions from his diaries. His account conveys a sense of the difficult logistics involved and the culture shock experienced now that they had finally arrived in India:

It took us three days to unload our thirty heavy cases and pass the customs officers. Our agent, Jack Hawd, had arranged a location and had assembled a collection of artists, who watched us curiously as we prepared our studio for recording. It was the first time the talking machine had come into their lives and they regarded it with awe and wonderment.¹⁵

It was also the first time that Indian music had come into Gaisberg's life, and it seemed no less awesome and traumatic to him than the effects of the gramophone on the Indians: 'We entered a new world of musical and artistic values. One had to erase all memories of European opera houses: the very foundations of my musical training were undermined.'¹⁶ Also, his contact with Indian music set him apart from other Europeans on the subcontinent: 'I soon discovered that the English, whom we contacted and who were acting as our agents and factors, might be living on another planet for all the interest they took in Indian music.'¹⁷

The first musicians whom Gaisberg recorded were contracted with the help of two proprietors of local theatres, Amarendra Nath Dutt and Jamshedji Framji Madan.¹⁸ As the Westerners knew nothing about Indian music or musical genres, they had to take what was on offer. Thus the early recordings

were musically arbitrary—everything from classical vocal music to 'Bengali Comic Talk'. The first recordings of Indian musicians, made on Saturday, 8 November 1902, were of two *nautch* girls called Soshi Mukhi and Fani Bala, of the Classic Theatre. They recorded extracts from popular shows of the time such as *Sri Krishna*, *Dole Lila*, *Pramode Ranjan*, and *Alibaba*.¹⁹ According to Gaisberg, they had 'miserable voices'. Elsewhere he describes his general dismay at the theatre music he heard in venues around the Harrison Road area of Calcutta:

Our first visit was to the 'Classic theatre' where a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in a most unconventional form was being given. Quite arbitrarily, there was introduced a chorus of young Nautch girls heavily bleached with rice powder and dressed in transparent gauze. They sang 'And Her Golden Hair Was Hanging Down Her Back' accompanied by fourteen brass instruments all playing in unison. I had yet to learn that the oriental ear was unappreciative of chords and harmonic treatment, and only demanded the rhythmic beat of the accompaniment of the drums. At this point we left.²⁰

This paragraph encapsulates a wealth of misconceptions about Indian music by Westerners and Western music by Indians. Perhaps the rendition of the ballad 'And her Golden Hair was Hanging Down her Back' with brass accompaniment was set up especially for the important Western visitors; but the two musical cultures failed to connect. Expecting Indian music, Gaisberg heard a bad arrangement of a Western song, and the Indian band did not know how to score for brass. It is an example of cross-cultural misfirings on every level, and is a classic anecdote in the chronicle of Indian music and the West. Above all, Gaisberg had no idea what he was looking for in Indian music, and was doubtless at the mercy of local entrepreneurs anxious to get to the rich Westerners and their lucrative new talking machine. As Hawd had warned head office in London earlier that year about the locals that he had business dealings with, 'the baboos here are slick'.²¹

However, following hard upon his experience at the Classic Theatre, Gaisberg was ushered into a different world of Indian music. He was taken to the home of a 'wealthy *babu*', where he heard, among others, Gauhar Jan, the

¹⁴ EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 16 Nov. 1902.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Gaisberg 1942: 54.

¹⁸ Kinnear 1994: 11, 15–20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 10–11.

²⁰ Gaisberg 1942: 54–5.

²¹ EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 19 June 1902.

vocalist: 'an Armenian Jewess who could sing in twenty languages and dialects'.²² Through hearing Gauhar Jan, Gaisberg came into the mainstream of classical and light classical music performance in India, but in surroundings he would not have been familiar with in Europe or America: 'We elbowed our way through an unsavoury alley jostled by fakirs and unwholesome sacred cows, to a pretentious entrance . . . No native women were present excepting the Nautch girls, who had lost caste.'²³ That Gaisberg found the subsequent performance 'long and boring', and was offended by the betel-stained teeth of the musicians, did not blunt his business acumen. Gauhar Jan was clearly a find. That night she sang 'Silver Threads amongst the Gold' for the wealthy Western visitors. So, at the end of an 'unsavoury alley', Gaisberg had stumbled upon the source for the twentieth century's first commercial recordings of Indian music.

Gauhar Jan (c.1875–1930), doyenne of the Calcutta *kothās*, was to become GTE's first major Indian recording artist. She recorded scores of songs, which were still in GTE's catalogues in the 1930s, when she was listed as 'The Late Gauhar Jan'. She was already well known among *aficionados* of Indian music, and through the medium of the gramophone she became an immensely popular artist, later appearing in silent films miming to her own recordings and foreshadowing 'playback', in which film stars mimed to sound-tracks of singers, later in the century.²⁴ Gauhar Jan was an appropriate figure to play a role which bridged tradition and modernity, India and the West. She was born to Eurasian parents William Robert Yeoward and Allen [sic] Victoria Hemming, but was brought up in Benares by her mother, who had converted to Islam after the break-up of the marriage.²⁵ Gauhar Jan was multilingual, glamorous, flamboyant, and fully aware of the potential of the new medium.

Through coming into contact with her, Gaisberg entered a different musical world from that of the *nautch* girls of the Classic Theatre, although in his diaries he called Gauhar Jan a 'rather fat . . . dancing girl' who 'terminated each song with a most cleverly executed muscle-dance'.²⁶ (His memory of her seems to have mellowed by the time *Music on Record* was written.)

Gauhar Jan was a trained singer of *khyāl*, *thumrī*, and other classical vocal forms. She is also reputed to have performed the more austere forms *dhrupad*

and *sādra*.²⁷ She was a student of Bhaya Saheb Ganpat Rao (1852–1920), considered to be one of the most important figures in the nineteenth-century development of the vocal form *thumrī*.²⁸ This gave Gauhar Jan a direct stylistic and historical link to the world of courtly musical patronage. Bhaya Saheb also taught other fine singers of the day, such as Ghafur Khan and Malkajan.²⁹

Gauhar Jan was clearly an imposing personality, as well as a fine singer, and she was not intimidated by the new Western technology or the commercial wheeling and dealing associated with it. As Gaisberg noted:

When she came to record, her suite of musicians and attendants appeared even more imposing than those who used to accompany Melba and Calvé. As the proud heiress of immemorial folk music traditions she bore herself with becoming dignity. She knew her own market value as we found to our cost when we negotiated with her.³⁰

It appears that not only Gauhar Jan, but other famous Indian singers in the first decade of recording, like Jankibai, charged enormous fees; Gauhar Jan charged 1,000 rupees for a recording session, and Jankibai 3,000.³¹ Gauhar Jan's almost legendary status is underlined by a curious story related by Gaisberg (and elsewhere in slightly differing versions) about her throwing a party for her cat which cost 20,000 rupees!³² It seems that such tall tales, her extravagant and provocative appearance—'delicate black gauze draperies embroidered with real gold lace, arranged so as to present a tempting view of a bare leg and a naked navel'³³—and her habit of riding through Calcutta in a carriage and pair created an ambience which made it easier for her to drive a hard bargain with Gaisberg when it came to fees.

Gauhar Jan quickly became a gramophone celebrity, appearing in numerous catalogues peering demurely into the camera or cradling a gramophone horn to her bosom. In her first recordings for Gaisberg, she recorded songs in Hindustani, English, Arabic, Kutchi, Turki, Sanskrit, Bengali, and Pushtu. Represented in this body of work were many of the classical and light vocal styles current in North India at that time: *thumrī*, *khyāl*, *dādrā*, *ghazal*, *kajārī*, with compositions in a variety of *rāgs* usually associated with lighter classical forms: *Pīlu*, *Jinjhōṭī*, *Bhupālī*, *Khamāj*, *Pahārī*, and *Ghārā*. However, among her first recordings are also examples of more 'serious' *rāgs*, such as *Malhār*, and

²² Gaisberg 1942: 55. ²³ *Ibid.* ²⁴ Michael Kinnear, personal communication, 1992.
²⁵ Misra 1990: 97. ²⁶ Moore 1976: 80.

²⁷ Misra 1990: 96. ²⁸ Manuel 1989: 74–5. ²⁹ *Ibid.* 75.
³⁰ Gaisberg 1942: 56. ³¹ *Ibid.* 57; Misra 1990: 99. ³² Gaisberg 1942: 56. ³³ *Ibid.*

rarer ones, like *Dhānī* and *Janglā*.³⁴ Nevertheless, Gaisberg's understanding of her musical accomplishments was rudimentary: 'The Mohammedan girl could lay considerable claim to a coloratura voice. She performed with some ease some very difficult vocalising such as scales & a sort of guttural trill which drew our attention to herself.'³⁵ Even though Gauhar Jan was a renowned, respected performer of classical music, with a large repertoire of traditional compositions, the novelty value of the gramophone did not escape her notice.

One of her 1902 recordings is an English-language version of 'My Love is Like a Little Bird'. An extant recording of this song seems to have been recorded at too slow a tempo (in fact, the speed, and therefore the pitch, varies considerably on many of the recordings of both Indian and Western singers), adding a curious high-pitched edge to Gauhar Jan's voice, which exaggerates the nursery-rhyme quality of the lyrics:

My love is like a little bird
That flies from tree to tree.

The accompanying musicians carry on regardless of the curious musical setting in which they find themselves, adjusting the Indian *tāl kaharvā* (8 beats) and the mellifluous flow of the *sārangī* to fit the four-square melody. Even when, midway through, Gauhar Jan forgets the lyrics, no one is perturbed, and the rhythm is picked up when she re-starts.

However, her celebrity status and her accomplishments as a singer, preserved for ever on those early recordings, tell us little about the social status of women musicians in turn-of-the-century India. Gaisberg hints at it: 'All female singers were of course from the caste of public women, and in those days it was practically impossible to record the voice of a respectable woman.'³⁶ At the time of Gauhar Jan, Indian classical music and the musicians who performed it occupied an ambivalent place in Indian society. As noted in Chapter 2, the public performance of music was considered by Indians and Westerners alike to be a degenerate art. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was still considered a low-status activity, despite the revival of 'Hindu' music in upper middle-class society, and was yet to attain

its image in the West, or in India, as a quintessential symbol of Indian high culture. For women it was considered a particularly disreputable profession, only one step away from undisguised prostitution.

Musical activity in the cities centred on the *kothās* situated in *cāklās*, where *tawā'ifs* performed music and dance to an audience of music *aficionados*, pleasure-seekers, and fellow musicians. The male musicians, particularly *sārangīyās* (*sārangī* players), had a complex musical and social role in relation to the women performers. They acted as both teachers and accompanists, and it has been suggested that in some situations as pimps or procurers. This latter, unsavoury reputation, whether deserved or not, persisted up until modern times, even when the *sārangī* had become established as a concert instrument.³⁷

Such musical venues as salons were linked in the minds of the incipient Indian bourgeoisie with the loose, degenerate living previously associated with the courts; but it was within this milieu that many of the stylistic innovations of twentieth-century Indian classical music took place. Male professional musicians frequented the salons, and were influenced stylistically by the women, a dimension of Indian music history that has only recently been acknowledged.³⁸ Gaisberg himself noted that the first two male singers he recorded had 'high-pitched effeminate voices', perhaps a result of the female influence.³⁹ Lalchand (L. C.) Boral was a particularly popular artist in the early days of recording. His vocal delivery is notably high-pitched. Manuel also notes how some of the greatest male vocalists of the century—for example, Faiyaz Khan—emulated the performance practices of the *tawā'ifs*.⁴⁰ Female musicians and the musical environment they inhabited were clearly of great significance at the turn of the century, yet a photograph of a gathering of Indian musicians at a conference in Nepal in 1900 shows not a single woman.⁴¹

At this point it is perhaps necessary to clarify the meaning of the term 'courtesan' in relation to women musicians and dancers. In former times the term referred specifically to women who performed music and dance at the

³⁴ See Kaufmann 1984 and Manuel 1989 for details of these *rāgs*.

³⁵ Moore 1976: 80.

³⁶ Gaisberg 1942: 57.

³⁷ Sorrell and Narayan 1980: 65; Joep Bor, personal communication, 1996.

³⁸ Daniel Neuman, personal communication at the *Women Music-Makers of India* conference in New Delhi, 1984.

³⁹ Gaisberg 1942: 56.

⁴⁰ Manuel 1989: 72–3.

⁴¹ Neuman 1990: 19.

courts of nawabs and maharajas, this was closely associated with *devadāsīs*, or women who danced in temples, taking part in religious rites.⁴² However, as this patronage declined in the twentieth century, the musical skills of the courtesans were transferred to urban centres and salons. Thus, it is not strictly accurate to term Gauhar Jan a courtesan, although she apparently performed at the court of the Maharaja of Darbangha at one point in her life,⁴³ and even less a 'dancing-girl', with all the pejorative connotations that such a designation carries in India. She was certainly heir to that tradition, and performed in the musical contexts that succeeded the courts. The musical and dancing skills she had acquired were those of a courtesan, but she represented a distinct, and emerging stratum of professional urban musicians at the turn of the century.

The entertainment in the salons was a mixture of music, dance, and sensual indulgence. One of the courtesan's skills was to entice and seduce, through suggestive lyrics, tone of voice, and gestures. The *kothā* was not merely a brothel (although it certainly functioned on occasion as that as well); it was also a venue where highly skilled musicians and dancers performed and listened, a place of relaxation, gossip, and musical appreciation, as well as ventry. Echoing Gaisberg's perceptions, McMunn gives further background regarding the social status of the twentieth-century courtesan:

the mass of them come from the lowest of the depressed classes and untouchables and from outcast tribes . . . The dancers have matriarchal descent for many generations perhaps, for though all dancers are courtesans, not all courtesans are dancers. The recruiting of the dancer class comes also from one more source, the unwanted daughter. The unwanted daughter may be sold, given to, or stolen by a gipsy tribe and sold on to some duenna of dancing girls, herself retired from the craft of keeping houses of ill fame.⁴⁴

Neuman has suggested that kidnapping as a form of recruitment to the salons may also have had an effect on the intermingling of musical styles, as some girls were brought from outside India—another instance of the social shaping the musical.⁴⁵

Courtesan-musicians constituted a distinct stratum of Indian society, and were often identified by their names having the suffix '*bai*', a practice which

⁴² Post 1989: 98–9.

⁴³ Misra 1990: 97.

⁴⁴ McMunn 1931: 80–1.

⁴⁵ Neuman, personal communication, 1984.

dates back to the time of the Moghul emperor Aurangzeb, who ruled 1658–1707.⁴⁶ The term *bai* (dame, lady) has many connotations, being both honorific, *baijī*, and stigmatizing: honorific because it acknowledges the artistic achievements of the woman so named, stigmatizing because it links her directly to the courtesan tradition.⁴⁷ Some of the most famous female vocalists of the twentieth century, many of whom were recorded in the early part of the century, still bore this suffix in their names, such as Jankibai, Zohrabai, Hirabai Barodekar, and Keserbai Kerkar, to name but a few.

In the courtesan's performance, dance was clearly as important as music. It is apparent that the two skills were closely integrated, with the performer singing and dancing simultaneously on occasion, a dramatic style of performance known as *abhinaya*. I have already noted the importance of dance in the story of Indian music and the West, and it is descriptions of music in the context of dance that form the bulk of European eyewitness accounts of Indian music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Europeans, unless they were musicologists or were deeply interested and immersed in Indian culture, seemed mainly to be exposed to music only within the context of dance entertainments. The image of the dancing-girl, with all its mysterious and lewd connotations, had become a central artistic representation of the East in the West in ballets and operas. McMunn, a retired army officer from India, gives an interesting description of what took place in Hamesha Behar's *kothā*, and shows that Western fascination with this kind of performance, an attitude laced with exoticism, romanticism, and prurience, carried over into the twentieth century.

From the large chamber within the darkened lattices there comes the luring throb of the little drum . . . Within one of the inner rooms where the velvety cushions are super-velvety, Azizun the dancer taps the floor quietly with her embroidered crimson and green shoe to supple the sinews . . . you can see every muscle under the soft olive skin of the bare abdomens and the transparent muslin of the dancers . . . ankle and bosom moving to the pipe, now in softness, now in frenzy.⁴⁸

And all this under the watchful eye of a portrait of King Edward. But, like some tabloid journalist of the present day, McMunn soberly takes his leave before 'some lured by soft arms and eyes retire behind the heavy curtains,

⁴⁶ Manuel 1989: 49–50.

⁴⁷ See also Neuman 1990: 100.

⁴⁸ McMunn 1931: 84–9.

amid the smell of musk and sandalwood', wistfully noting that 'It is in the scents perhaps that the allure lies strongest on the imagination'.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, despite the languid, dream-like sensuality of McMunn's description, there is also valuable information about the type of music and performance which took place in this particular *kothā*. He notes the ankle bells of the dancers, suggesting that the dance form is *kathak*. The ankle bells, which are considered sacred by the *kathak* dancer, are used in performance to accentuate the rhythms of the footwork, and are an indispensable part of the performance. The accompanying instruments in McMunn's description are *tabla*, (two-hand drums) and perhaps a *dhol* (a double-headed drum), a *shenai* (a double-reed wind instrument), and a 'zither'—probably a *tānpūrā* (a plucked lute which is played as a continuous drone or ostinato). As was typical of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practice, the musicians stood up to play, behind the dancers. Photographs from the time show musicians with slings in which they carried their instruments.⁵⁰

Dance forms such as *kathak* and vocal genres like *thumrī* are now accepted as vital elements of mainstream Indian classical culture, both in India and in the West. Yet in Gaisberg and McMunn's time, 'Outside police circles they would be unknown to the Western world in India.'⁵¹ The music and dance of the *kothā* would also have been unfamiliar to the majority of the Indian population. It is part of the story of Indian music and the West that, as the twentieth century progressed, music and musicians stigmatized as immoral and degenerate by large sections of the population, including, as noted in Chapter 2, academic musicians, came to gain status as carriers of classical musical culture. The gramophone industry played an important role in this process. With the first recordings, the music of the *kothā* was to move from a world of obscurity on to the mass market. Unwittingly, Gaisberg and other Western sound recordists were preserving in sound a crucial era in the history of Indian music and examples of a unique stratum of women's music making. From then on, *tawā'ifs* could be listened to in the respectability of middle-class Indian homes, through the neutral (and unscented) channel of the gramophone.

Nevertheless, on early discs women often had 'amateur' printed after their

names, to show that they were respectable, even though their music may have told a different story.

GTL now had the music and the discs, but how did they sell it to that vast, complex population that was the Indian public?

'The marvel of the twentieth century': Marketing the Gramophone in India

The executives of GTL quickly realized that, in India, they were sitting on a potentially huge market for their new product. Thomas Addis took over from Hawd in 1903 as GTL's agent in Calcutta, and was an energetic and tireless promoter of its Indian market, including the native, or 'vernacular', lists. Hawd left GTL under a cloud, and went off to free-lance in the Indian gramophone market, becoming something of a thorn in the flesh of his previous employers—but that is another story. GTL correspondence for the years 1903–5 shows not only the growth of the Indian market, but also some of the difficulties Addis encountered convincing his bosses back home of the commercial potential of local recordings and the cultural, linguistic, and logistical complexities of selling their product in India. In December 1903, a year after Gaisberg's first recording expedition, Addis wrote to London, analysing the market for recordings of Indian music and making some shrewd observations:

India is a peculiar country in regard to language as if you go 300 miles out of Calcutta you would find a different dialect altogether which would not be understood here and so on through every state and presidency. Each particular district has its own local and popular singers male and female, beside which there are a few amateur singers whose records would sell freely. Now it is this class of work that the better and middle class natives, who have the money enquire for and we are creditably informed the present sales are largely due to the excellent results obtained from the instruments [gramophones] alone, and that it is not the records themselves that are inducing the public to buy instruments.⁵²

Addis was making a point that provides an important historical window on the meaning of the gramophone in Indian society in the first years of the

⁴⁹ McMunn 1931: 89.

⁵⁰ Moore 1976: 106.

⁵¹ McMunn 1931: 82.

⁵² EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 23 Dec. 1903.

twentieth century. To the Indian middle classes who could afford one, the gramophone was a technological novelty and a status symbol in itself, quite aside from the music being played on it—a concept that would be exploited in later publicity material.

That the gramophone was also a status symbol with the really wealthy is underlined by correspondence in 1905 concerning requests from a 'wealthy Nawab' and the 'Maharaja Kumar of Cutch Behar' for custom-built gramophones. The nawab wanted:

something he could give from Rs. 8,000/- to Rs. 10,000/-, and feel that no one else could purchase such an instrument. . . . He also enquires what it would cost to make for him one thousand special Records, and whether we would be prepared to send a man out for this purpose.⁵³

The maharaja was after something even more elaborate: two special machines that would allow him to play twelve to fifteen records without rewinding, with coats of arms on the front of each machine.⁵⁴ Despite the large sums on offer, GTL was unable to oblige.

Addis realized that the industry could not run on novelty value indefinitely, and he was astute about the potential of regional language-based music as part of GTL's marketing strategy.

When arrangements were made for the next recording expedition, the regional diversity of Indian music was duly acknowledged, and South India was included on the itinerary. Addis had written: 'I should like to mention casually that the whole of South India has been untouched by us.'⁵⁵ The London office instructed Addis to extend the catalogue by 2,500 records, broken down by language as follows: 'Bengali 300, Hindustani 500, Gujarati 300, Mahratti 150, Tamil 300, Telegu 250, Canarese 200, Cingalese [sic] 200, Bhutian Nepaulese Thibetan [sic] 120, Sanscrit, Persian 120, Beluchi 60'.⁵⁶ Yet, two years after his earlier communication about this issue, he was still trying to convince the London office. This time he had done his research to back up the point:

We have taken records in various vernaculars, but we have not, in my opinion gone far enough into this matter. Permit me to fall back on figures to show the immense field there is to be developed in India:

⁵³ EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 8 June 1905.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 6 June 1904.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 3 Aug. 1905.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 6 Dec. 1904.

India. Total population (1901) 287,000,000
There are 147 vernaculars of extraordinary variety . . .

Hindi spoke by		60,000,000
Bengali	do	44,000,000
Bihari	do	47,000,000
Telegu	do	20,000,000
Mahrati	do	18,000,000

after which come Rajastani, Kanarese, Gujarati, Oriya, Burmese, Tamil, Malayalam, Pustu, pure Urdu etc, etc. The above figures convey, no doubt the enormous diversity under the name 'India'.⁵⁷

The attention given to the regional nature of Indian music by Addis is of interest in the wider historical context of the development of popular music forms in India in the twentieth century. By the middle of the 1950s and through to the 1970s the Indian popular music market would come to be dominated by *filmi* songs, songs from films, which were almost exclusively in Hindi or Urdu, and were 'an important expression and vehicle for a pan-ethnic urban social identity'.⁵⁸ It was a new recording technology, the cassette tape, that would break the hegemony of the Hindi pop song, and once again lead to a proliferation of recordings of regional styles and genres.⁵⁹

Back in 1903 the fact that there was no record-pressing plant in India was also giving Addis problems. Records had to be pressed in Europe. He was continually running out of stocks of Indian records, and had to fight an ongoing battle to convince the London office to send more copies and dispatch another recording expedition to both increase the list and record more and better artists. In September 1903 he wrote:

We are rather dissatisfied [sic] at the native records coming through so slowly especially when you consider that you have had the original records made here since the beginning of January last . . . We have only a few Bengali records and people are beginning to lose faith saying that they do not believe they are coming at all. The same thing will happen regarding Japanese, Chinese and other records . . . it will be quite another year before we shall be in a position to make a big move in the 'Eastern Trade'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid. 23 Dec. 1904.

⁵⁸ Manuel 1988a: 158.

⁵⁹ Manuel 1993.

⁶⁰ EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, Sept. 1903.

As an illustration of the popularity of Indian recordings, Addis wrote on the 8 June 1905 that all 300 copies of L. C. Boral's recordings were sold 'within half an hour of the time they were opened'. Elsewhere he notes a turnover of 4,000 native records in one day.⁶¹

Another major headache for Addis was the piracy by other Indian dealers of GTL trade marks, notably the term 'gramophone' and the famous 'His Master's Voice' picture showing a dog listening to a gramophone. An advertisement in the *Calcutta Morning Post* of February 1903 showed a Calcutta firm, the 'International Gramophone Depot' of Dhurumtalla Street, using a picture of the music-loving dog (with a slightly rabid look about him) to sell a variety of imported gramophones and accessories, 'All at American prices'. Such infringements led to many lawsuits, through which GTL established sole ownership of the now world-famous image.⁶² In 1906, GTL catalogues were offering 'Genuine Gramophone Needles in coloured boxes bearing our Famous Copyright Picture "His Master's Voice" '.

Between this and typewriter platens melting in the heat, shelves erected by an unreliable Chinaman crashing down and destroying large amounts of his stock, and 'No society—no amusements and scarcely a breath of cool air from one month end to another',⁶³ these were not easy days for Addis. It is little wonder that he was ill and absent for long periods by the middle of the decade.

During the first five years of the century, GTL's native list began to take shape, reflecting the regional and linguistic heterogeneity of India. The catalogues were published in all the major languages of the area, including Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telegu, and Malayalam. The list had also increased, due to a second more extensive recording expedition in 1904. During this tour, led by William Sinkler Darby, recordings were made throughout India, rather than just in the Calcutta area.

As the list increased, the question of publicity became of utmost importance. There were teething problems with the first catalogues, mainly due to the numbers of scripts and languages being employed:

It frequently happens that we submit the matter for a catalogue to a supposedly reliable man for correct translation, and then, when we submit the same matter to a second party, he discovers great errors. This is due no doubt to the great difference that exists in methods of writing the various vernaculars.⁶⁴

The spelling in the early catalogues is often a confused mix of Indian words and phonetic translations of English into Indian scripts. Nevertheless, Addis was aware of the business that could be gained by the production of properly translated catalogues with appropriate illustrations. Photographs in early catalogues show the big-selling celebrities such as Gauhar Jan, Malka Jan, and L. C. Boral, but it is the specially commissioned artwork in gramophone catalogues that are of particular interest, as they incorporate the history, religion, and social mores of Indian life in a striking manner. They are also an example of how the West tried to sell images of India to Indians.

The question of illustrations for GTL catalogues is first raised by Addis in a letter to London dated 19 January 1905. Apparently he had a small picture 'painted by a local artist here, and which we propose to use on the cover of our new Indian catalogue', but a Mr Wortman who had been visiting had taken the picture away by mistake, much to Addis's consternation. The picture in question was in three separate colours, and was to have appeared in a catalogue for 10-inch records in lots of 100,000. This latter figure indicates the way in which trade was increasing and the urgent demand for publicity with suitable pictures. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what picture Addis was alluding to, for several interesting paintings by local artists appear in catalogues during the years 1906–7. He could be referring to the one entitled 'The Gramophone in the Court of Jahangier the Magnificent' by one, Fred C. Rogers. (This curious concoction of past and present is discussed in detail below.) Or perhaps it was the picture of the goddess Sarasvatī, complete with gramophone, by G. N. Mukherji, which appears fronting a 1906 catalogue.

These and other paintings show the way in which GTL tried to target its Indian customers by mixing ancient and modern, by projecting the talking machine as an almost miraculous phenomenon worthy of taking its place in the realm of emperors and goddesses, or simply as an adjunct to social status and progress.

⁶¹ EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 8 June 1904.

⁶² *Ibid.* 9 May 1905.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 1 June 1904.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 7 May 1904.

In a 1907 catalogue the ubiquitous 'His Master's Voice' hound is pictured sitting in front of a new gramophone in a comfortable middle-class Indian household (Plate 1). The text is in Bengali, but the décor of the room and the dress of its inhabitants are a mix of Western and Indian. The gramophone is the focus, the centre-piece of the room. The status of the gramophone is reflected by the man of the house, who stands, arm outstretched, presumably extolling the wonders and virtues of the new technology, and presenting it proudly to his family and relatives. His wife stands at the other side of the table clearly delighted with this new acquisition. The couple's children, a boy and a girl, listen attentively, the boy leaning forward anxiously to catch the sounds of the wondrous machine. An elderly man, father or grandfather, sits to listen with a younger relative or friend; even a servant has been invited in to listen. The latter crouches on the floor wearing only a dhoti. The HMV dog sits beneath the gramophone, a corporate trade mark come to life in an Indian domestic scene. This is a dog which is welcome indoors, unlike most dogs in India, which are considered unclean and are rarely kept as domestic pets.

This picture is packed with social and cultural messages. The gramophone is an object, a possession, that represents a bridge between two cultural domains, the West and India, and as such is a symbol of the aspirations of the burgeoning Indian middle classes at the turn of the century. It is also a technological innovation that crosses generations. The pride of the up-and-coming couple in their new acquisition is evident. Their son, leaning forward, is moving towards a mass-mediated future. The grandfather spans the generations, and has lived to see the world change through the medium of recorded sound, even though his face is creased in amusement, perhaps at the younger ones and their fascination with this new toy. But relative status is maintained by the presence of the servant, who sits on the floor while the others sit in chairs, who is half-dressed, whose skin is noticeably darker than that of the others, and whose back is to the viewer. Technology democratizes, but not completely.⁶⁵

The inextricable link in India between religion and everyday life also did not escape the eye of the publicists. In one particularly striking image from



Plate 1. The marvels of the gramophone come to a middle-class Indian household. (EMI Music Archives, 1907.)

1906 (Plate 2), Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of arts and learning, is depicted in a rural idyll, perched on a lotus in the middle of a lake. On her knees is a *bīn*, a traditional stringed instrument, but rising from the water next to her, balanced on another huge lotus and seeming to merge with the neck of the instrument to replace the second gourd, is a gramophone. With one hand resting on the frets of her instrument, she places the needle on a disc with the other. Nearby flowers contain neat piles of discs ready to be selected and played. Fishes, crocodiles, frogs, tortoises, serpents, and a beautiful swan also listen.

This picture deftly incorporates the gramophone into a panoply of ancient symbols associated with Sarasvatī. Sarasvatī is the consort of Brahmā, and 'the goddess of wisdom, knowledge, science, art, learning and eloquence, the patroness of music and inventor of the Sanscrit language and Devanagari letters'.⁶⁶ She is also closely associated with flowing water (the River Sarasvatī

⁶⁵ See also Ehrlich 1976: 96–7 for a similar image used to sell pianos in the 1870s.

⁶⁶ Garrett 1990: 559.



Plate 2. The goddess Sarasvati discovers a new medium of sound in the gramophone. (EMI Music Archives, 1906.)

is in the present-day Indian state of Uttar Pradesh). She is traditionally depicted as fair-skinned, four-limbed, often holding a stringed instrument or a drum and a book of palm leaves to symbolize her love of knowledge. Her vehicle is a swan, symbol of 'the whiteness or purity of learning and the power of discrimination, which is the essential quality for the acquisition of saving knowledge'.⁶⁷ Sarasvatī usually appears in a vernal scene, due to her association with the beginning of spring. But she also has a particular relationship with sound and hearing. One mythological account has a special resonance for the coming of the gramophone:

In the Santiparva it is related that when the Brahmarshis were performing austerities, prior to the creation of the universe, 'a voice derived from Brahmā entered into the ears of them all; the celestial Sarasvatī was then produced from the heavens'.⁶⁸

Thus the gramophone enters the aural universe of Indian mythology, bringing music to the masses of India, or at least that part of the masses that could afford it, at anything up to 250 rupees a machine.

⁶⁷ Morgan 1987: 106. ⁶⁸ Garrett 1990: 559; emphasis added.



Plate 3. The goddess Durgā uses the magical properties of the gramophone to subdue wild beasts. (EMI Music Archives, 1907.)

Sarasvatī was not the only goddess to feature in the catalogues. An illustration from 1907 (Plate 3) shows the goddess Durgā surrounded by wild beasts—tigers, lions, and pythons—that have been subdued by the music of the gramophone. Durgā, the consort of Siva, is a terrifying figure in the Hindu pantheon, often depicted as the goddess of destruction in her incarnation as Kālī. The image of Kālī was also invoked as a ferocious symbol of religious nationalism during the first decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁹

But Durgā also has a virtuous side, which is on display in the company of the gramophone. The many beasts that surround her appear to be tamed by the music of the gramophone. The lion is traditionally the *vāhana* (vehicle) of Durgā, and symbolizes her strength in the continuing battle between good and evil. The tiger is associated with the goddess Kātyānī, and the deer with Vāyu, the wind god.⁷⁰ Durgā leans her arm on the serpent, which is crushed under the gramophone, showing that she is impervious to this powerful, dangerous beast.

⁶⁹ Hechs 1993. ⁷⁰ Morgan 1987: 104–5.

Traditionally this type of image also appears in the iconography of Indian music, and is associated with the *rāgmālā* (miniature painting) depicting the *rasa* (mood or flavour) of the *rāginī Tōrī*, who through her beauty and skill on the *vīnā* has charmed the animals out of the forest to listen. A deer is always prominent in this representation.⁷¹ This timeless image has been cleverly transposed to suit the new technology of the gramophone.

Sometimes the publicity images for the gramophone company in India move into the realms of the surreal. A truly curious example of this is found in the 1905 catalogue, with the heading 'The Gramophone in the Court of Jahangir the Magnificent' (Plate 4). The Moghul emperor Jahangir reigned between 1605 and 1627, a period when European contact with India was on the increase. This illustration shows the splendour of the Moghul court, complete with attendants and concubines enraptured by the presence of a gramophone. The meeting has the look of a *darbār*, or official meeting, in the presence of the Emperor. Such events were noted for their lavish, luxurious shows of wealth. In 1902 Hawd had written that he hoped to display gramophones at the Delhi Durbar.⁷² But who has presented this wonderful gift for the delectation of a monarch in the seventeenth century? No supplicant is visible, but only an armed guard, who stands grimly by the machine. It would appear that the gramophone has arrived of its own volition—not only a talking machine, but also a time machine.

In this picture the marvellous nature of the gramophone has allowed it to skip centuries into a period in which Indian history is penetrated by Western technology. The message is clear: if these machines had been around at that time, even Jahangir would have wanted one. Curiously, perhaps, Jahangir is credited with being the first Indian emperor to have a Western instrument at his court. In 1616 he received a virginal as a gift from King James. It is doubtful whether the 1906 picture is a direct reference to that incident; rather, it is an odd example of historical coincidence. However, it is recorded that Jahangir soon became bored with the virginal.⁷³ Would the same fate have awaited the time-travelling gramophone?



Plate 4. The gramophone travels in time—a suitable gift for a Moghul emperor. (EMI Music Archives, 1905.)

By the end of the decade, Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd. had established a pressing plant in Calcutta, and was well on the way to becoming the dominant recording company on the Indian subcontinent well into the middle of the twentieth century and beyond. The correspondence and publicity of those years offer a rare glimpse of the logistics and cultural complexities involved in the gestation of a mass medium.

But what of Indian music and the new technology? How did musicians mould their performances to suit the time span of a disc? It is to this dimension of the early days of the gramophone in India that I finally turn.

Musical Form on Early Indian Recordings

Writing in 1942 Fred Gaisberg observed:

Thirty years have elapsed since my first visit to India. We found music there static and after a few years there was very little traditional music left to record. Songs for

⁷¹ Deneck 1967: 39.

⁷² EMI Music Archives, Indian correspondence, 6 Nov. 1902.

⁷³ Foster 1926: 48, 76.

festivals and weddings were already in our catalogue and new artists were learning their repertoire from gramophone records.⁷⁴

No doubt Gaisberg had little appreciation or understanding of Indian music to back up his claim that the music was static; indeed, all other evidence points to the fact that the early twentieth century was a time of great change in Indian music, with many forms moving from the court to the concert platform or into the university classroom. However, his final comment is intriguing. As a way of disseminating musical material, the gramophone was unprecedented, and it was inevitable that artists would copy songs from records. In fact, recording was the perfect tool for such endeavours. The record could be played repeatedly and copied, without recourse to a teacher or notation. But what exactly was being copied, in terms of musical form? And how did recorded versions of *khyāl*, *thumrī*, and other traditional genres relate to live performances? Were the recordings in fact 'constructions', rather than 'reproductions', of Indian music? Or, put another way, was the music that appeared on discs the creature of recording technology, rather than a representation of traditional Indian music performances?

Manuel has noted that throughout the history of recording in India, certain forms of music have been neglected because of the limited time on discs. He cites genres such as Braj *dhola* and Budelkhandi *Alha*, whose extended ballad forms were unsuitable for recording.⁷⁵ Many of the forms that did appear in the first recordings of Indian music were also unsuitable for rendition in two or three minutes, notably the vocal genre *khyāl*, of which Gauhar Jan recorded several examples.

In the present day a performance of *khyāl* is likely to involve extensive, elaborate improvisation, and there is little evidence to suggest that live performances of *khyāl* and other genres differed, at least in terms of duration, at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, it should also be borne in mind that the stamina and creative powers of Indian musicians have always been exaggerated at an anecdotal level. For example, it is reported that performances of *batānā*, a mixture of singing, usually *thumrī*, and dance, performed by courtesans could last up to three hours on a single piece.⁷⁶ Similarly, the practice regimes of Indian musicians are given epic qualities, which include reports of regular

⁷⁴ Gaisberg 1942: 58.⁷⁵ Manuel 1993: 39.⁷⁶ Misra 1990: 98.

14- and 16-hour stints and other marathons of endurance.⁷⁷ Such tales are told to inspire students and instil in them respect for their gurus.

But, exaggeration apart, live performances of Indian music at the turn of the century were open-ended in duration, as witnessed by this quote from Fox-Strangways about the performance of an *ustād* that he heard during his 6-month period of field-work in India during the first decade of the twentieth century:

The phrases are finished off and fit so well into their place, there is so much variety and so much telling gesture, that the time goes quickly by, although you may find that . . . he has sung for at least half an hour continuously.⁷⁸

There are also eyewitness accounts of Gauhar Jan, Malka Jan, and others giving extensive live performances of *khyāl* and *thumrī*.⁷⁹

Following the first recordings, Indian music performance existed in two worlds: the extended live performance and the two- or three-minute duration of the disc. It has been suggested that this represented a further distinction between performance practice at the courts and that in the urban milieu of musical entertainment.⁸⁰ However, that the short duration of the discs caused problems for musicians is indicated by the fact that in the early days many performers of Indian music refused to be recorded, because they found it contrary to the spirit of their art. Fox-Strangways reports one such incident with the singer Chandra Prabhu:

She compelled respect at once by refusing on any account to be phonographed; perhaps she thought, amongst other things, that if she committed her soul to a mere piece of wax it might get broken in the train . . . She sang for an hour, three songs.⁸¹

Here, both the musician's aesthetic feelings about recording and the disparity in time duration are underlined.⁸² Feedback from a live audience is also an important ingredient of Indian music performances. As the performance unfolds, listeners interject exclamations of approval and astonishment at virtuosic passages. Such crucial interplay was absent in the recording situation,

⁷⁷ Neuman 1990: 33; Shankar 1968: 51.⁷⁹ Misra 1990: 99–100.⁸¹ Fox-Strangways 1914: 90.⁸² This was also the response of some Western musicians in the early days of recording—e.g. the pianist Artur Schnabel.⁷⁸ Fox-Strangways 1914: 89–90.⁸⁰ Kinnear, personal communication, 1992.

especially in India at the turn of the century, when the only audience present consisted of Western sound recordists who did not appreciate or understand what was going on. An important source of musical inspiration and affirmation was thus denied the performers. Even in the present day, when musicians are used to studios, Manuel notes how canned exclamations such as 'Wah! Wah!' are dubbed on to recordings of popular *ghazals* to reproduce the excitement and immediacy of live performances.⁸³

In one sense the early recordings were no more than snapshots of particular genres and styles of performance. But they provide clues as to how musicians dealt with the short amount of time available, as well as insights into the way in which Indian musical form was adapted to suit the new technology. On disc, time constraints throw the essential structural features of Indian music into sharp relief. Musical procedures which usually involve detailed extemporization and exploration in live performance are poured through the sieve of recording technology and time limitation until only the essentials remain.

In order to illustrate some features of this process, I will look in more detail at one example, a *khyāl* by Gauhar Jan from 1907, 'Etne Yauwan Dāmān Nā Kariye', ('I can no longer contain my youthful exuberance'), in the pentatonic *rāg Bhūpālī*. On this recording Gauhar Jan was accompanied by a *sārangī* and a *tabla*. The *sārangī* has an important role in *khyāl*, as a support to the vocal line, shadowing every subtle nuance and inflection of the voice.

In general, *khyāl* is considered to be a more abstract and classical genre than *thumrī*, although the latter shows the influence of the former. In *khyāl* the sound and syllables of the words are used as vehicles for abstract vocalizing, with the literal meaning of the text, which is usually on a romantic or religious theme, of secondary importance. The lyrics in a *khyāl* are usually heard only once in their complete form, thereafter becoming the source for improvisation. This is not to say that no improvisation with syllables takes place in *thumrī* and other vocal genres; it does, but there is more emphasis on the meaning of the words, rather than the sound. In this sense *thumrīs* are more like 'songs' than *khyāl*.

The term *khyāl* comes from the Urdu word meaning 'thought' or 'imagination'. By the turn of the twentieth century, *khyāl* had become the most

widely performed classical genre of vocal music in northern India, supplanting the older, austere vocal form called *dhrupad*. *Khyāl* is thought to be a synthesis of vocal forms such as *dhrupad* and *qawwālī*, the latter a type of Sufi devotional song.⁸⁴ *Khyāl* developed into a distinctive genre of performance characterized by virtuosic vocal extemporization and dramatic bravura passages, both musically and visually gripping.

A live performance of *khyāl* falls into several sections: a slow, composed section as *bara* (large) and a faster composed section called *chotā* (small). These can be set to various *tāl*s, but a common format is slow, *ektāl* (12 beats), and fast, *tintāl* (16 beats). In *khyāl* there are no extended *ālāps* (slow unmetred preludes) as in *dhrupad* or instrumental music, although detailed *ālāp*-like improvisation takes place at the beginning of the slow section, albeit with a metrical accompaniment. This is often performed to a very slow basic beat known stylistically as *atī-vilambī*. The performance opens with a few phrases of the *rāg* sung in *ālāp* style, then moves directly to the composed sections. Extemporization takes the form of slow explorations of the syllables of words and fast melodic passages called *tāns* using either pitch names (SA, RE, GA, etc.) or *ākār* (using the vocable 'ā'). There is also great cross-rhythmic interplay, known as *laykārī*. An extended performance of *khyāl* is open-ended in duration.

How is it possible to perform such music as this in 3 minutes? Gauhar Jan's recording offers some insight.

'Etne Yauwan Daman Na Kariye', which is an example of a *chotā khyāl* in *tintāl*, lasts approximately 2 minutes and 23 seconds. Typical of Indian melodies, this example is in two main parts: a non-metrical opening, the *mukhrā* of the composition, and a *cīz* or *bandīs* (composition), which is the fixed part of the composition, in *tāl*, and is in two sections, *sthāī* and *antarā*, which are followed by sections of improvisation based on the *sthāī* part of the *cīz*.

There is a clear sense of balance and shape in the way in which Gauhar Jan fits the form of *khyāl* into the short time span of this disc. The *ālāp* takes the form of a single sounding of the tonic note SA, followed by the opening phrase, the *mukhrā*, of the *sthāī*. The *sthāī* is the most important part of the

⁸³ Manuel 1993: 98.⁸⁴ Wade 1979: 169.

composition, as it delineates the metre of the piece and forms the basis for subsequent improvisations. Gauhar Jan sings the *sthāī* three times before giving a brief rendition of the *antarā*, once only, before repeating the *sthāī*. In total, the fixed composition takes 1 minute, or almost half the total recording time.

The improvisations take the form of *tāns* (sweeping melodic phrases), with a return to the *mukhrā* at the end of each phrase. In Gauhar Jan's recording the longest improvised break spans two whole cycles of sixteen beats, returning to a compressed version of the *mukhrā* at the end of each phrase. After two such improvisations, forming the central part of the recording, the improvisations shorten to one cycle before returning to the *sthāī*.

However, it seems that Gauhar Jan was caught out on this particular occasion, as the disc ends half-way through a cycle rather than on the first beat, as would be typical in Indian music, leaving her a few seconds to announce (in English with flirtatious flair) 'My name is Gauhar Jan'. Such announcements are a feature of early Indian recordings. It has been suggested that this practice was purely for reasons of novelty;⁸⁵ but it may also have been a form of advertising. The announcements are not always in English, and on one recording, Malka Jan announces not only her name but also her address!

How is the form of *khyāl* reconciled on Gauhar Jan's recording? Within its own terms it is a perfectly balanced performance, giving equal weight, in time, to composed and improvised parts. However, the time demands unbalance the traditional performance practices associated with *khyāl*. Rendition of the *sthāī* and *antarā* would never take up half the performance of live *khyāl*. Indeed, they might be sung in their entirety only once or twice in an extended performance. Extemporization of various kinds would take up something like 90–5 per cent of performance time.

The analysis of performance in terms of proportions of composed and improvised sections is particularly apt in the context of recording, where the musician has to decide what to include or leave out. Such decisions have a different meaning in the unfolding of a temporally open-ended live performance. Although I do not wish to generalize too much from one example, I suggest that one possible effect of the short duration of early recordings was to lead artists to give greater weight to the composed, or fixed, parts of the

performance, at the expense of more developmental forms of improvisation.

Nevertheless, the flexibility of Indian musical form undoubtedly helped in its transition to the medium of records, though early instrumental records, in particular, sound fragmented. For example, 1904 records of the great sitar player Imdad Khan, grandfather of Vilayat Khan, suffer from lack of time; and what we are left with are tantalizing glimpses of complete sitar performances, sectionalized and taken out of context—an *ālāp*, a *ḥor*, but without the overarching coherence of a complete performance. In this case the recording cannot contain the form.

Later, especially in recordings of instrumental music, Indian musicians found other ways to work around the time constraints in keeping with Indian musical form, especially after the introduction of two-sided discs. Sitar players performed *ālāp* with *surbahār* (bass sitar) on one side of the disc, and a *gat* (fixed composition) with sitar on the other side. But even though this pointed up the different movements of the *rāg* there was still not enough time to give a detailed rendition.

Much research remains to be done on the formal effects of recording on Indian music performances, but general observations suggest that Indian musicians readily adapted their recorded performances as the technology changed. The advent of LPs in the 1960s led to longer performances, and it is now not uncommon to hear extended performances of one or two *rāgs* for 70 or 80 minutes on compact discs.

The early days of the gramophone industry in India were important for musicians. This period is in many ways unique, as it represents a musical culture in transition—crossing over from a world of patronage to one of global mass media. That moment is captured in sound by the early recordings of the Gramophone Company. Therefore they occupy a central place in the study of Indian music and the West, although, even now, they have received little attention in the literature of ethnomusicology. Not only is there a wealth of historical and cultural material to be explored, but also a large body of extant recordings by prominent Indian musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The recordings mark the beginning of one of the largest recording industries in the world. From then on records would be used for

⁸⁵ Joshi 1988: 148.



Plate 5. Dancing girls, the quintessential symbol of the sensual and mysterious East, emerge from the horn of a gramophone. (EMI Music Archives, 1907.)

every purpose, from entertainment to the mass dissemination of information on health and hygiene, and in politics as part of the Swadeshi movement during the struggle for independence from Britain. The advent of the recording industry in India proved to be a musical and social phenomenon of enormous significance.

It seems appropriate to end this chapter with one final illustration from those early days. In a 1907 catalogue the HMV hound tilts his head in that quizzical way as two dancing-girls, complete with ankle bells, emerge from the horn of a gramophone to spin on the rotating disc (Plate 5). Surely there could be no more fitting symbol of Indian music's emergence into the twentieth century through the medium of recorded sound.