Radio Retrospective

2024

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Subhadra Kumari Chauhan and other poets at a recording, 1942

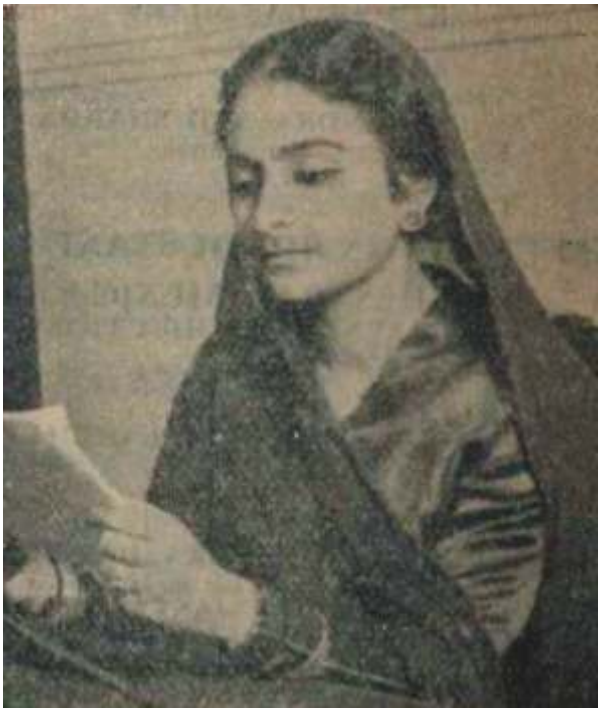
She was the only woman poet at the *Hindi Kavi Sammelan* (Hindi poetry festival) organised by AIR Delhi.

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1942

Cover Image:

Kanika Bandyopadhyay, popularly known as Mohor-*di*, was an exponent of Rabindra-sangeet. She took music lessons from none other than Rabindranath Tagore. It was Tagore who named her Kanika (her original name being Anima), also the name of one of his books on poetry. According to Haimanti Goswami Banerjee, this photograph was taken by her grandfather Parimal Goswami when Mohor-di visited his home in Kolkata,1953

Courtesy: Haimanti Goswami Banerjee, Kolkata, 1953



Meri taza nazmein, 1942 (My recent verse)

Amrita Kaur (later Pritam) presenting her recent work in Punjabi, from AIR Lahore

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1942

Centre for Women's Development Studies
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Curation & Research: Bhaswati Thakurta
Introduction & Captions:
Bhaswati Thakurta & Malavika Karlekar
Design: Sundaresh

Radio Retrospective

Established in both Bombay and Calcutta in 1927, the India Broadcasting Company became All India Radio (AIR) in 1936. We share photographic vignettes and interesting nuggets from its early history, where, before long, women were active participants – both as broadcasters and as presenters. We showcase women activists, politicians, singers, school girls and others whose voices were soon heard over the air waves. Apart from their many other roles, women in the public domain like Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade and Begum Aizaz Rasul made their point of view known on the radio. Radio recordings meant that it was not always necessary to queue up for entry into auditoriums to hear M.S. Subbulakshmi and other classical singers. In addition, by the 1950s, an impressive archive of recordings of prominent Indian classical singers and musicians started growing.

Listening to music on the radio soon became a major pastime. Interestingly, the harmonium was banned between 1940 and 1971. During the Indian independence movement, both British and Indian scholars condemned it for embodying an unwelcome foreign musical sensibility (Rahaim, 2011). Apart from this view, according to music critics, the instrument could not produce the microtones and ornamentation so vital to Indian classical music such as the *ghasit*, the *meend* and the *gamak*, the slides and glides between notes and the accent on these. A singer of AIR Kolkata from 1972 to 1982 recalls that, except for well-known singers, emerging artists were not allowed to use the harmonium while recording.

Together with Indian music, it was not long before western music also gained popularity on AIR. Remembered for his seven-hour long commentary at Mahatma Gandhi's funeral in Delhi, Melville de Mello used to compere various western music programmes including, as our visual shows, 'Music Box'. Soon, students were enthusiastically taking part in various AIR programmes, a favourite being the debate. Our photograph of the debate on uniforms focusses on students earnestly arguing their points. Those from Ewarts Girls School were in sarees – it was a finishing school that did not have any specific dress code - while those from Church Park Convent wore uniforms.

Ironically, the shortwave radio station introduced by the British was used against them: in 1942, two shortwave radio stations were founded in Delhi and Berlin respectively - Congress Radio and Azad Hind Radio. When Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement, the underground Congress Radio was managed by Usha Mehta. A little-known broadcaster of Azad Hind radio was convent-educated Protiva Bose, born and brought up in Burma (Myanmar). A frequent attendee at public meetings called by Subhas Chandra Bose, she gladly accepted the offer to be a broadcaster when the Azad Hind radio headquarters shifted to Rangoon. The life of a broadcaster at AIR Delhi, was indeed action-packed. In her autobiography, Saeeda Bano, the first woman news reader, wrote that on 15th August 1947, the day had been spent in non-stop broadcasts. With spreading communal violence, more hectic and stressful days followed for both her and her young son, Saeed.

In 1952, all film song-based programmes on AIR were banned by B.V. Keskar, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, as these were regarded as being too westernised. As a result, that very year, when Radio Ceylon broadcast its weekly countdown show, Binaca Geetmala, hosted by Ameen Sayani, it became immensely popular in India. It was quite a major step when from 1967 onwards, AIR initiated commercial broadcasts. The first programme, 'Saridon ke Sathiyo', again hosted by Ameen Sayani, showcased Bollywood personalities promoting the popular pain killer. Tuning in to commercial radio programmes hosted by Sravanti Mazumdar such as 'moner moton gaan mone rakha kotha' (remembering a favourite song) from AIR Kolkata, became a daily routine with many homemakers. Clearly, long before the relentless onslaught of the visual media, the radio brought news and entertainment to India. Through rare archival images, our calendar presents known as well as little-known moments of women's role in this vital slice of our history.

Bhaswati Thakurta and Malavika Karlekar

Presidential address, All India Women's Conference, 1939

Rani Laxmibai Rajwade, President of All India Women's Conference, broadcasting the summary of her address from the Delhi station of AIR. A practising doctor, she worked actively for women's franchise.

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1939

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 New Year's Day	2	3	◑ 4	5	6
7	8	9	10	● 11	12	13 Lohri
14 Makar Sankranti	15 Magha Bihu/ Pongal	16	17 Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday	◐ 18	19	20
21	22	23	24	○ 25 Hazarat Ali's Birthday	26 **Republic Day**	27
28	29	30	31			

January 2024

December

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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February

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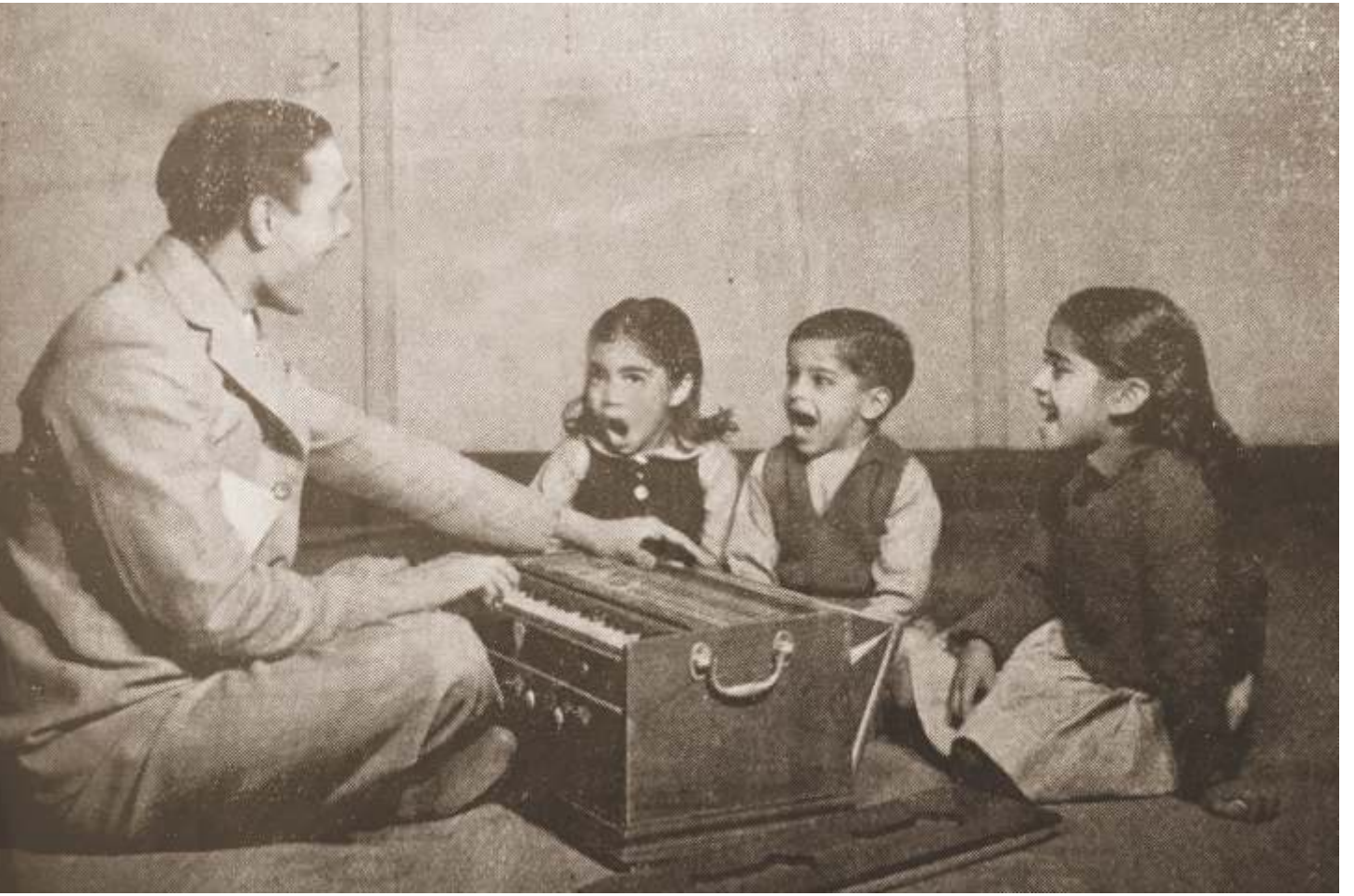

When the harmonium was banned, 1940

Between 1940 to 1971, the harmonium was banned on AIR. As Matthew Rahaim wrote in 'That Ban(e) of Indian Music: Hearing Politics in the Harmonium' (2011), 'During the Indian independence movement both British and Indian scholars condemned the harmonium for embodying an unwelcome foreign musical sensibility'. Today 'it is still provisionally accepted on the national air waves'.

Courtesy: Aswin Punathambekar, University of Pennsylvania

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	◑ 3
4	5	6	7	8	9	● 10
11	12	13	14 *Sri Panchami/ Basant Panchami*	15	◐ 16	17
18	19 *Shivaji Jayanti*	20	21	22	23	○ 24 ***Guru Ravi Das's Birthday***
25	26	27	28	29		

February 2024

January

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March

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A Debate, 1941

A lively debate between the students of Church Park Convent and Ewarts Girls' School at AIR Madras (Chennai) station titled 'The Need of Uniform'.

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1941

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
31 *Easter Sunday*					1	2
◑ 3	4	5	6 *Birthday of Swamy Dayananda Saraswati*	7	8 *Maha Shivaratri*	9
● 10	11	12	13	14	15	16
◐ 17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 *Holika Dahan, Dolyatra*	○ 25 **Holi** *Dolyatra*	26	27	28	29 **Good Friday**	30

March 2024

February

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April

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'Music Box', 1942

The choir of Covent of Jesus and Mary, New Delhi participated in this programme with Paul Strauss and his orchestra. The compere of the programme was Melville de Mello who is seated in the middle at this outdoor shooting of the event.

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1942

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	◑ 2	3	4	5 Jamat-Ul-Vida	6
7	● 8	9 Chaitra Sukladi/ Gudi Padava/ Ugadi/ Cheti Chand	10	11 **Idu'l Fitr**	12	13 Vaisakhi/ Vishu
14 Meshadi /Vaisakhadi/Bahag Bihu	15	◐ 16	17 **Ram Navami**	18	19	20
21 **Mahavir Jayanti**	22	23	○ 24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

April 2024

March

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May

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Secret radio broadcaster, 1942

When Subhas Chandra Bose (Netaji) changed the location of the secret Azad Hind radio station from Berlin to Rangoon (Yangon) 1943, Protiva Bose volunteered to be a broadcaster. This photograph was taken in Rangoon shortly after her marriage with Shomyron Das.

Courtesy: Aditi Roy Ghatak and Srirupa Ray, Kolkata

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			◑ 1	2	3	4
5	6	7	● 8 *Birthday of Guru Rabindranath' Tagore*	9	10	11
12	13	14	◐ 15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	○ 23 **Buddha Purnima**	24	25
26	27	28	29	◑ 30	31	

May 2024

April

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June

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Congress Radio, 1942

During the Quit India Movement, Usha Mehta, a broadcaster with Congress Radio, was caught red-handed at the station while broadcasts were on. This photograph is of her (to the right) when she reached Victoria Terminus, Bombay, after her release from Yerawada jail, Pune.

Courtesy: Mani Bhavan Gandhi Sangrahalaya, Mumbai

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30						1
2	3	4	5	● 6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	◐ 14	15
16	17 Id-ul-Zuha (Bakrid)	18	19	20	21	○ 22
23	24	25	26	27	28	◑ 29

June 2024

May

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July

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Commenting on World War II, 1942

In 1942, Begum Aizaz Rasul, member of United Provinces Legislative Council, broadcast a talk on the war situation. She was the only Muslim member involved in the drafting of the Constitution of India.

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1942

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	● 6
7 Rath Yatra	8	9	10	11	12	13
◐ 14	15	16	17 Muharram	18	19	20
○ 21	22	23	24	25	26	27
◑ 28	29	30	31			

July 2024

June

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August

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Amita Roy (later Malik) as disc jockey at AIR, Lucknow, 1944

Noted media person and film critic, Amita joined AIR in 1944 for a couple of years when there were few women in the field. Later, she went on to broadcast with the BBC, CBC and other international broadcasting organisations.

Courtesy: the late Amita Malik

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
● 4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	◐ 12	13	14	15 **Independence Day** *Parsi New Year's day/ Nauraj*	16	17
18	○ 19 *Raksha Bandhan*	20	21	22	23	24
25	◑ 26 **Janmashtami (Vaishnva)**	27	28	29	30	31

August 2024

July

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September

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29	30					

A single mother in Delhi, 1947

Saeeda Bano joined AIR, Delhi on 13th August 1947, and was the first women to be employed by the organisation. According to her granddaughter Shahana Raza, the following September, her father who was then eight years old, and grandmother faced communal violence.

Courtesy: Shahana Raza, Dubai

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	● 3	4	5	6	7 *Vinayaka Chaturthi/ Ganesh Chaturthi*
8	9	10	◐ 11	12	13	14
15 *Onam or Thiru Onam Day*	16 **Milad-un-Nabi or Id-e-Milad (Birthday of Prophet Mohammad**	17	○ 18	19	20	21
22	23	24	◑ 25	26	27	28
29	30					

September 2024

August

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October

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A recording at AIR Bombay (Mumbai) station, 1950s

At a recital to mark the death anniversary of Faiyaz Khan, an exponent of the Agra *gharana*, Shreemati Bai Narvekar, was the only women performer (Aneesh Pradhan, 'Recreating the Faiyaz Khan barsi concert of 1957'). She was among the handful of girls from 'respectable families' who became students of Vilayat Hussain Khan (Agra -Atrauli *gharana*).

Courtesy: The Indian Listener, 1957

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 **Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday**	● 3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 *Dussehra (Saptami)*	◐ 11 *Dussehra (Mahashtami)* *Dussehra (Mahanavmi)*	12 **Dussehra**
13	14	15	16	○ 17 *Maharshi Valmiki's Birthday*	18	19
20 *Karaka Chaturdasi (Karwa Chouth)*	21	22	23	◑ 24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31 **Diwali (Deepavali)** *Naraka Chaturdasi*		

October 2024

September

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November

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The morning hymn, 1958

The 20-minute hymn, 'Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatam' was first broadcast in 1958 on AIR by M. S. Subbulakshmi. This morning hymn soon become extremely popular in most south Indian households, and was reputed to help people adjust their watches and manage daily chores.

Courtesy: Kalki Group Image Gallery, Chennai

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					● 1	2 Govardhan Puja
3 Bhai Duj	4	5	6	7 Pratihar Sashthi / Surya Sashthi (Chhat Puja)	8	◐ 9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Guru Nanak's Birthday	○ 16
17	18	19	20	21	22	◑ 23
24 Guru Teg Bahadur's Martyrdom Day	25	26	27	28	29	30

November 2024

October

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December

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Sravanti Mazumdar and the world of jingles, 1970

Boroliner Sansar (The world of Boroline), an enormously popular programme on AIR Calcutta (Kolkata), was hosted by the popular singer, Sravanti Mazumdar. She sang a number of jingles – short, pithy tunes - for Boroline cream and various other products.

Courtesy: Sravanti Mazumdar, HMV Saregama, Kolkata

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
● 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
◐ 8	9	10	11	12	13	14
○ 15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	◑ 23	24 *Christmas Eve*	25 **Christmas Day**	26	27	28
29	30	● 31				

December 2024

November

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January

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Centre for Women's Development Studies
An autonomous research institute supported by the
Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)
25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi-110001
Phone +91 11 23345530/ 23365541 Fax +91 11 23346044
E.mail cwds@cwds.ac.in
Website https://www.cwds.ac.in