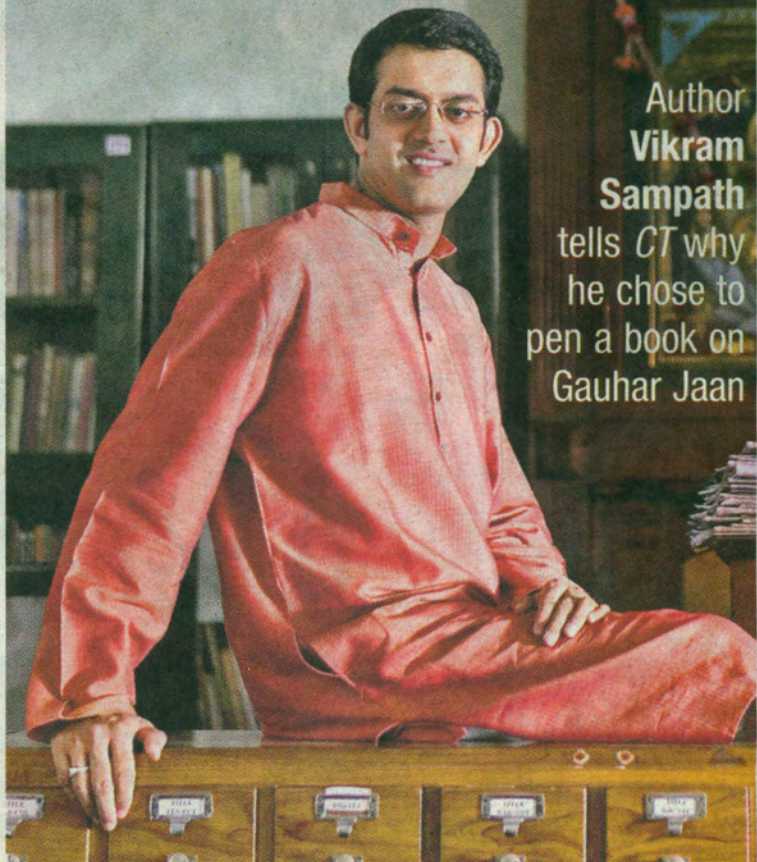


What made you write Gauhar Jaan — The life and times of a musician?

■ It was accident. I was researching in the Mysore palace archives for my first book titled *Splendours of Royal Mysore: The untold story of the Wodeyars*, when I chanced upon Gauhar Jaan's name. Though she was from Kolkata, she had died in Mysore. She was the first Indian and first woman to record on the gramophone. My book describes the evolution of the recording industry in India and its impact on Indian music, theatre and social life.

Would you say that Gauhar Jaan was Kolkata's original Page 3 girl?

■ Of course, she was. She'd go around Kolkata in a four horse-drawn buggy, for which she even paid a penalty of Rs 1,000 a day to the Viceroy! People would wait to see her drive down every evening, wearing the most expensive costumes and a pair of dark goggles. One day, her buggy had crossed the path of the Viceroy's. He mistook her for a queen and had taken his hat off to bow to her. Later, he was miffed when he got to know that she was a courtesan! She was also known to have thrown a lavish party worth Rs 20,000 when her cat gave birth to a litter of kittens! Her photograph used to appear on matchboxes in those days that were manufactured in Austria!



Author
**Vikram
Sampath**
tells *CT* why
he chose to
pen a book on
Gauhar Jaan

'Gauhar Jaan was Kolkata's original Page 3 girl'

Have you unearthed anything new about her during your research?

■ Yes. I've documents on two court cases that she fought in Kolkata. One was a paternity suit filed by her alleged step-brother named Bhoglu after the death of her mother, Badi Malkajaan. Bhoglu was actually the son of a maid and Gauhar had to prove in court that she was indeed her mother's daughter. Her parents had had a bitter divorce

and she had to go to Allahabad to trace her father, who was an Armenian Christian. He had charged Rs 9,000 to come down to Kolkata and accept her as his daughter! Another case that she fought was with her secretary-turned-love, Abbas. Though he had stood by Gauhar during the Bhoglu case, he later turned out to be a cheat. Gauhar had won the case though it left her in penury.

PRIYANKA DASGUPTA



Gauhar Jaan