



Daffodil Day

Daffodil Day is a special occasion celebrated on 20 August to spread hope, kindness, and awareness about cancer. On this day, people wear or buy daffodils to show support for cancer patients, survivors, and their families. The bright yellow daffodil symbolizes strength, courage, and new beginnings. Many schools, organizations, and communities organize fundraising events to support cancer research and patient care. Volunteers work hard to raise awareness and encourage people to contribute to this noble cause. Daffodil Day reminds us that even small acts of generosity can make a big difference in the lives of those facing cancer.

#SUDHA MURTY

The Postcard That Changed a Career

While walking past a notice board advertising engineering opportunities, she noticed a discriminatory condition: Ladies need not apply...



"Ladies need not apply?" When Sudha Murthy's Postcard to J.R.D. Tata Broke the Glass Ceilings For Women



In 1974, a young engineering student at Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore encountered a moment that would later become one of the most widely told stories of determination and quiet defiance in Indian professional history. While walking past a notice board advertising engineering opportunities, she noticed a discriminatory condition: Ladies need not apply. That student was Sudha Murthy. According to widely recounted accounts of the incident, she was deeply disturbed by the exclusion. The message was not just a job advertisement, it reflected a broader barrier that women engineers routinely faced at the time. Rather than accepting it silently, she chose to respond. Instead of applying for the position, Sudha Murthy wrote a postcard addressed to the higher authorities of the company but she felt that she didn't know who headed the company. But she knew the face of the parent organization. So, she wrote in his name. She asked one simple question: How can a pioneering company discriminate on gender basis? She objected to the discriminatory nature of the advertisement, expressing her frustration that qualified women engineers were being explicitly excluded. It was a simple act, just a postcard, but it carried a powerful challenge to institutional bias. The message eventually reached the leadership of the Tata group, one of India's

Most of these early women on record were courtesans, acutely aware of the precarity of traditional male patronage. They adopted recording technology since it came with the promise of new audiences, wider markets, stardom and freedom. It was an astute move, taken at a time when nationalist fervour was increasingly casting a stigma on their profession. "By disembodiment music from its physical source, the technology could uncouple their music and their persona and thereby could make the music of these morally 'suspected' women 'safe' for mass consumption, the artist and the audience both would remain physically invisible to each other."

Kotha To The Gramophone



Jankibai.



The book cover of 'Jalsa: Indian Women and their Journeys from the Salon to the Studio.'

Bulbul Joshi

The invention of gramophone and cylinder records by Thomas Alva Edison in 1877 marked the dawn of a new era in the world of music. In 1898, Emile Berliner introduced the flat discs for recording. Initially, all recordings were done through voice horns which were replaced by electrical carbon microphones in 1925. Then came the magnetic tape, followed by vinyl discs 45 rpm and 33 1/3 rpm turning the old 78 rpm shellac records into antique pieces. The first recording of Indian voice was done in 1899 by F.W. Gaisberg in the Gramophone Company's studios at London. The old catalogue mentions the names of singers as Dr. Harnamdas, Capt. Bholanath, Hazrat and Ahmed, then living in London. They sang or recited in Persian, Hindi and Urdu

but, unfortunately, none of these records have been traced so far. Considering the great potential of this industry in India, the Gramophone Company set up its office in Calcutta in 1901. Within a year or so, its leading technical expert F.W. Gaisberg landed in Calcutta with his recording team. In the glorious journey of the musical history of North India played a pivotal role always. In the era of the Gramophone, the scenario of the musical field was changed by technology. Tawaif, the women performer community was introduced once again and they became the singing sensation of the Gramophone Era. Vidya Shah recalls feeling vaguely insulted by the words accompanying a gift she received right after a concert in the spring of 2008. An elderly audience member had walked up to the Hindustani vocalist and handed her two mixtapes with the words: "Yeh suno, yeh hai asli gana" (listen to this, this is real music).

The inlay card, however, did something to assuage her plique. On it were names of women singers from the earliest 78 RPM era, of whom she knew only two, the ageless Mallika Pukhraj and the star Gauhar Jaan. But who were Kitijaan, Umda Jaan, Kajjanbai or Kamala Jharvi? "The quality of the sound on the tape was really bad, but I was very taken by the familiarity of some of the music," recalled Shah. "I knew many of the bandishes and ghazals. But there were many I didn't know either. What was I to make of the boldness of some of the lyrics? For example, the ghazal Tum ek bosa karo inayat (bestow upon me a kiss) by Bai Sunderabai. Who were these women? Who were their ustads? Where did they come from? How did they navigate the hierarchies of gender and status? And what kind of agency did the first recorded musicians have?" Her curiosity sparked a decade-long quest that opened up a new

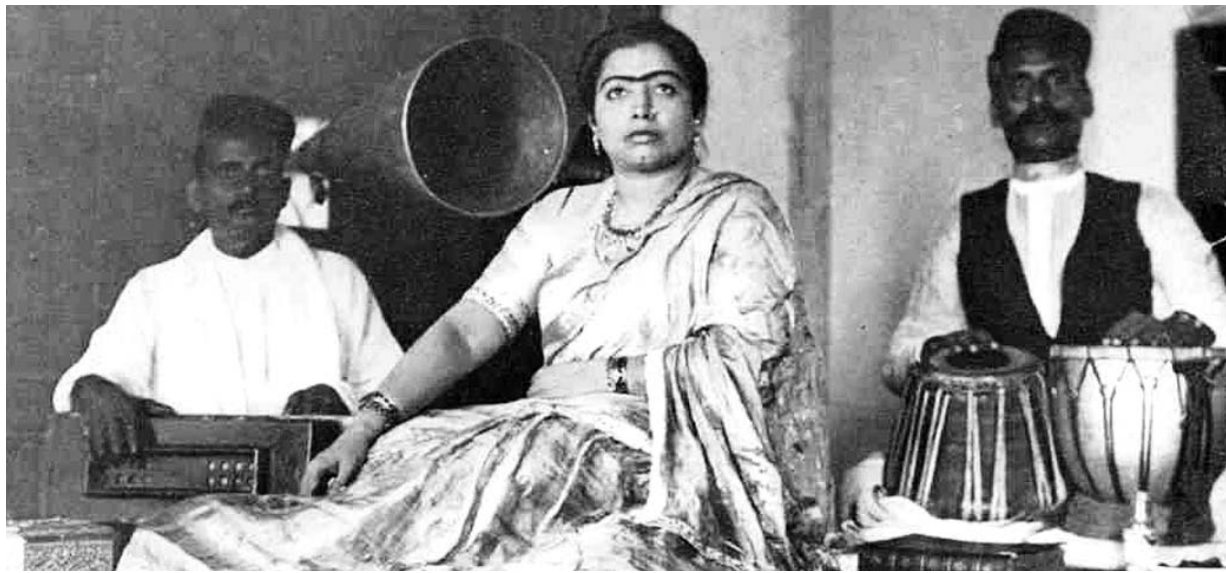
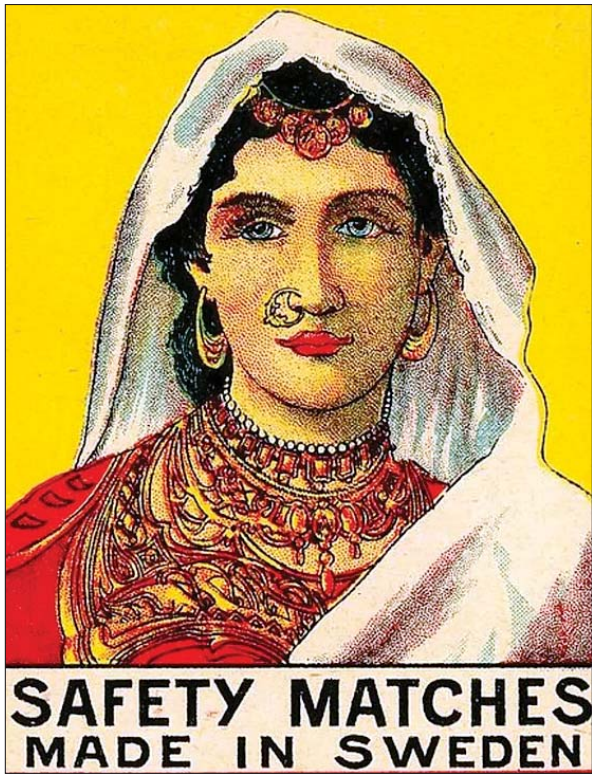
world for her and for music lovers: the world of fabulously talented women musicians of the early 20th century who fearlessly embraced the unfamiliar realm of recorded music even as ustads and pandits debated whether this new technology was black magic or a vulgar threat to their high art. Most of these early women on record were courtesans, acutely aware of the precarity of traditional male patronage. They adopted recording technology since it came with the promise of new audiences, wider markets, stardom and freedom. It was an astute move, taken at a time when nationalist fervour was increasingly casting a stigma on their profession. "By disembodiment music from its physical source, the technology could uncouple their music and their persona and thereby could make the music of these morally

rose to recording stardom. There was Janki Bai, whose popularity was marred by violence, but whose new record releases drew traffic jams on market streets. And there was Rasoolan Bai, who, despite her undisputed talent, died in penury. Today, there is extensive scholarship on the public women of the colonial era and the undervalued cultural traditions they left behind. This includes Saba Dewan's acclaimed documentary The Other Song and book Tawaifnama and Vikram Sampath's biographies of Gauhar Jaan and Bangalore Rathnamma. There is also considerable research on nautch girls, their communities, their place in elite courts, salons and streets, and the epic lives of figures like Umraro Jaan and Bindini Das. But when Shah began, little was known about how their voices came to be etched into the hard grooves of music records. "But I find that some of the real stories are now lost in the retelling," said Shah. "You have to set their context, so that they are not reduced to cliches. For instance, sing 'Rangi sari gulabi' from their repertoire by all means, but also make sure you explain to the audience where it came from."

as singers, actors and producers. Shah's research project, titled Women On Record, eventually yielded the book Jalsa: Indian Women and their Journeys from the Salon to the Studio, a traveling music show and an accompanying collection of art curated by her husband, photographer and filmmaker Parthiv Shah. The project documented the stories of entrepreneurial courtesans, early moguls of the indigenous recording industry, and the interface between the two. The women in Jalsa had arresting life stories, tales of exploitation, poverty and humiliation, but also of amazing triumphs. There was Indubala, who came from a family of circus performers and dreamt of a career in nursing, but instead



Gauhar Jaan.



Gauhar Jaan was one of the biggest stars of the 78 RPM era.

#ASLI GANA



Melawa (Melba) Devi from Nepal.



Indubala Sings.

Angurbala Devi.

Natural fit

They came by many names, gaanevali, tawaif, public women, kothewali, domni, nautch girls, among them. Today, there is extensive scholarship on the public women of the colonial era and the undervalued cultural traditions they left behind. This includes Saba Dewan's acclaimed documentary The Other Song and book Tawaifnama and Vikram Sampath's biographies of Gauhar Jaan and Bangalore Rathnamma. There is also considerable research on nautch girls, their communities, their place in elite courts, salons and streets, and the epic lives of figures like Umraro Jaan and Bindini Das. But when Shah began, little was known about how their voices came to be etched into the hard grooves of music records. "But I find that some of the real stories are now lost in the retelling," said Shah. "You have to set their context, so that they are not reduced to cliches. For instance, sing 'Rangi sari gulabi' from their repertoire by all means, but also make sure you explain to the audience where it came from."

Collectors, and Amian Dasgupta's scholarship. Saleem Kidwai's knowledge of Lucknow and its arts also served as a source, as did media anthropologist Steve Hughes and arts writer S. Kalidas. Shah's research, covering the early 20th century to the independence years, took her to big courtesan hubs such as Patna, Lucknow, Kanpur, Benares and Kolkata. On her trips, she explored the collections and stately homes of former patrons, interviewed researchers who delved into the lives of local bais...

having "miserable voices." But soon after, he discovered the supremely talented and flamboyant Gauhar Jaan, who, according to Jalsa, went on to record nearly 400 songs in 20 languages. There are many reasons why courtesan artistes embraced the recording industry so naturally and why the industry sought them out eagerly too. Early recording machines, Shah writes, were more suitable to women's voices, so much so that the few men who recorded, such as Pearsa Saheb, had to mimic women to be heard. Equally importantly, unlike male singers who could afford to be high-nosed about their art, the bais and Jaans understood the open market and its insecurities. For all the stardust around them, they

remained on society's periphery, their music labelled "entertainment" and sexualised. What the recording industry did was free them from this ignominy by removing their physical presence from their music and taking their voices into middle-class homes and zenanas, where they were otherwise not welcome. "These stars seem to have been better known and more popular than any Hollywood or India's silent film stars of those days," Shah writes. Transformative shift

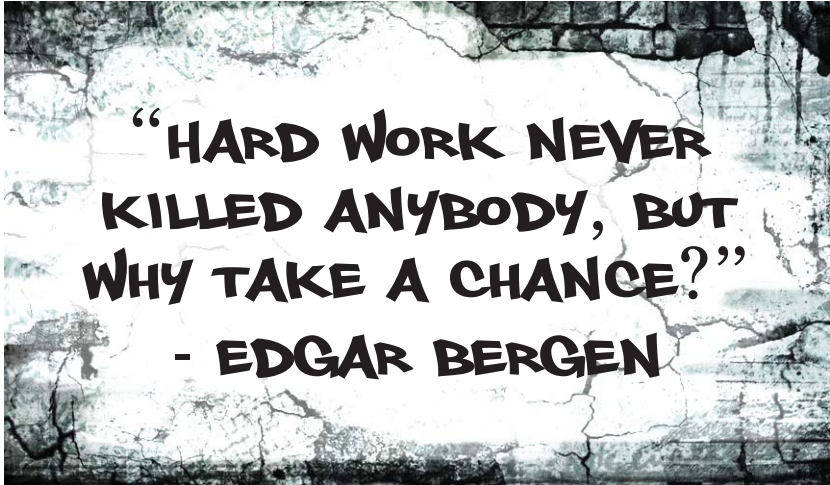
What kind of music did these women bring to gramophones? Most of them had received formal training, though it was often given generously and wholeheartedly, says Shah. "There was little information available, they were taught mostly by the sarangiwas," she said. "The ustads taught them bits and pieces. Kesari Bai was an example of this. You rarely hear of them in association with a gharana, for instance. Some would not be taught, say the antara, and be left to figure it out on their own." Despite this, they entered recording studios armed with a formidable repertoire, khayal, thumri, dadra, chaithi, saavan, hori and more. The non-khayal forms lent themselves more readily to the record, being shorter and livelier. Yet, some khayal specialists mastered the art of compressing expansive compositions into the three-minute format. Zohrabai Agrewali was considered the most adept at this skill. At a more abstract level, the new format upended established ideas of creativity and the aural experience of Hindustani classical music. When performed live, this music was, and remains, ephemeral: a composition is rarely rendered the same way twice and a raag is seldom framed identically even by the same musician. Recorded music, by contrast, invited repeated savouring. For aspiring musicians, this shift was transformative. "Their first lessons came engraved on the grooves of 78 RPM discs, and the

attendance of live performances followed," writes Shah. Narayanrao Vyas famously quipped that he had thousands of students he had never met. As anti-nautch sentiment grew, finding institutional expression in the 1952 ban on tawails from AIR studios, many of these women made a shrewd transition from recording studios to theatre and cinema, where they found greater acceptance. Among them was the entrepreneurial Jaddan Bai, who moved from Varanasi to Bombay and built a career in films as an actor, singer, and producer. She also famously ran a salon that attracted leading intellectuals and promoted her daughter Nargis in Hindi cinema. With nationalism at its peak, many made sure to record their own versions of "Vande Mataram," Mogubai Kurdikar's in raga Khambavati was one and Siddheshwari Devi's was another. The women on record were nothing if not resiliently versatile.



Zohrabai.

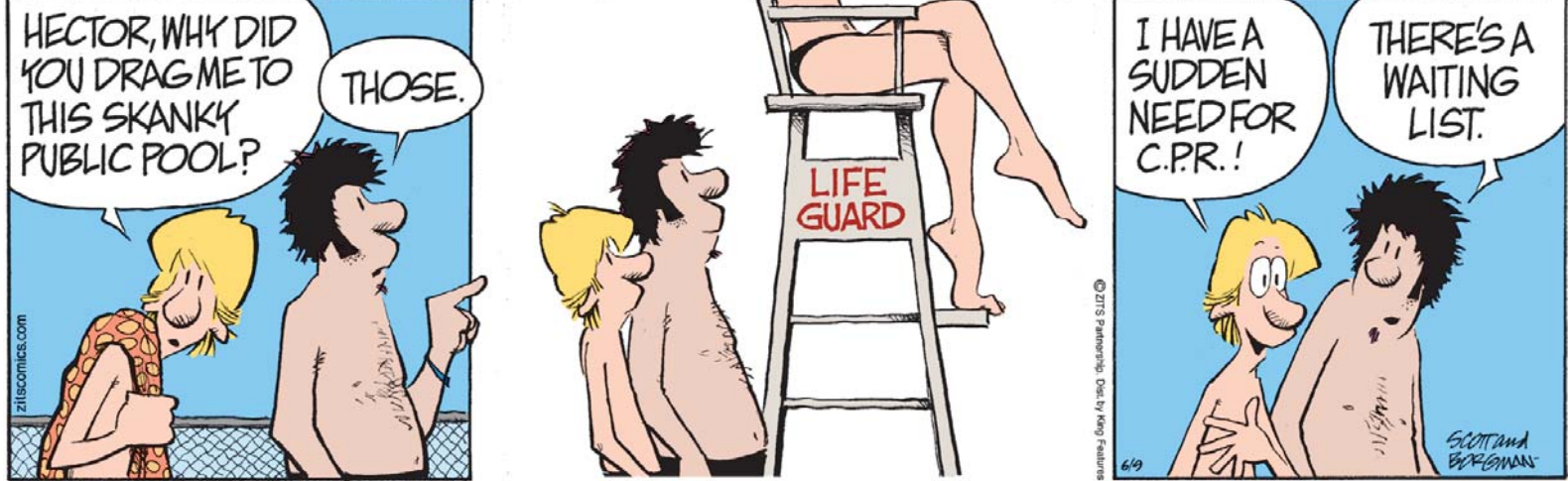
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman