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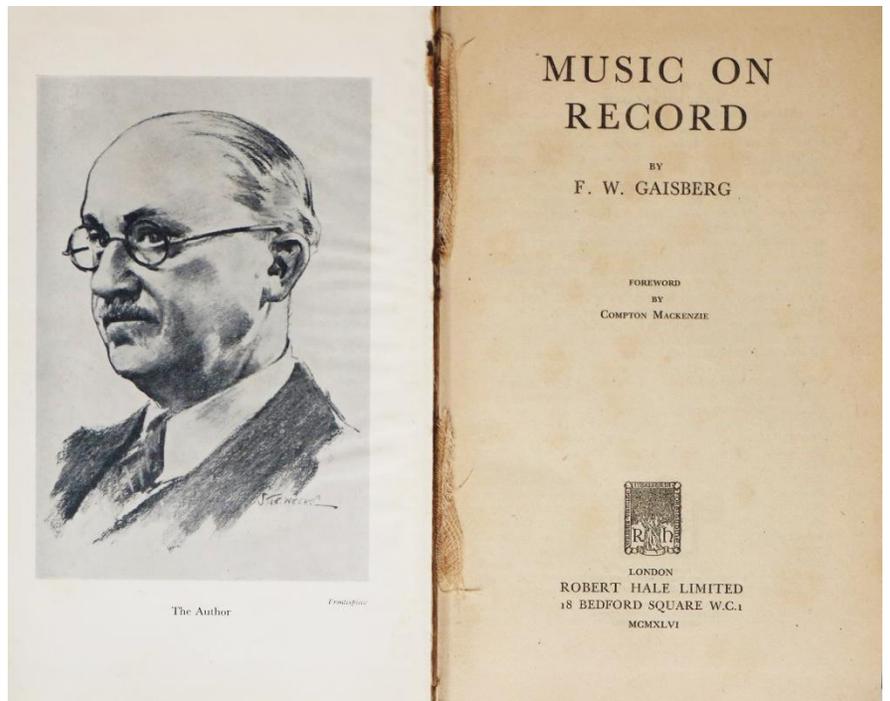
“Collection, preservation, documentation and Digitisation of ethnic recordings made in India in the acoustic recording process on shellac 78 rpm gramophone records”.

Sound Recordings in Indian languages were first made in England in 1899 and released as seven inch size, single side records - “E. BERLINER’S GRAMOPHONE”. No sample of these 44 recordings have been traced. In 1901, an office of the Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd. was opened in Calcutta. Recording engineer, Frederick William Gaisberg came to Calcutta in November 1902 with a recording machine. Popular singers of Calcutta were reluctant to record their sound. So Gaisberg had to be satisfied with recording the songs of dancing girls of a local drama troupe. Historically, the records of dancing girl, Soshi Mukhi (14 years old) is important as the first recordings made in India by an Indian. For the second day of recording, Gaisberg succeeded in persuading Miss. Gauharjan (Gaurajan) the most famous dancer-singer of Calcutta at that time. Like the recordings of Enrico Caruso and Melba, the recording of Miss. Gauharjan gave the starting momentum to gramophone records in India.



Miss. Soshi Mukhi

Recordings were taken using wax process, but recordings taken up to 1908 have a low quality. In 1908, new machines came and recordings improved. Many record labels from Europe like Nicole, Odeon, Pathe, Beka, Elephone, Heywa and many local entrepreneurs took recordings locally and got records pressed abroad. In 1912, England imposed embargo on imports from Germany and the Gramophone Company got the monopoly in record industry for the next 15 years. During this period, they made nearly 12,000 recordings (6,000 records). In 1928



new electrical process recording was introduced in India by the Gramophone Company and other companies from Europe re-entered with their labels like Odeon, Parlophon and Columbia. Electrical recordings were superior in quality. For a few more years, Gramophone Company marketed few of the acoustic recordings on “Twin”, a low priced label introduced in 1928. After 1930, nobody cared about the old acoustic records. As raw material for making new records and for sales promotion, buy back of old acoustic records for new electrical recordings were introduced by record companies. Till the 1930s,

gramophones and records were very costly and the number of copies of records issued were limited, As a result, only around 10% of the recordings made in the acoustic era survived.

The last two years journey after the forgotten old recordings of forgotten Artists was memorable. It widened my knowledge about the early recordings. I met many collectors who boasted that they have a very good collection of very old records. But, almost all these collections go back till the early 1930s when there was a boom in gramophone record production in India. Till early 1930s, there were

a few companies which made gramophones and records. In the early 1930s, many business men imported parts of gramophones, assembled them in boxes made locally and marketed gramophones at prices as low as 1/3rd the price of similar machines imported. This gave a boost in the sale of machines and records and boosted the chances of many artists. But the negative impact was the neglect of the early period artists and their recordings. This was mainly due to the change in the recording system from acoustical to electrical which drastically improved the recordings. Since these recordings were inferior, very few of the recordings by famous Artists were reissued in the electrical era. Companies bought back old acoustic records in exchange of new records at a discount. Even now, these old recordings of historic and ethnic value have no takers. I found a copy of the first recording in India by an Indian Artist, in a lot of discarded records in a Calcutta flea market. This single side record has a song by Miss. Soshi Muki, a 14 year old dancing girl. None of her many recordings taken on 8th November 1902 were re-issued and are very rare. Even the songs of the famous Singer cum dancer Miss Gauharjan, whose many songs were recorded during the period 1902 to 1912 ,were not reissued after 1916. In 1908, the Gramophone company made a special recording program to record songs by Coimbatore Thaiy and all her songs were released on premium priced violet records. Even the recordings by Coimbatore Thaiy could not pass to the 1930s.

The acoustic records differ in content from the electrical records due to many factors. In South India, male singers were actor cum singers in the musical dramas. Comedians had a major role in these dramas. Their comic songs contained a satirical presentation of the day to day life in the first quarter of last century. They also made imitations of birds, animals and Train, the new wonder of that period. Many records have the enactment of situations like quarrel between husband and wife, scene in a railway station, court, types of beggars and many such things. These open the windows to that period for us. Most of the female singers in South India were Devadasis – girls attached to the temples, who sing and dance in the Temple. Their songs are related to the deity of the Temple they belong. All these recordings are purely ethnic in nature since they were not



Recording session of Miss. Gauharjan 1902



Peara Saheb

available in printed version. The songs of Devadasi singers like Thiruchendur Shanmuga Vadivoo, Coimbatore Thayi, Bangalore Thayi, Bangalore Nagaratnam, Salem Godaveri were Classical. Now, Devadasi system is no more. All the songs of Coimbatore Thayi were issued with the violet colored “Celebrity label” in 1910, but few of her songs were re-issued in the 1920s and a few of her songs found a place in the low priced “Twin” label introduced in 1928. Her songs are not seen in the 1930s.



Coimbatore Thayi

The singers in the North had better circumstances. They were mainly courtesans. Bengali and Marathi musical dramas were very popular. Even in the early 1910s, abridged versions of Bengali Dramas like Alibaba, Bilwamangal Thakur were released on sets of 17 and 16 records respectively. These musical drama sets were never re-issued because, the songs in these dramas change periodically to attract the same audience again and again. Even then full sets of these dramas were obtained. On listening to the revised versions of the same drama, we can see the change in the talking pattern, songs since the culture of small ethnic groups started to mingle with those of the neighboring groups.

Laughing song by Burt Shepard was released in India in the early 1900s and was re-issued periodically till the 1930s. Almost all the languages in India produced “Laughing Song” during this period. This Digitisation project was helpful in collecting many local versions of “Laughing Song”.

During the acoustic recording period, the gramophone Company took recordings at Calcutta, Delhi, Rajputana, Lucknow, Bombay, Mysore and Madras. Most of the times, recording facility was available only in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and Language wise, Hindustani (Hindi), Tamil and Marathi recordings top the list. These languages were spoken in areas under the British Colonial rule and forms of arts like musical dramas were much organized in these areas. Artists had easy access to the recording centers which helped in getting more recordings. Rest of India had little access and very few Artists could travel 500 miles from places like Cochin in the Malabar Coast to Madras in the eastern coast to make recordings in Malayalam language.

Contributors

The main source of the recordings is “Discs & Machines” Gramophone Museum and Records Archive, Plassanal, Kerala. The second major source was the collection of Dr. Suresh Chandvankar., Mumbai. All the other sources are considerably small. So, the digitised copies are grouped into two adding the contribution by them to these two groups. The main contributors in Suresh Chandvankar group are Kushal Gopalka, Bhalchandra Meher, Narain Mulani (Mumbai) , Mohamed Shafi (Calicut), Sriram and Sampath (Chennai), Ashish Batra, Moitre (Calcutta)



Digitisation

Recordings from Gramophone Company's labels like Gramophone Record, Gramophone Concert Record, Gramophone monarch record, His Masters Voice, Zonophone Record and Twin are grouped on the basis of language. Languages having less than 20 recordings are grouped as Miscellaneous languages. Smaller labels like Ajano, Beka, Vielophone, Elephone, Heywa, James Opera, Ramagraph, Sun etc are grouped as Miscellaneous labels.

Zohra Bai of Agra

Sl. No.	Description (language/label)	Serial number of Records	Remarks
Discs & machines collection, Plassanal, kerala			
01	Bengali	0001 to 0065	
02	Hindustani (Hindi)	0066 to 0131	
03	Urdu	0132 to 0150	
04	Marathi	0151 to 0170	
05	Miscellaneous labels/various languages	0171 to 0237	
06	Malayalam, Concanim, Pushto, Gurmukhi etc	0238 to 0250	
07	Tamil	0251 to 0360	
08	Telugu	0361 to 0440	
09	Tamil	0441 to 0561	
10	Instrumental	0570 to 0635	
11	Sanskrit	0636 to 0657	
12	Telugu	0658 to 0665	
13	Canarese (Kannada)	0666 to 0694	
14	Hindustani (Hindi)	0696 to 0730	
15	Marwari	0731 to 0741	
16	Jain	0742 to 0751	
17	Bengali	0752 to 0840	
18	Tamil	0841 to 0859	
19	Gujarati	0860 to 0883	
20	Marathi	0884 to 0893	
21	Instrumental	0894 to 0907	
22	Hindustani (Hindi)	0908 to 0940	
23	Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Canarese, Telugu etc	0941 to 0964	
Dr. Suresh Chandvankar Collection, Mumbai			
24	Urdu	0965 to 0982	
25	Marathi-A	0983 to 1128	
26	Miscellaneous languages – Telugu, Bengali,	1129 to 1144	
27	Gujarati	1145 to 1185	
28	Hindustani (Hindi)	1186 to 1230	
29	Marathi B	1231 to 1268	
30	Hindustani	1269 to 1331	
31	Various labels-Ajano, Beka, Rama, Sun, Vielophone	1332 to 1450	
32	Gramophone Co. assorted	1451 to 1475	
33	Twin and Zonophone labels	1476 to 1485	
34	Various Artists- Peara Sahib, Mhd. Hussain, Jankibai	1486 to 1590	
35	Instrumental	1591 to 1629	

Note: Record sleeves were not specific to particular records. They contain advertisements of new issues and photos of Artists. Hence images of Record sleeves are included as a file.

Bibliography

Many Books, mainly the discography and History of early years of Gramophone in India by Michael Kinnear have helped in identifying many records and the year of recording.

- 1 – The 78 rpm Labels of India by Michael Kinnear
- 2 – The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings (1899 to 1907) by Michael Kinnear
- 3 – The Gramophone Company's Indian recordings 1908 to 1910 by Michael Kinnear.
- 4 – Research Papers of Dr. Suresh Chandvankar and Sunny Mathew, published in Lindstrom Project- Volumes 2, 3 & 6
- 5- The Record News – Journal of The Society of Indian Record Collectors, Mumbai, Editor-Dr.Suresh
- 6 – Bajanama – A study of early Indian Gramophone Records by A.N.sharma

Books & catalogs

