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***N***ot Just Mad Englishmen and a Dog:  
**The Colonial Tuning of 'Music on Record', 1900-1908**

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***Abstract***

The ingress of the technology, business and culture of recorded music in a colonial milieu transformed the existing aural economy of British India into a recognisable fabric of modernity, and within a coherently capitalist framework.

This paper excavates how the advent of commercial audiography, through ‘Recording Expeditions’ between 1902 and 1907, shaped configurations of the nascent business in, and culture around, ‘music on record’. It will weigh the evolving nature of colonial imprints on these configurations by scrutinising three sites: the production of music, including the kinds of business practices shaping it; the propulsion of commodities and ideas through advertising; and the meanings accorded to this ‘new media’ in the everyday life of early 20th century India.

In grasping the instances that articulated the changing relationship between entrepreneurship and entertainment, three principal sets of sources will be engaged with: Travelogues of European engineers sent on ‘recording expeditions’ to colonial India ; Advertisements of gramophones and records in Indian English-language newspapers; and Popular and Scholarly commentaries resplendent with euphoric and sceptical observations on the implications of recorded music. Importantly, it is the interplay of these sources that form the bedrock of an account of the colonial mediation of business practices, cultural commodities and ideological values during the formative years of this media industry.

***Not Just Mad Englishmen and a Dog:  
The Colonial Tuning of 'Music on Record', 1900-1908<sup>#</sup>***

Vibodh Parthasarathi<sup>\*</sup>

Early in the autumn of 1902, an American employee of a London-based British firm was sent on a mission to Calcutta. As much as the firm employing Fredrick William Gaisberg was an unknown entity to the colonial government, little was he aware what awaited him on his maiden visit to a British colony.

Four years earlier, in 1898, Gaisberg had been reassigned from his position in Emile Berliner's gramophone company in the US, where he had been doubling-up as a recording supervisor and a piano accompanist for the artists being recorded. He was sent to London to join the 'The Gramophone and Typewriter Limited' (GTL)---the British sister concern of Berliner's American firm---as their principal recording engineer. Much as Gaisberg was sceptical about his move across the Atlantic, this was the first of his many oceanic journeys that paved the way for this British firm to propel a 'new media' into colonial India.

As he set sail to India in 1902, Fred Gaisberg was deeply aware that his singular mission was to record music in British colonies and other countries of the Far East. This was aimed at widening GTL's repertoire of records from, and for, countries of Asia, where the market for recorded music was struggling to be born. Although the Orient was a different, if not difficult territory for this American engineer, he was full of a missionary-like zeal. Leaving Britain for India his travelogue succinctly notes

*The object was to open up new markets, establish agencies, and acquire a catalogue of native records. Tom Addis, accompanied by his good-looking wife, was the business head, and I had as my helper young George Dillnutt..... As we steamed down the Channel into the unknown I felt like Marco Polo starting out on his journeys<sup>1</sup>*

***Introduction: More than Mad Dogs and Englishmen***

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we observe a highly competitive and rapidly internationalising business in recorded music throughout the Northern Hemisphere. This business was orchestrated by private capital germinating in countries on both sides of the Atlantic, some of which had never managed a territorial foothold in the Indian sub-continent. The nascent exports in records to British India, part of this process of internationalisation, rested on an emergent but categorical division of labour: broadly between, investor and managers of records firms from Europe and America; secondly, recording engineers, who often switched their loyalties to rival firms; thirdly, indigenous financial and cultural interlocutors in colonial and sovereign countries; and lastly, the

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<sup>1</sup> GAISBERG (1942:52)

commercially intuitive local musicians and singers.

At the apex of this growing pyramid of workforce stood the techno-theocrats of the game, viz. the 'recording engineers'. At the turn of the century, the very idea of disembodied sound---music and voice---was scarcely two decades old; and commercial records a decade old business on both sides of the Atlantic. Capturing the human voice was considered complex and specialized since it was not a stand alone task; it involved a deep knowledge of and experience with a whole array of tasks that preceded and succeeded the moment of audiography, i.e. of 'writing sound'. Recording engineers, who orchestrated events in permanent and make-shift studios, were first and foremost technicians---most with a passion for music, some even playing the odd instrument. Nevertheless, they gradually came to develop an understanding of entrepreneurship in the growing business of musical entertainment. As the demand for new recordings multiplied in the USA, Britain and France, the stock of the recording engineers rose exponentially. When the business expanded beyond national boundaries, the once studio-bound engineers were sent on long journeys to record music--- by train within their continents, and on ship across continents. All of a sudden they became the prime movers---sometimes the fulcrum, other times the propellant---of the emerging business of sound recording in North America, Western Europe and, as we shall see, in India. For example, C.J. Hopkins, in-charge of the wholesale and export business of the Columbia Company, embarked on a year-long global recording journey on October 1902. But the most legendary figure of the music industry was another American, Fred Gaisberg. His visit to India in 1902, whose immediate motivations were touched upon, was the first of his three recording visits to India during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following him, were over a dozen recording engineers sent to the Indian subcontinent by rivalling firms from Britain, Germany, USA and France.

While the figure of an Occidental traveller is far from novel in the history of the Indian sub-continent, there is something distinct about the folklore of wandering sahibs during the Raj. Perhaps because of the many, often rivalling shades of myth, fact and fantasy embedded in the lore of 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen'. Fortunately, the journeys of the recording engineers have reached us through the 'travelogues' penned by them, variously found tucked away in their autobiographies, serialized in in-house publication of firms, or as feature articles in international trade magazines. They form a vital component of the otherwise thin corpus of archival material on this, much neglected, domain of Indian media history. Retracing the specific motivations, objectives and contexts of each of these recording journeys tells us more than simply the travellers' engagement with the cultural economy of colonial India. However, while making sense of these travelogues, the ethnographic assumptions of the engineers ought to be questioned if our readings of their experiences are to help in reconstructing the musical landscape of the period. More so, if our wider excavations are to shed light on the emergent dynamics of recorded music, both as a media enterprise and a media culture. This becomes doubly crucial as the intentions of the Roving Recordists in colonial India pertain to neither administrative power nor intellectual power--- as was with Grierson. Rather, they were associated with another constituent of power, i.e. commercial power---more precisely, early 20th century capitalist power.

We believe that the problematique of the location of these journeys provide an apt entry point to recount, and account for, the formative configurations of recorded music in British India. Admittedly, one must surround this proposition with a few caveats: viz. of neither reducing these travels to their cultural, and/or geographical location, nor essentialising the travelogues of these 'great men', nor searching for diffusionist imprints of the engineers' journeys. Steering away from this necessitates addressing the relationship between the

accounts of these roving recordists and the wider regimes---commercial and probably ideological---that were responsible for their travel. Such an address will dispel some of the ambivalence in the historiography of recorded music in British India. It will also dispel the hesitancy of grappling with media history in India, as such an account will open up, and on to, some questions about business history and cultural history---disciplines hitherto at polar ends of inquiries by Indian scholarship.

In studies on recorded music in India, the marginalisation of research on its formative contours is both, surprising and paradoxical. For, this was not only the first mass media of the electrical era but recorded music continues to inhabit a crucial role in subsequent media industries, right until the present<sup>2</sup>. This neglect is also paradoxical precisely because the sphere of music-culture---mediated or otherwise---has a far older, richer and diverse tradition of scholarship in India compared to that in other spheres of the modern media, be it cinema, radio, television or even publishing. However, a closer look at this scholarship indicates the predominance of musicological, ethno-musicological and anthropological studies---as is the case to some extent even internationally. This has barred systematic and thorough industry studies including, or perhaps consequently, explorations on past configurations of the music industry. This is not to deny that some ethno-musicologists have raised significant culturalist issues, such as the role of the gramophone in redefining spectatorship<sup>3</sup>; however, their disciplinary moorings and methodological options have prevented them from integrating their examinations of musical practice and form with the larger commercial and industrial locale within which recorded music emerged in India. Amidst all this, research on the formative years of the business has been struggling to cut loose of its origins in sweeping and variedly informative writings<sup>4</sup>; what exist are short sketches of individual music companies as an introduction to, or woven within, discographical compilations<sup>5</sup>. While the dynamics of recorded music in the post-1947 years has received irregular and variedly intense attention<sup>6</sup>, writings on its founding contours are less than a handful<sup>7</sup>.

This paper proceeds from a sense of recognising the interplay between entrepreneurship and entertainment, between the dynamics of commerce and culture. In our case, the core issues concerning entrepreneurship and entertainment are multiple, simply because recorded music touched upon a plethora of human activity. It is not a matter of our offering the political economist's angle on what may appear to be a well-trodden cultural ground; nor, superimposing a culturalist interpretation over commercial data; rather, it is

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<sup>2</sup> Links with not only cinema but also private/FM radio and increasingly internet and mobile based delivery systems; for an outline of the changes in the MI in the post-1991, globalisation years, see PARTHASARATHI, V. (2007) "The Ecology of Creative Industries: The Indian Music Industry Un-played" in **"The Future of India's Creativity": Report of the Planning Commission Taskforce towards a National Mission for Creative and Cultural Industries**; Asian Heritage Foundation/Planning Commission, New Delhi.

<sup>3</sup> FARRELL, G. (1997) "The Gramophone comes to India", **Indian Music and the West**; Clarendon, Oxford (pp111-43).

<sup>4</sup> JOSHI, G. N. (1988) "A Concise History of the Phonograph Industry in India"; **Popular Music** Vol. 7/2 (pp147-56); MANUAL, P. (1988) "Popular Music in India 1901-86"; **Popular Music** Vol. 7, No. 2 (pp 157-177).

<sup>5</sup> In discographies of the Acoustic Era, the contribution of Kinnear has been pioneering and phenomenal; KINNEAR, M. (1994) **The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings - 1899-1908**; Popular Prakashan, Bombay. A more contextual effort that has resulted in a different approach and style, while remaining essentially discographical, is SHRIMALI, N. (2002) **Music of Theatre and Hindi Cinema, 1900-1950**; Sadhna Press, Baroda.

<sup>6</sup> such as an intensive study of cassette-based music in North India MANUAL, P. (1993) **Cassette Culture: Popular music and technology in North India**; University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Also see the special issue of 'Asian Music' (Vol. 24/1, 1992-93) on music in India, albeit dominated by studies on film music. P. D. GREENE (19??) 'Sound Engineering in a Tamil Village: Playing Audio Cassettes as Devotional Performance' **Ethnomusicology** Vol. 43/3.

<sup>7</sup> On the pre-commercial years, see GHOSH in SIRC; on the formative years, see FARRELL, G. (1997), and PARTHASARATHI, V. (2005) "Construing a 'New Media' Market: Merchandising Recorded Music, 1900-1911" in B. BEL, B. DAS, V. PARTHASARATHI & G. POITEVIN (Ed.) **Communication Processes - Volume 1: Media and Mediation**; Sage, New Delhi. On recorded music during the advent of the Talkies and Radio in the 1930s, see S. HUGHES (2002) "The 'Music Boom' in Tamil South India: Gramophone, Radio and the Making of Mass Culture"; **Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television** Vol. 22/4 (pp445-74).

asking how an interdisciplinary approach to ‘media history’ would enable us to refigure that seemingly familiar ground both, in epistemological and methodological terms. We work through a general narrative, often detouring into specific arguments, to show how seemingly ‘textual’ issues of (technologically) capturing disembodied music and of (commercially) propagating such music, find a connect with the ‘economistic’ activities (of production, trade, distribution and consumption) of recorded music. Drawn from the works of Michel Foucault, the schematic categories ‘preconditions of emergence’, ‘conditions of emergence’ and ‘textual construction’ help us grasp the historical development of recorded music both, as a commercial and cultural practice. This would yield a vibrant sense of the textures of colonial mediation in the re-mooring of the cultural economy of music; and simultaneously, a set of anthropological insights into the business of early recorded music.

Not surprisingly, this leads us back to the recording engineers’ travelogues, now additionally as ethnographic material, as an entry point of our own voyage.

### **Part 1: Music and Merchants**

The Anglo-American team led by Fred Gaisberg arrived in Calcutta with an elaborate and bulky plethora of recording equipment---and about 600 blank discs. For the tour, a specially designed falling-weight driven motor was built, to dispense with the heavy storage batteries and clock springs.

It took 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 that the talking machine had come into their lives and they regarded it with awe and wonderment.<sup>8</sup>

But it is not the technological standing of audiography that is of interest to us. Nor was Gaisberg the kind to record all and sundry, irrespective of whether potential ‘artists’ were short-listed by his firm’s expatriate agents or by---as typical of colonial transactions---indigenous intermediaries. What attracts our attention is the manner in which Gaisberg ‘sourced’ potential singers and musicians, given the aims of his voyage.

I met the Superintendent of the Calcutta police, who placed at my disposal an officer to accompany me to the various important entertainments and theatres in the Harrison Road. Our first visit was to the native “Classic Theatre” where a performance of Romeo & 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. .... 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.<sup>9</sup>

Gaisberg was musically inclined and could play the piano; he had a reputation of sensing musical talent when he saw it, a reputation earned during the early 1890s while working for Charles Tainter in the US, who was then producing records on cylinder machines<sup>10</sup>. Soon after familiarising himself with the musical landscape of Calcutta, the American realised that the resident ‘Englishmen’ he was to liaise with were clueless about Indian melodies---neither their musical quality nor, importantly, their commercial value.

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<sup>8</sup> GAISBERG (1942:54)

<sup>9</sup> GAISBERG (1942:54-55)

<sup>10</sup> Gaisberg set up the studio, conducted recordings, accompanied vocalists on the piano and delivered finished cylinders to stores.

Making enquiries through the freshly appointed liaison staff of The Gramophone and Typewriter Limited (GTL) in Calcutta, and immersing himself into the cultural world he was engulfed in, Gaisberg began familiarising himself with the musical landscape of Calcutta. Almost immediately he came to dislike and privately disdain the music he heard; probably ignorant of the famine ravaging the greater part of the country that year, he wrote

The rains had passed and India's glorious dry season was ahead of us. We entered a new world of musical and artistic values. One had to erase all memories of the music of European opera houses and concert halls; the very foundations of my musical training was undermined.<sup>11</sup>

Taking matters into his hands, Gaisberg resorted to identify and experience at first hand the most admired singers performing in the capital city. This was not to understand the new world of music and aesthetics, but to gauge the tastes of connoisseurs and patrons of performances and enumerate songs and singers that were popular. Focused and single-minded, Gaisberg was quick to recognise that it was from among these people that would emerge the consumers of his recordings. Attending performances at theatres, private parties and fêtes in different pockets of Calcutta, he began zooming in on probable singers.

That evening we heard another celebrated singer, Goura Jan, an Armenian Jewess who could sing in twenty languages and dialects. Her great hit that evening was an adaptation of "Silver Threads Among the Gold". Her fee was 300 rupees per evening and she used to make a brave show when she drove at sundown on the Maidan in a fine carriage and pair. Hers were among the six hundred records which proved a firm foundation for our new enterprise. ....She knew her own market value, as we found to our cost when we negotiated with her.<sup>12</sup>

Among the numerous singers identified and recorded by the American, from a makeshift studio in a city hotel, the most prominent were Gauhar Jan and Malka Jan--the latter charging 3000 rupees for her recordings. The five hundred songs recorded on wax masters during the Indian-leg of his Far Eastern recording sojourn were sent to the records pressing factory of GTL at Hanover, Germany. It was here that in 1898 the first 'Indian' records--of "Hindu" and "Islamic" chants recorded in London--were pressed. Gaisberg was aware that the singers he recorded in India, however prominent in the colony, were unknown entities for the technicians in the German factory. For these technicians to have accurate, 'recorded' documentation on the singers' names--to make paper labels for the finished discs--he had asked the singers to announce their names, in English, at the end of their songs. Several discs from his recording visit have 'Made in Germany/Hanover' printed on their label and the signatory announcement by the singer--often rapidly uttered, lest the disc ran out of time--"Mera naam Gauhar Jan". Little did he realise that his foresight in surmounting a very practical task would turn into a stylistic signature, even a fad, in the times to come.

The finished records were shipped all the way back to India in the spring of 1903, three months after Gaisberg left India for Japan. Significantly, these 7 and 10 inch discs, larger in size than those sold in India during the previous decade, were inscribed with recordings only on one side; but they sold exceedingly well in the two largest cities of the colony, Calcutta and Bombay.

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<sup>11</sup> GAISBERG (1942:54)

<sup>12</sup> GAISBERG (1942:55-56)

## 1.1 PRE-CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCE

This fascinating, now well known course of events begs the question: why did Fred Gaisberg tour India precisely in 1902?

Answering this seemingly chronological question makes us step back from recounting Gaisberg's accounts, and sift through the dynamics of the early history, and even pre-history, of recorded music in a plethora of regions: viz. in Britain, from where Gaisberg was sent; in America, where he started his career; and in British India, where he spent three months. For, the emergence of a business in recorded music in India was not an organic process. Neither was it purely the outcome of technological diffusion from the West, nor a consequence of the cultural entrenchment of the Raj; nor still, the consequence of British industrial expansion in a colony. It was a result, and the incremental result, of varying combinations of all these; and much more. As a corollary, it would be fruitful to grasp the milieu of encounters that shaped the dynamics of early recorded music in British India. To do so, one needs to begin by identifying the complex of contending forces---of technology, of entrepreneurship, of cultural practice---that co-determined the emergence of 'music on record'.

In the fading years of the 19th century, advertisements for Talking Machines in newspapers of Bombay and Calcutta were as unusual as the machines in these cities. The earliest local retailers, predominantly large dealers of western musical instruments, did not emphasise the difference between the principal formats---the disc and the cylinder---as evident in their advertisements<sup>13</sup>. The brands most frequently advertising in English-language newspapers were Columbia, GTL and, less so, Pathe.

Until around 1901, the singular objective of these firms was to only sell machines in India; selling discs or cylinders of Indian music was remote to their commercial priorities. Firms remained content with replicating a uniform set of recordings, at their respective factories in Europe and America, for sales all over the world---given the advantage of scale this brought--- including in India. Under these conditions, what existed was not a (recorded) music business, let alone a records business, but a Music Instruments business. The Talking Machine was another product in the large export trade of Western musical instruments, albeit more akin to the Pianola or Music Box due to its 'automated' nature.

After the turn of the century, two factors amended these primordial conditions.

Hitherto, the element of novelty was the prime factor for the Talking Machine's popularity in India. With improvements in equipment and recording quality, the perception of recorded music started changing from curiosity to avid attraction. But most of the discs and cylinders sold in the Indian market were 'English airs'--- snatches of comic shows, acts of mimicry, songs and dance melodies etc; the records themselves were single-sided, with playing time of 90 to 120 seconds. Business was not necessarily profitable for all domestic retailers of this imported product<sup>14</sup>. But sensing a growing demand for 'Indian' music by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, domestic retailers began pressing their overseas record suppliers for greater volumes and variety of local music.

On their part, for the Euro-American firms the necessity to sell local music was provoked from another condition that characterised the increasingly distinct market for recorded music. In the early years of the century, international trade in machines unfolded in a situation that was not only non-monopolistic but saw varying formats--- the principal

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, see [INDIAN MIRROR](#) 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 1898 Advertisement by Harold & Co. (p1)

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Mutoscope and Bioscope Company in Calcutta--who with S. Rose & Co. in Bombay were GTL's principal agents in India--were said to have accrued losses of £3000 in 1900; DE, S.K. (1990) **Gramophone in India: a brief history**; Uttishata Press, Calcutta.

two being the disc-based and cylinder-based machines. Consequently, competition between leading Euro-American equipment makers equally signified a race between rivaling recording technologies, and therefore between formats of the 'Talker'<sup>15</sup>. Thus, precisely when the character of recorded music began being a matter of distinction for the small but interested Indian consumer-listener, the content of 'music on record' became the locus of attention for foreign entrepreneurs. In short, an inter-linked set of influences on the supply-side overlapped with the emergent demand for local music. And this was not unique to India, as the same story was un-spooling in other regions of Asia.

In response, the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw entrepreneurial moves on two fronts: to capture emerging markets for recorded music; and, in the process, to ensure one format prevailed over the other. This brought a great deal of urgency among firms---hitherto competing to primarily sell machines---to aggregate a repertoire of recordings from outside the 'home' countries, in local languages and styles. In other words, recording 'native' music in all nooks and corners of the world became the new mantra for firms.

In October 1902, a few months after Gaisberg set out for India, C.J Hopkins---in-charge of Columbia's wholesale and export business---embarked on a yearlong global recording expedition<sup>16</sup>. Leaving London first for South Africa, he went up the east coast of Africa, from where he sailed to Colombo and India. Hopkins, unlike Gaisberg, was quick to realise that the search for 'new business' meant venturing into towns of the mid Gangetic plain, such as Lucknow and Kanpur, in addition to the three principal port cities. Much to his surprise, he found that in India Talking Machines of various formats were "as well-known as in Europe and the States"; and moreover, that his firm, Columbia, was selling more machines based on the cylinder format than the disc format. This was because the latter could play pre-recorded discs whose available repertoire still consisted of western music, while cylinder machines enabled people to make home recordings, on blank cylinders, of songs, chants and tunes of their choice.

The natives make their own records and there is consequently a big demand for blanks. The records so made are nearly all of them of a religious character and nearly all vocal. Needless to say they are in the native dialect. There are several dealers in Bombay making these records, and each native dealer has his own repertoire. They charge five rupees each for them, about six-eighths of your money.<sup>17</sup>

As much to counter any threats from cylinder machines as to consolidate the trade in disc-machines, the leading players in the latter from both sides of the Atlantic, Victor and GTL, decided to divide the world into two zones, where each had the sole right to sell their records. This unique practice, an early form of cartelization, had its own peculiar history. In 1900, Berliner's US Gramophone Co. lost a patent infringement suit, filed jointly by Columbia and Zonophone<sup>18</sup>, and was barred from manufacturing records in the US. Berliner's machine manufacturer, Eldridge Johnson, was left with a large assembly line and an inventory of machines with no records to play on; he filed a suit that year to be permitted

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<sup>15</sup> MARTLAND, P. (1997) **Since Records Began: EMI the first 100 years**; Batsford, London

<sup>16</sup> TMN 1908 'A Record Globe-Trotter' (p313). Before this epic journey, Hopkins had traveled through France, Belgium, Holland, and for 18 months in Russia. And since his world tour, he had also circumnavigated South America, remaining in this trade for 13 years of his life.

<sup>17</sup> TMN 1904 'An Ambassador of Commerce: Charles Hopkins of Columbia' (p243-44) p243

<sup>18</sup> Zonophone was founded in 1899 by Frank Seaman on the basis of, industry legend says, designs and technology stolen from Berliner (Seaman's previous employee), and machines copied from Johnson. In his lawsuit, Seaman, allegedly in cahoots with Columbia, argued that patents held by Columbia concerning cylinders were applicable to any type of recording where a stylus vibrated in a groove. In 1900, Seaman obtained a restraining order on Berliner and Johnson to stop making discs and machines respectively. KOENIGSBERG, A. (1987) **The Patent History of the Phonograph, 1877-1912**; APM Press, New York. ALDRIDGE., B. (1964)**The Victor Talking Machine Company**; RCA Sales Corporation; GELATT, R. (1976) **The Fabulous Phonograph** (2nd rev. ed.; first publ. 1956); Macmillan, New York.

to make records himself. Johnson won the case, and his new company---appropriately named Victor---was formed in early 1901. In the same year, Johnson and GTL struck a multi-layered pact: the gist of this arrangement was that GTL was guaranteed at least 50% of Johnson's current and future capacity of machines, plus 25% of profits<sup>19</sup>. But the implications for British India are to be located in another component of the deal---in the territorial rights to markets. As much to prevent competing with each other, as to jointly acquire a better niche in the globalising records industry, the world's markets were divided between the firms: GTL had the rights to sell in Europe, the British Empire, Russia and Japan; and Victor everywhere else<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, by 1901 the status of GTL was complex: it was neither a subsidiary of the American firm, nor did it compete with the latter; though all GTL's capital was raised in Britain, its principal managerial and technical personnel were American. The head office of GTL in London, did not manufacture anything! The machines it exported to India were assembled by importing parts from Victor in the US; and its miniscule collection of 'Indian' records, were pressed in Germany. All it had in London was a recording studio, and of course, a corporate office.

In their zeal to expand, GTL realised that while their 'hardware'---machines imported from Victor---could be exported the world over, the 'software'---its repertoire of discs---had to be customised for particular regions. This realisation stemmed from their experiences with the market for records within Britain, in Europe and in Asia<sup>21</sup>; from these specific encounters, newer ways of going about their business emerged.

In the race to record 'native' music, and thereby push their format over others, GTL resorted to a *modus operandi* history had witnessed before: they organised 'Recording Expeditions' to frontline countries of Europe, and thereafter to their colonies. For instance, in Russia GTL initially recorded folk music and bands, besides comic records. William Darby, assistant to Gaisberg during his India visit, was the first Berliner employee to make such an 'Expedition' in the spring of 1899, from Berlin to Russia. But by end-1901, GTL's Russian branch realised that if well known Russian musicians were recorded then these disc-records could be sold at higher prices to buyers--- an overwhelming majority of whom were the richer, 'cultured' strata of the Tsarist aristocracy<sup>22</sup>. Based on the success of this approach, GTL sought to try it in another market. In the spring of 1902, it sent Fred Gaisberg to Italy to convince some of the reigning 'stars', initially hesitant to record, to sing for the horn. This recording expedition was clearly motivated by the sense of competition perceived by his firm in the early years of the century. Gaisberg was particularly keen to travel to Milan to hear a young singer who was creating a sensation, and possibly to making his records. On hearing this singer, Gaisberg was extremely impressed; but Enrico Caruso, 28 years old in 1902, wanted the unheard of fee of £100 for 10 records<sup>23</sup>. This session turned out to be one of

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<sup>19</sup> ALDRIDGE (1964:45); for an analytical account on this, see JONES (1985:76-100).

<sup>20</sup> A not so minor amendment was made in 1907 when Victor took the much closer and lucrative Japanese territory from GTL, in return for (effectively) Africa. Such deals typified the practice of restrictive international agreements between US and European firms in the two decades before the First World War; see M. WILKINS (1970) **The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise**; Cambridge/Mass (I: pp 6-77).

<sup>21</sup> For instance, despite the common language, American music and musicians were not always a success in Britain; Belgians complained about the Parisian accent in the records from GTL's French catalogue; and, recordings in southern China did not sell in the north of the kingdom.

<sup>22</sup> TMN 1903 'Talking Machine Talks: No.4 - The Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd.' (p59). Western Russia, where Pathe's cylinders of French songs were extremely popular among the Russian elite, was becoming increasingly difficult to be serviced by GTL's records manufactory at Hanover. And so, in the summer of 1902, GTL started a records pressing plant, its second, in the Baltic town of Riga.

<sup>23</sup> The current scale was in the order of \$2-5-10 a selection. Despite GTL's London office refusing to pay such an amount, the engineer took a gamble. These red labelled discs, released in March of 1902, sold at double the price of reigning black labelled records. ALDRIDGE (1964:51-52).

the most important, if not the most important, in the early business of recorded music<sup>24</sup>.

Following the success of their Italian sojourn, GTL was bursting with confidence, and wanted to replay this strategy outside Europe. And so, later that year, Gaisberg was packed off on a 'Far Eastern Recording Expedition', during which the first and most vital stop was British India.

## 1.2 CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCE

The significance of Fred Gaisberg's expedition should not be misconstrued as being the first to commercialise sound recording in India, as is often done<sup>25</sup>. It is more prudent to judge the historical weight of the American's forays into the British colony by looking at what it conveyed in as far as the commercial practices of foreign firms in India. What is noteworthy is not the strict sequence of events Gaisberg's expedition resulted in; rather, the overlapping set of activities it led to, and the existing phenomenon it acted upon, within India.

By the time Gaisberg's recordings were being vended in India, GTL realised two traits in foreign markets: that the modus operandi of recording expeditions to Russia, Italy and India bore immediate results; and that British India was a an important, and possibly large enough, potential market to be on the horizons of its Euro-American rivals. Learning from this, GTL undertook another Recording Expeditions to India in 1904-05, led by William Sinkler Darby---the firm's first recording engineer to be sent on a 'recording expedition' from, as explained earlier, Berlin to Russia.

Recognising that business with British India was more extended and profitable than with most Asian countries, rival British firms---hitherto selling their 'English' repertoire of records in India---were not to be left behind. In parallel with GTL's forays, they embarked upon recording expeditions as well: either exclusively to India, or as part of their other Asian expeditions, with and without Indian agents 'officially' on board.

In 1904 Nicole Freres from London sent a recording expedition to India. Originally a manufacturer and exporter of musical instruments, Nicole was the first firm to manufacture disc records in Britain, at a facility in Saffron Hill, in 1905<sup>26</sup>; it had been recording music in practically every European country, something that its chief, C.H. Krieger, saw as an endeavour at continually enlarging the "borders" of the firm<sup>27</sup>. Its expedition to India in 1904 was led by John Watson Hawd---until recently the Calcutta Branch Manager of GTL---and Stephen Carl Porter and recorded musicians in Calcutta. The following year, in September 1905, "Nicole Freres (India)" was registered in London as a separate company to acquire the Indian branch of Nicole Freres's business for the manufacture and dealership in Talking Machines<sup>28</sup>. The existence of a potentially large market in British India was also sensed by entrepreneurs and traders across the Atlantic. In 1905, The American Talking Machine Co. sent a recordist to India, after touring China<sup>29</sup>. A race was on to can greater amounts and variety of 'native' music in what was increasingly recognised as the largest market for records in the Old world. The importance given by Euro-American firms to produce 'Foreign Catalogues' was to become the key to their forays into, and success in, the nascent

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<sup>24</sup> Caruso's records are estimated to have been the biggest contributor to GTL's success in these years of bitter competition among European firms. Equally, these records proved potent for the singer's career; the record 'E Lucevan Le Stelle' fetched Caruso his first contract with the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York; MARTLAND (1997) **Since Records Began: EMI the first 100 years**; Batsford, London.

<sup>25</sup> JOSHI (1988), MANUAL (1988)

<sup>26</sup> Others were making only the master disc in Britain, the rest of the processes being completed abroad---like GTL at its Hanover facility.

<sup>27</sup> TMN 1905 'The Nicole Disc: An Interview with G.H. Krieger' (p413, 415)

<sup>28</sup> TMN 1906 'Trade Topics' (p257)

<sup>29</sup> TMN 1905 'Trade Topics' (p151)

records markets in countries like India.

Thus, there emerged a new set of conditions governing the business culture of this 'new media' in India. We recall that until 1902, foreign firms were content with selling 'western' music and oral forms recorded abroad, at best some 'native airs' perceived to have a market in India. But the Recording Expeditions brought alive the demand for pre-recorded music that was tucked away in British India. More precisely, the spate of expeditions by leading European firms concertedly succeeded in opening up India as market for 'native' records: i.e. music recorded in the colony but manufactured in abroad. Not surprisingly, from around 1905 western trade magazines---hitherto concerned with activities and opportunities in the Atlantic world alone---began carrying frequent reportage, interviews and editorials on the significance of selling in, and investing to sell in, the Old and New worlds.

The race between these individuals and the emanating dynamics of trade it fuelled, had two, interrelated consequences. First, it rapidly propelled the expansion of this business within India. This was equally true of other 'emerging' markets of recorded music during the mid 1900s, be they Imperial territories like Australia, or kingdoms like China. And this propulsion took different forms. Unlike GTL, which sent expedition after expedition, or Columbia, whose early Indian operations lacked coherence and persistence, Pathe chose another path into the Indian market. Central to its strategy for expansion, was an appropriate groom, ideally an indigenous entrepreneur in the same sector. The trajectory of indigenous forays into the business of recorded music in India have largely, although sometimes exaggeratedly, pivoted around the persona of Hemendra Mohan Bose. Bose was amongst the earliest importers and dealers of Talking Machines in Calcutta, from the late 1890s onwards. Just before the turn of the century, Bose started making his own cylinder recordings on imported Pathe and Edison machines. Interestingly, these recordings were aimed at preserving the voices of his friends--- and not for commercial use and anonymous users. But within a couple of years, and with the assistance of Pathe, Bose transformed his interest into a commercial venture. He associated himself with Pathé to produce and vend primarily Bangla recordings; the products marketed under the name 'H. Bose Records'. From 1905-06 his cylinders were based on the New Model Phonograph, and were aggressively advertised in Calcutta's newspapers by his concern 'The Talking Machine Hall'.

While the entrepreneurial trajectories of Indian firms have been documented in varying detail<sup>30</sup>, what is significant for us here is their diverse character. The social basis of domestic entrepreneurship was different from that of the foreign firms: they were equivalent of modern day venture capitalists--- investors, or traders unconnected with the business of musical instruments---for whom the incipient business offered investment opportunities, unrestricted by government regulation and monopoly interests. Importantly, the earliest domestic ventures in recorded music were born largely through collaborations between an indigenous entrepreneur and foreign records manufacturer, such as between Bose and Pathe of France. By 1907, we do finally see the onset of Indian firms producing pre-recorded music and manufacturing disc-records, albeit at cottage-industry scale---the foremost labels being James, Singer and Sun Disc records<sup>31</sup>. Looking at all domestic firms we find those owned by entrepreneurs in Bombay were able to build a better place in this business (due to, among other factors, their pre-existing overseas networks) than those started by entrepreneurs in Calcutta. This illustrates the general observation that domestic industries, across different sectors, found a fertile germinating ground in the new economic space created by the Empire in Bombay, unlike in Calcutta where the imperial division of economic space was

<sup>30</sup> KINNEAR (1994); for an overview, see KINNEAR (1992).

<sup>31</sup> KINNEAR (2000)

perfect<sup>32</sup>.

On the other hand, and often as a result, such trade proved a vital catalyst in the growth of individual, especially European, firms. The growing consumption of machine and records in 'foreign' and/or 'colonial' countries contributed immensely to the expansion of leading Euro-American companies. The balance sheet of GTL amply illustrates this: in 1906-07, when its net profit climbed to £246733 from £53885 in 1901, a staggering 60% of the firm's profits came from outside Britain<sup>33</sup>! And this was before Fred Gaisberg's younger brother, started out on his recording expedition to India--- GTL's third foray in four years.

Setting out for India in 1906, William was well aware that GTL's previous two recording expeditions to India---by his brother in 1902 and by Darby in 1906---"had only touched centres, such as Calcutta and Bombay"<sup>34</sup>.

*Our tour of 1906 was something in the nature of exploring--- in the way of seeking out fresh native talent. Our party consisted of three Europeans, a native writer, and four native boys whom we had hired at Calcutta--- with an untold amount of kit and baggage.*<sup>35</sup>

On what was his first assignment outside the shadow of his much revered sibling, William Gaisberg was determined to take the race for the Indian ears, and pockets, into the unknown hinterland. The opening page of his three part travelogue, reproduced in the firm's in-house magazine ten years later, has a photograph of William along with his crew--- the leader clad in a safaari uniform, tie and wide hard-brow hat, an archetype hero from the lore of "mad dogs and Englishmen". Perhaps unsure about the success of his ventures into the hinterland of the colony, the photograph was modestly captioned "We leave Calcutta"--- aptly encapsulating the spirit of what was going to be an expedition within the Expedition.

The American's years in London had shaped other aspects of his being besides the colonial attire. In typical British fashion, his travelogues almost immediately zoom in on that favourite English theme: the Weather. This obsession ceaselessly punctuates his rich chronicle of the conditions of travel and stay, his trysts with 'native' music and musicians, during the weeks spent outside the capital city. The United Provinces and parts of Punjab, reeling under the partial failure of monsoons, were crucial to William's itinerary in the North. But it is difficult to pinpoint whether it was the weather, the music, or the music-culture that was the biggest torture for the American born engineer.

*I have painful recollections of our first singing party, which started about ten o'clock at night and lasted until the small hours of the morning, and was not finished even then. You must remember that we went out to India to furnish records for the natives, and not for Europeans, so that during our whole tour we were associated practically entirely with the natives, and during this first party of ours our bungalow was crowded with natives. European chairs were not used; we all had to sit on our haunches. Just try this for ten minutes and see how painful it is!*<sup>36</sup>

From the late 19th century, we observe a pattern in the emigration of musicians from regions contiguous to the mid Gangetic plains---from present-day western Uttar Pradesh in the west, to central Bihar in the east. Having gained success in cities like Lucknow and Varanasi, the crest of recognition pushed singers down the Ganga; harvesting further fame, legitimacy and money through performances at the courts of smaller principalities, before 'arriving' in the colonial capital, where fame and money peaked. Not surprisingly, William's

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<sup>32</sup> Ray, R.K. (1992) 'Introduction', **Enterprise and Industry in India**; OUP, New Delhi (pp1-69) p38

<sup>33</sup> MARTLAND, P (1997) **Since Records Began: EMI the first 100 years**; Batsford, London

<sup>34</sup> William Gaisberg's expedition was two-staged---in the summer of 1906 and winter of 1907---as he succumbed to the heat during the first leg, and returned to London.

<sup>35</sup> **THE VOICE** 1918 'THE ROMANCE OF RECORDING: INDIA -- ARTICLE I' BY WILLIAM C. GAISBERG (p7)

<sup>36</sup> **The Voice** 1918 'THE ROMANCE OF RECORDING: INDIA -- ARTICLE I' BY WILLIAM C. GAISBERG.

route was the other way round, searching as he was for new singers. For him, success meant going up the Gangetic plain, from the capital into the smaller cities and mufasil towns of the hinterland, to search for “fresh talent”. From Calcutta, he went first to the heart of what was once North India’s cultural hub, the capital of Awadh, Lucknow.

The language in Lucknow is Hindustani. The most appreciated singers are the young women with very high voices. The male artists are not great favourites, and their part generally consists of teaching the girl singers their songs and making up the orchestral accompaniment. ....One rarely hears a male singer, except when his voice resembles a woman’s. I know of one case where a male artist was exceedingly popular in India, and we made many records by him- his name was Peera Saheb- and one could not tell his voice from a woman’s.<sup>37</sup>

From Lucknow his entourage went to Ferozepore in Punjab, where he recorded about 200 titles in two languages, over three weeks. There, William was assisted by Bakshi Ram Singh, who spoke English and provided a short tutorial on Indian music, which he summarised as follows:

Indian music is divided into 80 Rags (this must not be confused with the U.S.A Ragtime music, which is simply a tempo). Each Rag has its numerous Raginis. Many of the Rags and Raginis have been forgotten or lost, owing to the fact that the study of music in India has degenerated into the hands of the lowest and most ignorant people of the land, and also that there are no publications.<sup>38</sup> (*original brackets*)

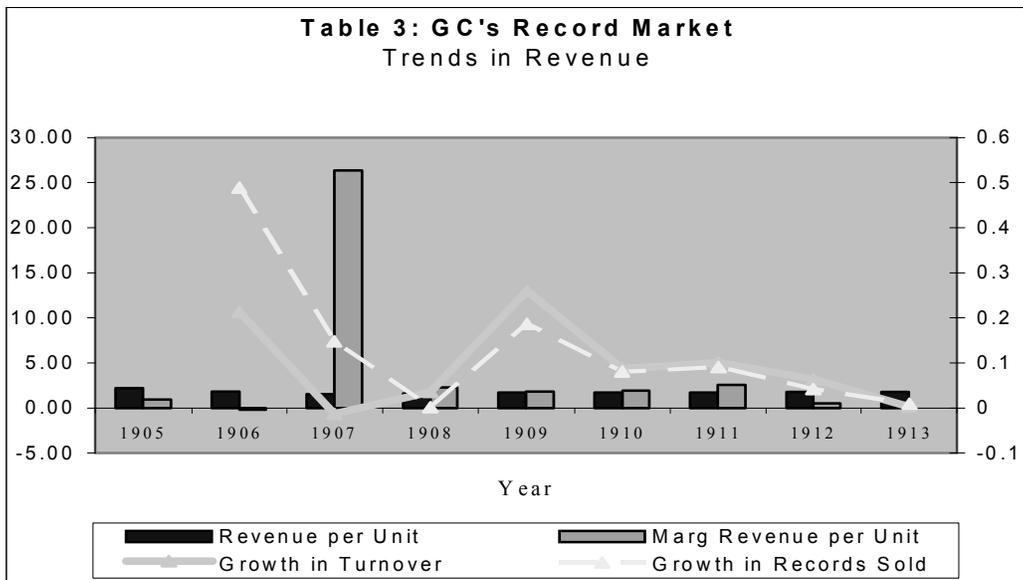
His journey from northern India to the Deccan meandered through cities of the Gangetic plain, the west coast and the peninsula. The narrative of his arrival in the independent kingdom of Hyderabad begins with the delays due to customs officers and the battery of plague-inspection doctors---as the team was coming from Bombay which was at that time declared “an infected port”. After traversing all bureaucratic hurdles, Gaisberg and his team got down to business: in all they made about 200 new records in Telegu, “Canarese”, Marathi, Arabic and Persian---a clear sign of the cosmopolitan character of Hyderabad. Unlike his sibling, William was more charitable towards the melodies he heard; Indian music, he observed, “is not particularly pleasing to the European ear but it arrests attention”, and in many ways “is unspoilt by European ideas”. Was William aware of the paradox in asking musicians to sing an evening Raag during a recording session in the morning? Or was he not able to put together what he saw and thought, with what he did and asked others to do?

From Hyderabad the expedition moved further south to Madras, where William noticed the marked difference in the features of people and the “entirely different tone of voice” compared to those from northern India. Assisted by George Dillnutt---who had played the same role with the elder Gaisberg---William recorded 300 discs in Tamil, Telegu and Canarese, harvesting a rich repertoire of the much needed South Indian recordings for GTL.

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<sup>37</sup> [The Voice](#) 1918 ‘THE ROMANCE OF RECORDING: INDIA -- ARTICLE I’ BY WILLIAM C. GAISBERG. Identified by his falsetto, Peera Saheb grew up in Matiaburz, a suburb of Calcutta, due to which he was alleged to be from the family of Wajid Ali Shah. He served the Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohon Tagore in Calcutta, more to avail himself the opportunity of learning music from the many famous visiting singers.

<sup>38</sup> [THE VOICE](#) 1918 ‘THE ROMANCE OF RECORDING: INDIA -- ARTICLE I’ BY WILLIAM GAISBERG (P6)



But other players lurking in the Indian market were also on the ascent, as was the case abroad. In Europe, by the middle of the first decade, the German production machinery was at its zenith. So much so that the former commercial monopoly of Britain, sometimes even in its colonies, was under threat, and captions like 'German Peril' were common in the press<sup>39</sup>. By 1906 the total production in Germany of Talking Machines for inland and export stood at 250,000 units a month; and that of Records at 1.5 million units a month<sup>40</sup>.

In 1906, Beka Records from Berlin announced its sole agent in India, Burma and Ceylon<sup>41</sup>---Vallabhdas, Lakhimdas & Company of Bombay. Established in 1898 by Vallabhdas---then an importer of machines and discs, the largest in western India---it was a partnership between the founder and Lakhimdas Rowji Taitsee, a trader/investor in Bombay<sup>42</sup>. But it was the other German firm International Talking Machine GmbH---recognized by its 'Odeon' label---that had been increasingly active in India<sup>43</sup>. In the gradually proliferating records market of India, the two leading German firms were as much pitted against each other as against other European firms like GTL, Pathe and Nicole, and less so American ones like Columbia and Edison. By 1906, when the makers of Odeon released its 'South Indian' catalogue, it had established itself as the principal rival to GTL in British India. This was precisely why during his expedition William Gaisberg found it necessary, despite his meandering itinerary, bouts of bad health and other delays, to keep his "most important dates, to travel South"<sup>44</sup>. The Odeon-GTL rivalry was doubly intense because they were the only two among the big firms operating in the colony to make both,

<sup>39</sup> But generalizations are misleading, since the impact of foreign competition on British firms varied with industries, and within sectors of an industry; ALDCROFT, D. (1968) "British Industry and Foreign Competition, 1875-1914" in D. Aldcroft (Ed.) *The Development of British Industry and Foreign Competition, 1875-1914*; University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1968 (p28-29).

<sup>40</sup> *TMN* 1907 (p147)

<sup>41</sup> *TMN* 1906 (p153) 'Trade Topics'.

<sup>42</sup> Unlike H. Bose, this entity concentrated its efforts on the disc format. By 1908, it had opened branches in Calcutta, Madras and Delhi. Besides music in English and many Indian languages, its stocks included disc records in Persian, Chinese and Arabic---since its base, Bombay, was an important node for commerce with Persia, Arabia, Madagascar and South Africa. Two decades later Taitsee became the head one of the more influential trade association in the colony, the Indian Merchants Chamber.

<sup>43</sup> The firm was started in 1903 by Max Strauss and Heinrich Zunz in Berlin with financial backing from the American Frederick Prescott, who had then recently resigned as head of the European branch of Zon-O-Phone; The Odeon label, born on 1st January 1904, was named after a famous theatre in Paris whose classical dome appeared as the firm's logo on record labels--- a logo still visible in cinema halls by the same name in most of our cities; *TMN* (various 1904-06).

<sup>44</sup> *THE VOICE* 1918 'The Romance of Recording: India - Article II' by William C. Gaisberg (p7).

machines and discs<sup>45</sup>. In 1907, two years after International Talking Machine Gmbh had perfected a new material to make disc-records called 'Empedite'<sup>46</sup>, it sent a recording expedition to India.

By mid 1907, Talking Machine importers in India became more vocal in asking foreign records manufacturers to devote more attention to recording Indian songs, for which they found a growing demand<sup>47</sup>. On the supply-side, a correspondent of the 'Zeitschrift fur Instrumentenba' drew attention to the fact that records in at least five different Indian languages readily commanded sale; he further clarified for German manufacturers

".....even if the Western nations refuse to class the screams and cries which pass for Indian sings as music" they gratify the taste of the majority of record buyers in India.<sup>48</sup>

Motivated possibly in part by this but in large part by not wanting to be undone by its national and international rivals, Beka dispatched an expedition to India. Its recordings in the winter of 1907-08 harvested a repertoire of 400 records, including a large number of songs from popular proscenium-theatre. The Germans firms had finally taken their battles to India, and by the end of 1907 India was next only to Britain and France in the quantum of discs imported from Germany<sup>49</sup>. More striking is the fact that while in 1906 GTL catered to the largest chunk of demand for records, by 1908 Beka had amassed a repertoire of 1000 recordings from India---allegedly the same as GTL had<sup>50</sup>.

Perhaps this forced GTL later that year to send George Dillnut to India---who, having assisted the Gaisberg brothers in India, was now rich in experience---to lead its fourth recording expedition to British India.

## **Part 2: Merchandise and Meanings**

Shops run by British settlers in India go back to the years before the subcontinent came under the Crown. By the opening years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century British retailers in major cities and smaller towns alike had to not only service their Indian customers, but also their numerous foreign suppliers. It was common practice for British retailers in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, to get together and organise subscription dinners, especially when agents and other representatives of 'home' firms were visiting their city. Besides expanding opportunities for individual retailers, such business practices aimed at bringing together the many, and many levels of, interests of the Empire in the subcontinent. The importance given to this kind of commercial networking by British retailers---such as Stanley Oakes in Madras who later emerged as a major retailer of machines and records---is evident by their frequent announcements in newspapers for hosting such gatherings, including in newspapers outside the their own city<sup>51</sup>. It is more than plausible that through such encounters, agents and representatives of foreign firms gathered ideas about the amorphous market for recorded music in India, and alternative possibilities about doing business in specific regions of the subcontinent.

On its part, the retail trade in Talking Machines commenced during the late 1890s, from shops that had been importing 'new' European products such as sewing machines, bicycles

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<sup>45</sup> TMN 1906

<sup>46</sup> TMN 1905 (p153)

<sup>47</sup> TMN 1907 'Trade Topics' (p227)

<sup>48</sup> TMW 1907 'India a Fertile Country' (p1)

<sup>49</sup> TMN 1907 (p534)

<sup>50</sup> TMN 1908 'Notes from India' (p148)

<sup>51</sup> THE DAILY TELEGRAPH AND DECCAN HERALD 16 Dec. 1902: Announcement: 'Meeting in Calcutta on 9<sup>th</sup> January' by Stanely Oakes (p5).

and umbrellas, targeted at the well-off. Cycle shops were considered an apt springboard for selling machines during the early years because bicycles, like Talking Machines, were viewed as a sign of status in the colony. Interestingly enough, in England it was the other way round; precisely when the sale of machines moved away from cycle shops and got intensified around music instrument shops, around 1909, did the Gramophone find its social status rising<sup>52</sup>. At the turn of the century, the retail trade began getting concentrated around places where, in retrospect, their sale seem more plausible---viz. shops selling pianos, music boxes, harmoniums and other 'Western' musical instruments. With the first discernable increase in imports of machines, the leading music instrument retailers joined in, such as Harold & Co. of Calcutta and S. Rose & Co. of Bombay.

With the opening up of the Indian market after the first few recording expeditions, domestic vendors were joined by foreign records firms and their agents in securing a share of the expanding business. This is not surprising: as the sensitivity of foreign records firms to local tastes increased, a wider variety of entrepreneurs sought to cash in on the retail business---of machines and records. By 1905 a reasonable number of people in India bought machines through catalogues of foreign firms, keeping in mind reviews and advertisements in the selectively popular British trade journal, 'The Talking Machine News'<sup>53</sup>.

Akin to the telephone just before it, and the radio much after it, the Gramophone entered the market at the apex, and very gradually seeped down. That the market for recorded music in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century was an elite market was principally due to the price of machines. Starting from around 1898 it took nearly 10 years for the 'Talking Machine' to transcend its status from that of an imported curio. Ten years was also the time taken for retailers to coherently understand the possibilities of this 'new media' for potential local buyers. These processes were deeply inter-related, each feeding the other. The increasing entertainment value of canned music were realised by consumers as the Indian repertoire of record firms expanded. Conversely, as firms widened their range of Indian songs and singers, the sales of machines and records grew. Domestic retailers, increasingly central to the sales-chain, were the first to observe this phenomenon, and convey it to their foreign suppliers.

Such an understanding by, and role of, retailers of machines was far from unique among Indian commercial intermediaries; well before the business of recorded music emerged in India, Jamshedji Tata laid bare the characteristic role of local traders: "Our small community is, to my thinking, peculiarly suited as interpreters and intermediaries between the ruler and the ruled in this country"<sup>54</sup>. Similarly, right through the formative decade, retailers lay at a vital cusp in the competitive milieu---next only to the recording engineers---since the retail trade was a crucial interface between the milieu of production and that of consumption.

## 2.1 THE SITE OF RECORDED MUSIC

Before the Gramophone, the arena for music consumption in urban India was private, privately public and public. In the wake of the Mughal Empire, courts of the regional royalty and Nawabs/Rajas of petty principalities continued to remain a significant locus of musical performance. While these landed aristocracies strove to maintain a large number of singers

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<sup>52</sup> TMW 1907 'Our Pessimist!' (p29)

<sup>53</sup> TMN 1905.

<sup>54</sup> TIMES OF INDIA 12 Apr. 1894, quoted in GHOSH, S.K. (1985) The Indian Big Bourgeoisie; Subarnarekha, Calcutta (p173). Although the context of this statement was the particular rapport of Parsi traders with foreign firms, its import reflects the attitude of the Indian trading community as a whole in the post Crown decades.

and musicians in their permanent service, they also sought to attract a floating set of artists until the early decades of the 20th century. But the central, and in many ways centripetal, site for musical activity in urban centres were the kothas of the tawaifs<sup>55</sup>. In fact, from the 19th century the development of music cultures around tawaifs was closely connected with, sometimes even mirrored, the rise of cities, especially along the Gangetic plain<sup>56</sup>. Besides music and dance, kothas were centres for political discussion in the early to mid-1850s, and many tawaifs were active participants in the events surrounding 1857<sup>57</sup>. After the uprising was quelled, kothas became a target for punishment by the British administration. Many tawaifs found themselves victimized by seizure of their property, and by new public health regulations and zoning laws designed to depict them as nuisances, detrimental to society's moral wellbeing. This is not to overlook the fact that British merchants and residents continued to partake in the pleasures of the Nautch---one rendition of the tawaif culture---well into the last decades of the 19th century. Such a 'nabbobising'<sup>58</sup> of the British occurred well into the years when there were an increased number of women in British enclaves, some of who also took to it---as is frequently visible in Company School paintings.

With more British settlers, the character of their enclaves underwent a change, and elements of English towns and amusements started to sprout, like concert halls and theatres, by the turn of the century. Concert halls, organised on the principal of a gate-fee, were the first to provide the illusion of an unmediated encounter of audiences with music. In tandem, we also see the emergence of music Sabhas---not 'Concert Houses' as its literal meaning suggests but akin to a 'connoisseur club'---as the prototypical site of public, albeit non-commercial, music in Southern India<sup>59</sup>. A direct product of increasing urbanisation, the Sabhas became the new trendsetters and mediators of music, musicians and musical talent<sup>60</sup>. Although there were differences in the cultural economy of music in courts, kothas, sabhas, theatres<sup>61</sup>, and concert halls, the more fundamental distinction was between listening to a performance in situ and listening to a replayed music at any point of time, at any place and at many places at the same time<sup>62</sup>. These convey two distinct aural experiences, cultural practices of listening and commercial processes of encountering music---and therefore, in the epistemological perception of what constituted musical activity itself. In short, it conveys two fundamentally distinct social relations of music--- i.e. ways in which music was produced and consumed; shaped and shared.

This makes us wonder who were the consumers of the gramophone---an expensive commodity---given that the real per capita income in urban India during most of the first decade was under Rs.150. But this figure, as rightly argued by its providers, masks the abject

<sup>55</sup> I would translate a 'kotha' as a saloon, and a 'tawaif' as a courtesan.

<sup>56</sup> KIDWAI, S. (2006) "The singing ladies find a voice"; *Seminar* No. 540, August (issue 'Celebrating Women')

<sup>57</sup> KIDWAI (2006) By the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the growing Congress, which routinely received donations from tawaifs, saw kothas as immoral centres. The story of Gauhar Jan being requested to leave Congress Party meetings by "respectable" female members, despite her large donations, is as legendary as any of the tales about her music.

<sup>58</sup> EDWARDS, M. (1988) *The Sahibs and the Lotus: The British in India*; Constable, London (p46). Originating from 'Nabob'---British corruption of Nawab, a local ruler---the term implies a 'Nawab-ment' of the British residents.

<sup>59</sup> Among the first was the Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Sabha in Madras in 1900, followed by, prominently, the Gayana Samaja in Bangalore in 1906.

<sup>60</sup> Tamil theatre, proliferating at the turn of the century, invariably included musicals with classical music; see HUGHES, S. (2002) "The 'music boom' in Tamil South India: Gramophone, radio and the making of mass culture"; *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Oct 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Although not central to their performative form, contemporary Parsi, Gujarati and Marathi theatre too offered a variety of musical genres such as *dadra*, *thumri*, *jhinjhoti*; see GUPT (2005); for a discography on records of stage music, see SHRIMALI (2002).

<sup>62</sup> Such a standpoint forms part of wider scholarship in the 1990s which examined transformations in Publicness from being rooted in social 'co-presence', to a mediated publicness; see J. THOMPSON (1995) *Media and Modernity: A social history of the media*; Polity Press, Cambridge.

unevenness in the disposable incomes of individuals<sup>63</sup>. It is this uneven distribution that explains the existence of a section of society with more than modest purchasing powers, from among whom emerged the large number of buyers of machines and records. This stratum was, on the one hand, financially unable to hold private soirees at home, like the landed aristocracy and merchants did in their urban manors. On the other hand, it had a discomfiting relationship with the hereditary musicians of the kothas, due to typically middle class social and moral taboos attached to 'bazaaru' milieu. It was from this largely salaried stratum of society who could afford imported products like the Gramophone that emerged the most eager consumers of recorded music as a means of private entertainment<sup>64</sup>. Not surprisingly, therefore, recorded music struck an immediate chord with the emerging and aspiring values of private entertainment of the upper middle class urban family. The advent of recorded music provided an opportune outlet for their musical entertainment; the Gramophone facilitated ready and reasonable access to a variety of popular genres, from across the country, within their domestic arena.

But it is questionable if this mode of listening was, or was even perceived, as an alternative to live performances, as has been contended<sup>65</sup>---a contention which over-stretches the significance of early recorded music in the lives of its primordial consumers. For, as late as in the latter half of the first decade, even amongst the emergent gramophone 'public', recorded music was far from considered as the primary mode of musical entertainment---either as a substitute to a live concert, or even on par with an *in situ* performance<sup>66</sup>. What is unquestionable is that the new experience of listening to recorded music, and the evolving cultural economy around it, radically challenged standing conceptions of music and music culture---and through that, of leisure and pleasure<sup>67</sup>. Like anything new, imported and British, the Gramophone provoked a cross-section of reactions. To grasp the textures of such response we need to look few years after the strict period under study, principally because popular and scholarly commentaries required that the business and culture of recorded music was prominent in magnitude and geographical spread to take for granted readers' familiarity with this 'new media'.

Although numerous singers, especially tawaifs, found an economic opportunity in commercial recording during the expedition years, others viewed the Gramophone with a mixture of horror and discomfort. As noted by the British musicologist Fox-Strangways in 1910---who termed the Gramophone an "unnatural growth"<sup>68</sup>---this was the case with singers like Chandra Prabha even when not recording for commercial gain:

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" .....my subsequent experiences showed that this was only too likely"<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> GOSWAMI, O. (1992) 'Sahibs, Babus & Banias: Changes in Industrial Control in East India, 1918-1950' in R.K. Ray (Ed.) **Enterprise and Industry in India**; OUP, New Delhi (pp229-59) p255.

<sup>64</sup> Very much like with the advent of the printed word, the users of recorded music comprised a sub-set of the section of society that was financially located below the 'high culture' of music but much above 'the folk'. It has been rightly argued that the advent of print in India created new forms and patterns of sociability among people who were literate but outside the classical tradition; see SARKAR, S. (1997) 'The City Imagined'; **Writing Social History**; OUP, New Delhi (p173).

<sup>65</sup> HUGHES (2002)

<sup>66</sup> The editor of a local trade journal, in his preview of a 'high tea' organised on a ship anchored in Calcutta judiciously reported: "The gramophone will discourse during tea. A fine music programme will then be unfolded"; **CAPITAL** 1908 (p1235)

<sup>67</sup> For an examination of early debates over the impact of listening to phonographs on musical culture in other locales, MATTHEW F. JORDAN (2005) 'Discophilie or Discomanie?: The Cultural Politics of Living-Room Listening'; **French Cultural Studies**, Vol. 16, No. 2 (p151-168).

<sup>68</sup> FOX-STRANGWAYS, A.F. (1995) **The Music of Hindostan** [first published 1914]; Mittal Publications, New Delhi (p16).

<sup>69</sup> FOX-STRANGWAYS (1995) (p90). NB: It was not unusual for wax discs, after being recorded, to break while transporting them on the train en route to the port.

Quite clearly, the Gramophone came to be infused with a plethora of meanings that were cognitively, and often ideologically, distinct from those created through both, the sites of its deployment and the music it played-back. The emergent 'music establishment', while inhabiting the contesting forces of reform and revival regarding the character and place of music in Indian society<sup>70</sup>, viewed this 'new media' with a mixture of Luddism and xenophobia. This was principally because the Gramophone was associated with the widening inflow of different kinds of mechanised musical instruments into British India, and into the homes of the urban upper-middle and upper classes. We recall that from the late 19th century, matters of music as a symbolic form and cultural practice were represented---both, viewed and defined---within the framework of the wider struggle against colonialism, a process peaking by the early 20th century<sup>71</sup>. Within this framework of representation, the tools of producing music---a crucial constituent of music as a cultural practice---severely came under critical interrogation<sup>72</sup>. It was in this historical and political context that recorded music, as a technology and cultural form, emerged in British India.

Like Fox-Strangways, leading figures of the establishment like V.N. Bhatkhande too was vehemently opposed to all mechanised instruments. However, both made the crucial distinction between the use of audiography for musicological study and its usage for musical entertainment<sup>73</sup>. This viewpoint was echoed by A.K. Coomaraswamy in his more nuanced critique of the 'new media', in a collection of essays published in 1909<sup>74</sup>:

It should be understood that the condemnation of the gramophone here given is concerned solely with its use as a substitute for music as an art. Just as machinery has a due place in industry, so even the gramophone has a use. This use is however as a scientific instrument--- not as an interpreter of human emotion. In the recording of songs, the analysis of music for theoretical purposes, and especially, perhaps, in the exact study of an elaborate melody of Indian music, the gramophone has a place.<sup>75</sup>

In the essay "Gramophone--and why not?", he questions the popular perception of the gramophone providing "innocent entertainment". For audience with a highly developed musical taste, listening to recorded music amounted to a degraded standard of appreciation, given the quality of tones produced by the gramophone. Displaying a deeper grasp of what the mechanical reproduction of sound entailed---rather than an anti-machinist apprehension or a narrowly anti-colonial rhetoric---he argued that recorded music brings in a monotony, as denies the listener the . For,

The performance of a musician is never exactly repeated--- on each occasion he adapts himself insensibly to the different conditions, and finds also in himself new expression though the old form.<sup>76</sup>

Integral to his denigration was an understanding of the debilitating impact of the "ill-taught piano" and the Pianola---both, colonial introductions---on musical education in particular,

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<sup>70</sup> The ideological, and philosophical, conflicts within the music establishment has been traced in BAKHLE, JANAKI (2006) **Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition**; Permanent Black, New Delhi.

<sup>71</sup> FARRELL (1997:54)

<sup>72</sup> The butt of criticism was the Harmonium, increasingly popular during the late 19th century in North Indian music, which was viewed by the establishment during the 1900s as the bane of musical practice. The 'degrading' aspect of this instrument was its tempered scale, which removed all micro-tonal elements central to the aesthetics of indigenous musical forms; especially when replacing the Sarangi as an accompanying instrument.

<sup>73</sup> During Bhatkhande's tour of South India, he candidly admitted the mistake in not bringing along his phonograph: "Mein apna phonograph saath mein nahin laya, yeh ek prakar se galati hai. Yahain ke geeto ke namune mujhe sahay mein he jana sambhav hota"; **Meri Dakshin Bharat ki yatra: Pandit Bhatkhande** (Trans. Amresh Chandra Chaube) Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidhyalay, Khairagad, 1986 (p155).

<sup>74</sup> **Essays in National Idealism** (first publ. Colombo, 1909); Central Book Depot, Bombay (p201-6)

<sup>75</sup> *ibid* p205.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*, p204.

and on music socialisation in general<sup>77</sup>. In as much as the substance of his argument was a response to the proliferation of these instruments and their legitimation by colonial power structures, its tone willed to contest the values espoused in the commercial representation of these objects. Consider the following copy of an advertisement in 1905:

Every one who loves music should have a Pianola which possesses invaluable qualities, requires very little practice and no musical knowledge to master it as the manipulation is so simple. No other attachment can approach the Pianola in artistic piano playing, which is a substitute for the human fingers in playing the piano.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Coomaraswamy's condemnation was not of audiography as a technology but of the gramophone as a cultural commodity; his critique of recorded music rested on it articulating a mode of producing social life:

"Every time you accept a gramophone in place of a man you degrade the musician, take from him his living, and injure the group-soul of your people. So it appears that your amusement is not quite so innocent as it appeared"<sup>79</sup>.

How was the records industry, which was by then evidently a competing locus of cultural production, engaging with all this?

Or did it anticipate it?

## 2.2 CONSUMER AS COLONIAL SUBJECT

Modern enterprises do not only make products. Intrinsic to their processes of production is a drive to create value-systems for, and around, their products; and ultimately, position them in, if not aggressively seek to fashion, a dominant way of life. Signalling a radically distinct mode of musical activity in India, record firms were compelled to create---in addition to new business practices for recording and vending---new mechanisms of marketing what was produced.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, advertising was a growing dimension of commercial and industrial activities in India. Unlike today, the norm was for newspapers to carry advertisements on the first and last few pages, such that all news was, so to say, bundled between the advertisements. By the early years of 20<sup>th</sup> century, we observe a profusion of advertisements in English and vernacular newspapers. Firms and retailers aimed to extend commercial messages beyond product-information, and thus sought to invent fresh, arresting, informational discourses to convey the merits of their products. This often led them to ape the grammar of news reportage and thereby, along with the invisible hand of the page designers, astutely blur the distinction between news and advertisements. Some readers were uncomfortable with this evolving landscape of newspaper advertising, as the following observation in 1903 demonstrates:

Kanhi kuch log aisa bhi karne lage hain ki apne vityapan samachar-patron mein aisi riti par samacharon hi ki bhanti aur unhon-ke beech mein chapva dete hain ki teen chauthai padhe jaane ke pashchyaat pathal ko gyaat hota hai ki samachar nahin, vityapan hai<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Coomaraswamy was worried about the impact of mechanised playing and listening was having on the learning of music, since they bypassed the rigour of musical education, as elaborated in another essay in the book, 'Music and Education in India' (pp 186-200).

<sup>78</sup> PIONEER 1 Dec. 1905 Advertisement by Harold & Co. of Calcutta (p26)

<sup>79</sup> This contrasts the vision of Berliner, inventor of the disc-machine, who in 1888 opined "Singers, speakers or performers may derive an income from royalties on the sale of their phonautograms....whole evenings will be spent at home going through a long list of interesting performances"; quoted in MARTLAND, P. (1997) **Since Records Began: EMI the first 100 years**; Batsford, London.

<sup>80</sup> SARASWATI 1903 'Vigyapano ki dhoom' by Shyambihari Mishra & Sukhdevbehari Mishra (p348-353) p350

Sceptical about the motives and mechanisms of advertising, these readers were convinced that advertisements, particularly of medicines, were grossly misleading. The only one to benefit from this explosion in advertising, they conclude, "is the Newspaper who gets a good income so that they can provide it to people at low prices"<sup>81</sup>.

Over the following years, as a greater number and assortment of imported, consumer goods got retailed among the rising upper middle class and British residents, the practice of advertising caught on. Glancing at advertisements in domestic newspapers provides a prism to all the hectic activities in the machine and records trade. By the middle of the first decade we see a rapid increase in the number and frequency of advertisements for machines and records, by a plurality of concerns: agents of foreign firms, foreign firms themselves, domestic record manufacturers, and of course, local shops and trading houses. Some retailers from the three large cities started to advertise in newspapers from other cities, including in those from smaller towns---the first sign of an embryonic 'national market' in recorded music.

However, a narrowly economic take on advertising as a distributive mechanism alone does not offer much purchase in our analyses. While advertising was a component of the costs accrued to a manufacturer, and thus part of the process of production, advertising was equally a part of the process of manufacturing the consumers of these records. Besides shaping the selling of hardware, advertisements simultaneously sought to shape tastes---of recorded music as a symbolic form, and of listening as a cultural practice<sup>82</sup>. This lends advertisements as a site to grasp the commercial and ideological discourses constituting, and emanating from, the milieu in which the Gramophone proliferated in India---as much as they contributed to mechanisms therein. However, since advertisements do not involve merely acts of representation, translation or transliteration, they necessitate---and this is a methodological point---being scrutinised beyond their textual and visual embodiment<sup>83</sup>. In elaborating on how advertisements incubated a complementing symbolic and ideological micro-universe for the proliferation of recorded music, the notion of 'cultural frames' becomes significant. This notion enables both, pinpointing the social conditions of the commercial propagation of this 'new media' as also explaining how such a propagation originated from experimentations with new, associational relationships being forged between people and things<sup>84</sup>.

We recollect that before 1902, the singular objective of European and American manufacturers was to sell, not recorded music, but machines in India. It is thus not surprising to find that in their earliest advertisements, local dealers and importers simply listed Talking Machines as an additional product along with Harmoniums, Organs and Music Boxes<sup>85</sup>. By 1899, we see a primordial 'product differentiation' whence some vendors like Paul & Sons in Calcutta put out separate advertisements for Phonographs and Gramophones<sup>86</sup>. A handful of these advertisements occasionally portrayed visuals of the machines, and carried rudimentary pronouncements on the virtues of this 'new media'; these pronouncements were predominantly rationalistic and the written text was the core of this explanation: viz. "They Permanently RECORD HUMAN VOICES and reproduce them

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid*, p352

<sup>82</sup> This was the logic driving the entrepreneurs in Europe and America, albeit reiterated more by editors of American trade journals.

<sup>83</sup> Our intention is not to scrutinise representation alone, such as in FARRELL (1997). Rather, to understand advertisements and advertising's part of, and in intimate empirical relationship with, elements of the wider political economy of recording music and merchandising machines; see PARTHASARATHI (2005).

<sup>84</sup> LEISS, KLINE & JHALLY (1990)

<sup>85</sup> *INDIAN MIRROR* 1 Nov. 1898: Advertisement by Harold & Co. (p1)

<sup>86</sup> *INDIAN MIRROR* 12 July 1899: Advertisement by Paul & Sons "The Phonograph" (p1);

naturally"<sup>87</sup>. Such an emphasis enabled the discursive agencies to play upon the possibility of people wanting to sing or speak themselves into permanence. Thus, advertisements provided a phenomenological take on the powers of audiography; they reiterated a consciousness of the way recording was transforming aural qua aural. This consciousness stemmed from the use of both, the cylinder-based machine that enabled non-professionals to capture the spoken word, and the disc-machine that could only replay pre-recorded sounds.

Wanting to extend commercial messages beyond merely the announcements of product information, firms gradually had to invent new and more persuasive, informational discourses arguing the benefits of their products. Agents of foreign firms and local vendors alike chose a varying set of semantics to underscore the quality and external finesse of their machines: especially their tone arms--a vital component--and brass horns---vital to the gadget's visual appeal<sup>88</sup>. Others sought to expand the market by festive offers, most notably during the Pooja season in Calcutta and Christmas in Madras. This was as much an indication of the existing competition, as a recognition of the spending patterns of the trendy upper middle classes which formed the bulk of the consumers of this 'new media'. Soon foreign firms like GTL too realised the importance of advertising aggressively and intensively during local festivals---like the Pooja season in Bengal---as they were used to in Britain during Christmas.

Amidst all this, fascinating is the changing pronouncements in the advertisements of the Talking Machine Hall, which sold the cylinder format by Hemendra Bose. In its earliest years, the firm chose to capitalise upon the familiarity and popularity of the names behind the music; thus, its advertisements highlighted the names of prominent people in their repertoires, viz. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Dwijendra Lall Roy, Lall Chand Bural et al. However, tempered by the rising Swadeshi wave during the second half of the first decade, we spot a gradual repositioning by the Talking Machine Hall. From mid-1906, its advertisements carried many a jingoist rhetoric: "Records made in your own country", "...much superior to records made by foreign artists..." or simply, "Swadeshi records"<sup>89</sup>. Thus, these advertisements created a landscape of value systems to which, and within which, the Gramophone public reacted in varying manners. In particular, to inculcate a consumer culture around machines and music, such modes of commercial imagination took to addressing individuals in their overlapping identities of a consumer, a listener and a nationalist.

From 1902 to 1908 we also find gradual yet concerted efforts in advertisements to fashion a harmonious transition between the inherited modes of musical practice---be they imported/colonial and indigenous/feudal---and the burgeoning culture around recorded music. The proliferating sales of machines, and the advent of cheaper machines in the market, led to the entry of successively newer social profiles of consumers; in tandem, advertisements increasingly began suggesting that recorded music could accompany, or even enhance, pre-existing forms of entertainment introduced. The most common illustration of this was records of melodies based on the Waltz, what were called 'Dance Records'. The advantage of these lay, as one advertisement proclaimed, in enabling the "general public in out stations where a Good Band is often unprocurable, to enjoy a Dance to

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<sup>87</sup> (*original caps*) INDIAN MIRROR 2 Aug. 1899: Advertisement by Dwarin & Son "Phonograph and Graphophone" (p1).

<sup>88</sup> Retailers like Mullick Brothers in Calcutta spelt out in their advertisements the technical quality of products in more general terms: viz. 'no metallic sound', 'new patented tapered arm' and 'improved records'; see ABP 2 Jan. 1905: Advertisement by Mullick Brothers 'Agents: The GTL' (p11); ABP 19 Sept. 1905 Advertisement by Mullick Brothers (p8)

<sup>89</sup> Three advertisements by 'The Talking Machine Hall' in ABP: 30<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1906, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1906 and 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan. 1907.

music played by the finest Bands”<sup>90</sup>. With Dance Records, mimicking colonial high culture became less dear; it was cheaper to play recorded music during private parties than to hire bands<sup>91</sup>. What we see is commercial representations by the records industry seeking to create a synergy between the aspirations about entertainment and the economic rationality of recorded music. Importantly, this rested on an evolving set of foci: that this new technology could have varied uses, and that the passive listening of music was not necessarily central to its principal application. All in all, by mediating values and information respectively through and on products, such evolving cultural frames sought to propagate ‘music on record’ on three counts---as a media technology, as a cultural practice and as a knowledge form.

One of the central challenges in the historical study of advertising is to demonstrate and explain how “the discourse through and about objects” evolved in a particular milieu<sup>92</sup>. This would enrich our canvas of analysis by incorporating aspects of the consumer culture being inculcated around the Gramophone. As a corollary, we deem it pertinent to examine clues to the preconditions of the gramophone’s representation, as this contributed to preparing the contours of, and paving the way for, the discursivities subsequently infused in commercial portrayal.

First, we should remember that before the Gramophone, the quintessential symbol of a ‘techno-cultural’ music practice was the Pianola--- the latest addition to the series of 19<sup>th</sup> century inventions in the mechanical reproduction of music. Akin to the Piano and the Pianola, owning a Gramophone was as much a sign of wealth as of social status in India--- what Fred Gaisberg had termed “a hallmark of affluence”<sup>93</sup>. Where as the Piano stood for an active and informed musical practice---which required skill, knowledge and labour---the attraction of the Pianola was its automated musicality; thus listening to, or playing along with, melodies churned out by a Pianola was portrayed as recreation, especially for those not skilled in music. Numerous advertisements for the Pianola and Music Boxes dating from the 1890s evidently demonstrate that the conditions for the commercial propagation of ‘mechanised music’---a colonial intervention---existed in India well before the advent of the Gramophone. The records trade built upon this fertile terrain through two arguments, as illustrated in the following copy from an advertisement.

Reasons why people buy Gramophones and Gramophone Records

A desire to hear songs or musical selections that are familiar

To hear some song or pieces of music that you know well, but wish to listen to some particular performer's manner of rendering

A wish to study cultured music, excerpts and numbers from the great opera and composers, sung by the world's most famous artists or played by the master orchestras and bands of the principal music centres

To enjoy the best options in your own homes

Every Gramophone Record is a Work of Art<sup>94</sup> (*original underline*)

The first argument stemmed from projecting ‘music on record’ as a means of pleasure,

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<sup>90</sup> CAPITAL 3 Dec. 1908: Advertisement by The Gramophone Company ‘Gramophone and Band Music’ (p1143). This advertisement goes on to specify that on purchasing the listed set of “Dance Programme Records”, 100 “Ball Programmes” would come free.

<sup>91</sup> Although an individual’s investment in machines varied could range from Rs.40 to Rs. 1600, the recurrent costs on purchasing records was comparable with the price of one ticket to a Concert or a Ball.

<sup>92</sup> WILLIAM LEISS, STEPHEN KLINE & SUT JHALLY (1990) **Social Communication in Advertising**; Routledge, New York.

<sup>93</sup> GAISBERG (1942:57)

<sup>94</sup> CAPITAL 5 Nov. 1908 Advertisement by The Gramophone Company: ‘Music for the love of it’ (p929)

to hear singers from distant cities and music from aspired cultures within the comfort of the home. And the second, by pitching the 'automation' of the disembodied voice provided by the Gramophone as being advantageous for both, learning and listening to music. In other words, recorded music was projected as being, not only a superior form of consuming music but, in tune with the wider technological modernity of the times.

Secondly, during the mid 1890s it was rare for newspaper advertisements to have visuals of Talking Machines, or of a number of models of machines<sup>95</sup>; even at the beginning of the 20th century, and for consumer goods in general, an image system around products was a nascent phenomenon in the commercial landscape of British India. But from the years of the recording expeditions, we see a definite change in the incorporation of visuals of machines in English language newspapers. The qualitative and quantitative aspects of this change involved an increase in column-space of the graphic, greater visual detailing of the product and the greater frequency of publication of such visually centred advertisements. Of significance in the visual constitution of the advertisements was the entry of the now legendary 'His Masters' Voice' logo---depicting a dog listening to a Gramophone<sup>96</sup>---during 1903, along with GTL's existing 'Recording Angels' trademark. By the second half of the decade, the propensity towards visual density was evident in advertisements by both, major foreign firms and domestic retailers. Still however, images were bereft of depicting any human interaction: besides the copy, advertisements comprised of just the visual of a machine, sometimes two rendition of the same model---one with the horn detached and folded in its box, and the other with an upright horn while playing.

Beginning 1908, we notice not only intensifications in advertising but importantly a substantive shift in the grammar of advertising discourse. We observe the incorporation of graphics of people in active proximity, if not actually listening, to a Gramophone. And within this imagery, we observe an overt construction of the social status of the people depicted---i.e. the listener-consumers. This was achieved through the portrayal of their attire---suits, ties, even tuxedos---and the social space of listening---in the lounge of a club, 'sitting room' of house, a ballroom or a private parlour---both of which invariably referred to colonial symbols. Through such an increasingly complex visual interplay of man and machine, together with the advertisement's copy, commercial representations imparted "cultural frames" about recorded music in this renewed discourse.

Two dimensions of this shift demand attention.

First, in such advertisements Machines were the object around which such a shift was instrumentalised. In fact the representation of gramophones in advertisements in a manner wherein the machine was, so to say, speaking its own story is indicative of a pre-historic anthromorphising of consumer commodities<sup>97</sup>. The visual grammar in advertisements allowed for innovations in discursivities, and for developing the associational dimension of argumentation. Machines were diminishingly presented on the basis of their technical traits and commercial efficacy, and increasingly by making them resonate with qualities desired by the consumer---viz. social status, cultural distinction, diversity of entertainment, happy

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<sup>95</sup> This was not due to the incipient state of print-advertising technology, and/or that of advertising practice in general. For, during these years the same newspapers carried many visually rich advertisements for other products: be they three-column photographs---prominently in advertisements for Organs---or detailed pencil sketches, like in advertisements for Dewars whisky showing men attired in a suit socialising in a 'drawing room' with glasses in their hands.

<sup>96</sup> This logo had its roots in Francis Barraud's 1895 painting, the eponymous canvas of Nipper and the phonograph; through a sequence of compulsions and interests, adoptions and adaptations, a work of art had ultimately gotten transformed into a commercial insignia; THE VOICE 1924: 'The Story of 'His Masters' Voice' by Alfred Clark (p3-5).

<sup>97</sup> JHALLY, S. (1993) 'Communications and the materialist conception of history: Marx, Innis and Technology'; CONTINUUM: THE AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF MEDIA & CULTURE, Vol. 7 No. 1.

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Secondly, we observe the rapid emergence of a whole new character of human interaction being added to advertisements. The techno-musical personality of the Gramophone was now being integrated with the social contexts within which recorded music was being consumed. The juxtaposition of the Gramophone with human figures in varying contexts suggested a number of possibilities in which recorded music could be socially positioned. Mediating a fresh epistemology of music as an aural encounter, such cultural frames addressed, and sought to fashion, consumers of records as simultaneously (trendy) audiences for recorded music and (better) colonial subjects---by incorporating a spectrum of recognisably colonial citations---ideological, spatial and social. Thus, 'music on a record' provided a fresh avenue for synergy between the production and consumption of colonial culture in its entirety---advertisements acting as crucial fulcrums to propel both, colonial commerce and colonial culture.

Consequently, as much as recorded music was a colonial technological and aesthetic experience for the emergent upper middle class, the Gramophone was visually reiterated as being a symbol of their social and financial status. And it was these sensibilities that got cast in the grammar of advertisements in newspapers. This is more visibly amplified in another construction of the personality of recorded music---one that surfaced with the introduction of Cabinet Machines in 1908. In these models, the speaker-horn---once fetishised for its brass finish-- was either detachable, or enclosed within wooden Victorian cabinets. Not surprisingly, attention and attraction returned to the physical aesthetic of the furniture-looking Machines; advertisements harping upon the quality of the cabinets' "Mahogany"<sup>99</sup> wood. This is strikingly similar to the emphasis on the ornately carved cabinets of the Organ marketed in India in the 1890s<sup>100</sup>---an instance of the pre-conditions that fuelled the emergence of the gramophone's image-system. The appearance of the Cabinet Machines was not just a rationale to buy the latest and improved models; the corporeal traits of this consumer gadget were sought to be integrated with the aesthetics of the upper class Indian home. Emphases on the non-musical aspects of tastes led to an all encompassing sales pitch, to the extent the copy often clarifying that these machines are "self contained in magnificent cabinets, with no visible sign of its purpose"<sup>101</sup>.

Clearly, the Gramophone had moved on from being solely an imported form of musical entertainment, or a commodity for a technological callisthenic. Ingrained in the commercial propagation of recorded music was an acknowledgement that 'music on record' did not represent an ordinary product, technology or idea; rather it was deeply associated with the lifestyle of colonizers, aspired by large sections of the upper middle classes. Its commercial imagination construed it as a commodity in tune with prevailing tastes of, in particular, furniture in the homes of the aristocracy, professionals, civil servants and business classes, the prime pleasure-seekers of recorded music<sup>102</sup>. This strategy reiterated the upwardly---i.e. more coloniser-like---social status attached to what was once simply an imported curio. That

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<sup>98</sup> This was qualitatively similar to the dynamics of advertising in the US industry, between 1910 and 1930, where it was precisely through intensive advertising campaigns that the Victor Talking Machine Company succeeded in convincing consumers that the phonograph was a cultural necessity; see KENNEY, W.H. (1999) **Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945**; OUP, New York.

<sup>99</sup> **ABP** 2 May, 1908: Advertisement by The Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd. (p1)

<sup>100</sup> In the late 1890s, pictorial ads for the Organ, invariably covering one-third column space on page one, categorically mention that the "music desk are elaborately carved". For instance, **INDIAN MIRROR** 5 Nov. 1898: Advertisement by Harold & Co. (p1)

<sup>101</sup> **CAPITAL** 3 Dec. 1908: Advertisement by The Gramophone Company (p1143)

<sup>102</sup> The transformation of the piano from a musical instrument into a piece of bourgeois furniture forms a historical backdrop to the gramophone's similar transformation; see MELVILLE-MASON, GRAHAM (1977) 'The Gramophone as Furniture' in **Phonographs and Gramophones: The Edison Phonograph Centenary Symposium**; The Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh (pp 117-138).

by the end of the first decade the Gramophone was being sold in furniture shops and 'lifestyle' stores---like by the British retailers, P. Orr & Sons in Madras---was overtly symptomatic of this.

### The Colonial Harmonics of Modernity

The sphere of the media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, celebrated at many a moment, provides an increasingly plentiful turf of material and symbolic artifacts---be they visual & aural, replicable & non-replicable. These, with the passage of time, have come to provide a valuable array of resources for investigating configurations of the media in the past. Historical scholarship in media studies has sought to perceive various artefacts of the media as more than sources or/and illustrative footnotes. Moreover, such a widening of the body of source materials has not been aimed at enlarging the universe of 'data' simply to facilitate a barefoot imposition of theories to evidence about the past, as often witnessed in the nomothetic social sciences<sup>103</sup>. Rather, to enrich the variety and compendium of knowledge about the relationship between historical variables by focusing on the qualitative aspects of their conjunction in specific cases, such as in this exercise.

However, the glut of scholarship on the media in India, noticeably coinciding with the decade old 'communication explosion', has refrained from exploring their formative conditions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The predominance of indigenous scholarship---obsessed with cinema and television---rooted in certain (especially hermeneutic) strands of cultural studies has contributed, inadvertently or otherwise, to a near complete neglect of industry studies on the media. This, in turn, partially explains the relatively miniscule literature on the early historical development of various media industries in India<sup>104</sup>. On the other hand, in the field of history, the neglect of themes dealing with the media, and industrially mediated-cultures, may be explained through a set of, often inter-related, reasons. For, where historians have ventured into exploring the deployment of media/communication technologies they have primarily addressed military and/or administrative concerns<sup>105</sup>. This is due to, most fundamentally, their conception of 'Communication' being framed within the so called "transmission" view<sup>106</sup>. Moreover, researchers tend to conform to established disciplinary divides wherein the study of communication processes having relatively pronounced symbolic value, and thus empirically interrogated, (such as radio when compared to telephone) has been largely undertaken by historical anthropologists, various ethno-scientists and recently, by sociologists. The lack of a rich and diverse array of studies on individual media enterprises, let alone sectors of the media industry, has prevented theoretical formulations informed by local historicity on the formative years, and thus the colonial contours, of the media industry in India.

We were aware that studying societal activity entailing the formative contours of the media in India called for excavating processes wherein colonialism paved the way for the introduction and production of new cultural forms. This is true of both

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<sup>103</sup> WALLERSTEIN, I. et al (1997) **Open the Social Sciences**; Vistar, New Delhi.

<sup>104</sup> For a detailed enumeration of standing research, see DAS, B., PARTHASARATHI, V. & POITEVIN, G (2005) "Investigating Communication: Remooring the Contours of Research" in B. BEL, B. DAS, V. PARTHASARATHI & G. POITEVIN (Ed.) **Communication Processes - Volume 1: Media and Mediation**; Sage, New Delhi.

<sup>105</sup> On the telegraph, see GHOSE (1995) & CHOUDHARY (2005); on intelligence and information management see, BAYLY (1996), and S. BHATTACHARYA (2000) "British Military Information Management Techniques and the South Asian Soldier: Eastern India during the Second World War"; **MAS** Vol. 34 (2) pp483-510. For a historian's exploration on radio and its administration, see GUPTA (1995).

<sup>106</sup> CAREY, J. (1989)

the principal cultural form under investigation here, recorded music, and that contributing to its wider making, viz. advertisements. In doing so, we also acknowledged the imperative of recognising these cultural forms as simultaneously forms of social interaction, objects of commerce and structures of meaning. Thus, running through our narrative is a sensibility that examined the formative historyland of recorded music as being constitutive of not only the role played by institutions of the media---fundamental, tangential or catalytic---but also the historical shaping of media institutions, practices and products.

These twin influences as much defined the canvas of our analysis as marked its methodological underpinnings. Although ever since the birth of recorded history, the 'media' has pivoted around intensely local ritual practices and artistic expressions, in the last century its shaping by technology, permeation by industry and mediation by distant political fulcrums has forced changes in understandings of the term. Moreover, a media history of early recorded music cannot be seeking a grip a substance with attributes, but an ensemble of inter-locking activities, grounded in a specific historical order. As a corollary, we found the need to map the multiple instances that articulated the relationship between early commercial recording, the incipient records trade and emergent cosmologies of representation.

The incremental force of the regimes represented by the merchants of music led to the propulsion and proliferation of the Gramophone as a commodity that was at once, a technology and a cultural form. If we play back our meandering narrative, we find that the importance of 'music on record' was commercial---and not technological. This scenario was intricately moulded by two institutional fulcrums: a specific mechanism of technologically capturing and industrially producing music---led by the recording engineers---and a renewed set of commercial agents and business practices. Thus, and in its essence, we realised that the historical significance of recorded music was its procreating a new set of cultural producers, retailers and consumers. In exploring this complex, we drew attention to the manner in which the circumstances governing the advent of the business of recorded music in India were tuned by the colonial milieu. This was as much in the economic dynamics of the relationship between the Imperial centre and the Colonial periphery, as in the ideological and symbolic dynamics of the cultural encounter between the Raj and its subjects. We structured our narrative so as to demonstrate how colonialism provided the pre-conditions of the Gramophone's emergence as also tempered the conditions of emergence of 'music on record'.

On the first dynamics, while we gained insights on the role and impact of foreign firms on colonial India, we also became conscious of the significance of indigenous consumption of records in the overall expansion of leading British firms. Although consumers of machines and records were small in proportion to the total Indian population, they amounted to a reasonably large number when compared to those in other countries. Not surprisingly, British India was the largest market for machine and records among all colonial countries---and, for that matter, any country outside Europe and North America. This is reflected in GTL's turnover accrued from its four leading overseas markets by 1908: Russia, Germany, India and France. GTL's £2.1 million takings from these countries, British India contributed to well over 8%---marginally more than that by France<sup>107</sup>!

Recognising that the business of 'music on record' rested on creating, at once, a new symbolic and material form---i.e. recorded music and records themselves---we underscored

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<sup>107</sup> JONES, G. (1985) 'The Gramophone Company: An Anglo-American Multinational, 1898-1931'; *BHR* Vol. 59 No. 1 (pp 76-100) p88.

the mechanisms of extraction associated with each. The practice of Recording Expeditions, aimed at expanding the repertoire and thus the symbolic form of records, was a peculiar means of garnering surplus. Central to the aims of the roving recordists<sup>108</sup> was sourcing a specific object---music---and bringing back a unique product, wax discs. Once brought back, these were processed through many stages<sup>109</sup>, like any other commodity, before being replicated in large numbers into the finished product---records<sup>110</sup>. Thus, in its essence, Recording Expeditions involved the export from India of disembodied music as a 'raw material', and the import of 'music on record' as a finished product; consequently, this business practice was greatly in tune with the wider dynamics of colonial extraction, not least in its mechanisms. And in this process, the role of the roving recordists resembled that of traders, involved as they were in identifying, sourcing and buying the requisite raw materials. Moreover, their contribution to the commercial regimes orchestrating their expeditions, given the span of cultural geography they traversed, equally involved being conduits in the transportation of ideas<sup>111</sup>, within and across the regions they visited---many of which had varying relationship with the British Empire.

The records business also rested on the more conventional form of extraction; this concerned the material form of 'music on record'. For, this business rested on the export from India of another vital raw material---Shellac<sup>112</sup>, over which British India had effectively a global monopoly. The price of shellac was highly volatile throughout the first decade of the century: in part due to the chain of intermediaries which had traditionally controlled this highly speculative trade, and in part because the quantity and quality of shellac produced did not kept pace with the newer kinds of demands<sup>113</sup>. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rapidly expanding records industry in Europe and the USA was fast becoming the largest consumer of shellac exported from India<sup>114</sup>. In 1907-08, out of 13000 tons of shellac exported from India, 6000 tons went to the US; this substantial increase over previous years was, according to the US Counsel General in Calcutta, "due directly to its increasing use in Talking Machine records"<sup>115</sup>. In fact, the establishment of a records factory in India in late 1908 by GTL---a worthy historyland in itself---was motivated by the firm's need to as much bypass the speculative trade in shellac, as to overcome the increasing transaction costs

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<sup>108</sup> This makes us ponder over the self-proclamation of these journeys as 'Recording Expeditions'; the historical etymology of 'Expedition' indicates it involving travel to an unknown region, usually with the intent of bringing back to the 'home' region Objects---potentially for sale and/or imitation; Ideas---of and about different societies; and, Exhibits---corresponding cultural artefacts such as clothes, food and even people.

<sup>109</sup> During the first half of the 1900s, tasks of processing wax recordings and replicating the stamper by firms, often took place in different locations. For instance, where as the wax discs brought back by Gaisberg were processed into metal stampers at GTL's facility in London, the master-discs were then shipped to another destination---its factory in Hannover---where the finished product was manufactured.

<sup>110</sup> Here, it needs to be borne in mind that records were different from other commodities not only due to the dual nature (as a commodity having an inter-related material and symbolic value) but also their sale being limited to markets of the country of origin.

<sup>111</sup> But their work entailed understanding local business practices, preferences of listeners and patterns of usage by consumers, much more so than other traders, given the novelty of raw material they were sourcing and 'products' to be vended.

<sup>112</sup> Shellac could be called the parent of the modern plastics industry because in the attempts to produce a resin resembling shellac, we notice the invention of synthetic materials. The blocking of the Malacca Straits, during the Second World War, forced the US industry to look for shellac substitutes for records; this provided the final push to the move from shellac to vinyl; CHANAN, M. (1995) **Repeated Takes: A short history of recording and its effects on music**; Verso, London.

<sup>113</sup> Commerce Dept 1922, #1-30 (p1). While shellac had been long used in making varnish, a use extended to paints, the birth of the electrical era saw shellac being deployed in large quantities to make insulators.

<sup>114</sup> Ten years later, as the records industry in Europe was crawling out of the slump of the War, there was a sudden and gigantic rise in the prices of records precisely because the price of shellac, speculative as it had been, rose from £50-80 to £500 per; **TMN** 1919 'Another Advance in Record Prices' (p310). Fluctuation apart, in the second decade the prices soared, especially during the latter years of the First World War which saw prices increase to 6 times that of the average during 1910-16; Foreign & Political Dept. 1916 # 107-118.

<sup>115</sup> **TMW** 1906 'Shellac for Talking Machine' (p60)

incurred in both, the export of shellac and import of finished discs. The historical significance of this intensely transitional moment lies not merely in this factory being the first and largest in the colonial world; but more importantly, as another illustration of the trajectory of many an Anglo-American firm s during this era which “started their corporate existence in extractive industries and only later began to manufacture”<sup>116</sup>.

While these forms of extraction---financial, symbolic and material---contributed to the emergent redefinition of the economic organisation of musical entertainment, this redefinition itself rested on the creation of a commodity system in music, leads us to the second dynamic. The emergence of ‘music on record’ created a scenario whereby music ‘performed’ at one place was ‘produced’ at another, and ‘consumed’ at many others across spatial frontiers and temporal orders. This scenario, unfolding in a little over 10 years, began altering not only the nature of music as a cultural practice but, through it, the epistemology of what constituted music and musical entertainment. The meanings accorded to the Gramophone in public discourse, while reflecting the elastic terrain of use and relations of usage of recorded music in its formative years, were essentially responding to the colonial introduction, trade and marketing of this ‘new media’. But we also found that much before the physical advent of the Talking Machine in India a gamut of interventions---some dating back to the late 1850s---succeeded in preparing a hospitable milieu for recorded music. Amongst these was, first, the reorganisation of urban centres including spaces of traditional social interaction and cultural entertainment, which contributed to forging the sites where gramophone culture could germinate. The second was the image-system of music-making instruments during the 1890s, which prepared the ground for the commercial discourse of, and around, the Gramophone. While we understood the shallowness of thinking about commoditification without engaging with advertising, we were equally aware that a focus on advertising as distributive mechanism alone would not offer much potency. This influenced the incorporation of an understanding of the cultural and ideological representation of recorded music, something which was a crucial structuring element in the commercial making of early recorded music<sup>117</sup>. In doing so, we emphasised the dialectics between the commercial discourses on musical instruments predating the Gramophone and the emergent, and evolving, contours of advertising pertaining to machines and records (redefined and fresh set of discursive practices accompanying machines and records). And having done so, we found that the commercial imagination of machines and recorded music overtime came to complement the wider economic order of colonialism within which the commercial dynamics of recorded music itself germinated.

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<sup>116</sup> STOPFORD, J.M. (1974) ‘The Origins of British-Based Multinational Manufacturing Enterprises’; *The Business History Review*, Vol.48, No.3 (Issue on ‘Multinational Enterprise’; Autumn) pp303-335 (p307).

<sup>117</sup> Elsewhere we have shown that it was the conditional outcomes of the relationship between the expanding contours of, and contests within, the expeditionary forces that account for the changing grammar of advertisements; see PARTHASARATHI, V. (2005) “Construing a ‘New Media’ Market: Merchandising Recorded Music, 1900-1911” in B. BEL, B. DAS, V. PARTHASARATHI & G. POITEVIN (Ed.) **Communication Processes - Volume 1: Media and Mediation**; Sage, New Delhi.

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