
UNIT 10 CONSTRUCTION OF TRADITION

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Music, dance and enactment have been an integral part of ritualistic and social celebrations in societies all over the world. All important occasions were celebrated with singing and dancing in groups within the community in which both men and women took part. Individual performances seem to be a much later phenomenon. The sexual division of labour reflected in the performance of various traditional art forms as well.

In India all the classical performing art forms have a long history. We are proud to have a treatise, Natyasastra, especially dedicated to theatre art, written in circa 200 BC to 200 AD. Alongside the classical arts forms have had well defined and well organised structures, there is a tradition of folk forms as rich as the classical forms. These folk forms reflect the society and its rituals and through them the age old traditions of the society are preserved. Most folk performances are associated with women. Women have contributed immensely in keeping alive many of these art forms. However, we need to reflect upon how society treats the women performers, and their status in society. In India, traditionally, all art forms have been associated with the different gods and goddesses, for example Lord Shiva with dance, Lord Ganesha with theatre and goddess Saraswati with music and education. Ironically, while goddess Saraswati, a feminine deity is associated with music and education, women performers in the folk as well as classical tradition were not given the same status and respect as male performers.

In this unit our objective is to discuss the engendering of performance related activities in Indian society and the status of women performers in the area of performing arts.

10.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Describe how the tradition of performance took shape in the Indian society;
- Critically analyse how gender is related to the traditional performances;
- Discuss the status of women in social performances; and
- Explain the status of women in classical performances.

10.3 PERFORMANCE AND GENDER IN PRE-VEDIC INDIA

As in any other society in the world, performing activities such as music, dance and enactment have been an essential part of the Indian society. They were an integral part of the shamanistic rituals in pre-Vedic India. There are no direct materials available for studying the state of performance related art forms of this period but archaeological findings help us to draw some conclusions regarding this. Evidence of dance or performance related activities was first noticed in the rock paintings of the Mesolithic age. The rock paintings in the caves and rocks of Kabarapahar, Abchand, Raisen, Bhopal, Berkheda, Pachmarhi, and Hoshangabad have illustrations of group dancing as well as individual dancing. Some of the paintings show people

wearing masks and others show the dancers holding some kind of musical instruments.

These paintings indicate that group performances were the usual practice in the prehistoric period whereas solo form of performances came in vogue much later. Masks were used for enacting various characters in the shamanic magic performances. It is difficult to differentiate between the male and female figures in the paintings of the earlier Mesolithic age as the figures are asexual. However, distinct male and female figures can be seen in the paintings of the later period. Three types of groups can be identified from the paintings: groups of male dancers, female dancers, and mixed groups. Evidence about the existence of women performers in India first appears in this period.

The only artefact from the Indus Valley civilisation that indicates evidence of performance related activities is the famous “Dancing Girl” figure. However no conclusion can be drawn based on a single artefact.

10.4 PERFORMANCES AND GENDER IN VEDIC RITUALS

The Vedas are regarded as the earliest sources documenting the Indian society. They contain the records of all activities of the inhabitants of that period. Numerous references in the Vedas confirm that performance activities were a feature of worship, shamanic magic, social rituals and celebrations and entertainment. While evidence of the existence of dance and enactment can be seen in various rock paintings, existence of vocal music was not evident till the Vedic era. The Veda is the first source that refers to music that was in the contemporary Indian society. The Sama Veda in particular is associated to music that contains detailed instructions for singing the richas while performing various Vedic rituals.

Vedic rituals mostly pertained to productivity. The head of the family, usually a male member, and his wife, both took part in the Yajnas but women in particular had to sing the richas and play musical instruments such as Vaana, Vina, Venu etc. during the rituals. Traces of dramatic elements in their rudimentary form too could be found in the ritualistic enactments by the priests. According to Dr. A.B. Keith “the Vedic ritual contained in itself the germs of drama, as is the case with practically every primitive form of worship” (Keith, 1923, p. 23).

It will not be wrong to say that the Vedic ritualistic music was practiced by upper classes of the society as only Brahmanas and Kshatriyas had permission to take active part in Vedic rituals. Men and women had their distinct parts to render in this music. Apart from music many references to dancing by both men and women are also found in the Vedas. The

“Shatapatha Brahmana” mentions reciting Samagana during the Yajna as a duty specifically delegated to women. Women desiring a child used to sing the *richas* as an accompanying component to Vedic rituals involving sacrificial offerings for the purpose.

Apart from the ritualistic music in which women had a definite and important role to play as performers, secular music was also in vogue in Vedic era. Ample references to married women singing in social functions like marriages, child births, etc. are found. Widowed women were barred in these celebrations. In the funeral ceremonies mourning women used to wail with rhythmic beating of the breasts. The actions were accompanied by musical groans and occasional shrieks. These traditions are still followed in many parts of India as a social tradition.

References also indicate about the existence of professional female artistes who could sing, dance and impersonate to earn their livelihood. Some of the female artistes who were wives of actor-entertainers (called ‘œailu?a’) were often forced into prostitution by their husbands.

Check Your Progress 1:

- 1) Which artefact from the Indus Valley Civilisation indicates the existence of women performing artistes in that era?
- 2) Give an account of role of women performers in a Vedic sacrificial ritual.
- 3) Apart from Vedic rituals, what were other contexts where women performers took part in Vedic India?

10.5 WOMEN PERFORMING ARTISTES DEPICTED IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

References in the ancient Indian literature indicate all kinds of performing arts as an important component in social activities. The palaces of the kings had a separate area dedicated for practicing music and dance. It became a part of education of the young princes and princesses. Music and dance teachers stayed in the palace with other officials. The “Sangeet Bhawan” used to have various musical instruments. In fact *Ramayana*, one of the important early literary texts, was actually meant to be a ballad, sung by Lava and Kusha, the sons of Lord Rama.

There are many references in the *Ramayana* which indicate the existence of women performers in that period. There were troupes of all women performers including vocalists, instrumentalists, dancers and impersonators or actresses. This implicate that these troupes were probably meant to entertain the ladies of the nobility in their privacy. The performers were termed as 'Vadhunataka Samgha'. There were some professional actresses too who were wives of the professional actors 'œailu?a', referred to earlier, who were frequently forced into prostitution by their husbands. Sita in the *Ramayana* accuses Rama of behaving like a 'œailu?a' while leaving her in someone else's hand

“Svaya? tu bhâryâ? kaumâri? ciramadhyu?ita? sati?
œailu?a iva mâ? râma parebhyo dâtumicchasi”

(*Ramayana*, Ayodhya Kanda, 30)

Patanjali (c. 2nd century BC) also refers to the existence of some professional women artistes in his *Mahabhashya*, who did not have a good reputation in the society because they openly accepted their affinity to their audiences: “tadyatha natanam striyo rangam gata yo yah prcchati kasyayuyamiti tam tam tvetyahuh” (*Mahabhashya*, VI.1.13). Moreover, these female artistes had to travel constantly with their troupes and such affinity with their audiences brought them disrespect.

The *Mahabharata* also mentions music as an essential part of education of the children of the royal families. Arjuna, one of the most important characters among the Pandavas, has been portrayed as proficient in vocal as well as instrumental music and dance. During their one year of anonymity, the Pandavas took shelter under the king of Virata where Arjuna, in disguise of a eunuch, was employed to teach music and dance to the princess Uttara. The *Mahabharata* also mentions the existence of professional male singers and female dancers in the form of Gandharvas and Apsaras who were invited with due respect to perform at various ritualistic and social occasions as well as in the court.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is one of the most important sources, documenting Indian Society around the 3rd Century BC. The *Arthashastra* lays down certain rules relating to performing Arts. Kings are advised to take proper care of the performing artistes and extend state patronage for their professional training. Interestingly, Kautilya suggests appointing women performers to do espionage. According to him women performers being beautiful and articulate could serve as good spies while performing among the crowd. In the 'Ganikadhyaksha Prakarana', Kautilya recommends 1000 *panas* per annum as a salary to the 'Ganikas' who were young and beautiful and adept in dancing, singing and acting. A ganika should pay 24,000 *panas* to get freedom from the service of the king. The dwellings of performing artistes were fixed on the boundary of the village but they were treated at par with the

other citizens as far as tax was concerned. Kautilya also recommends taking away half of the earnings by the prostitutes and other artistes during difficult times. There is also a reference to 'Kaushika striyah', certain women who were from the communities dedicated to performing arts and were employed in the courts.

Apart from this Kautilya also recommends a fine from a woman for watching a dramatic performance without the permission of her husband. According to him for watching a 'Stree-Preksha' a woman should be fined just half the amount of fine for watching a 'Purusha-Preksha'. This implies that the patriarchal society of the time did not approve of women watching any act of entertainment, without permission. The terms 'Stree Preksha' and 'Purusha Preksha' has been used for the first time by Kautilya. This should be considered as a significant quote in context of Indian performing arts as it implies either the existence of troupes of all women performers and all male performers or two types of auditoriums for female and male spectators in around 400BC.

Buddhist and Jain texts too directly or indirectly refer to instances of performances by female artistes. These instances show that professional artistes used to visit public fairs to earn money. In one of the Jataka stories there is an instance of employing female performing artistes to the palace to test the normalcy of the son of the king of Kashi; as he avoided ascending the throne as the prodigal son, who is supposed to be the heir of the entire kingdom. There are also instances in Jataka stories where professional artistes sang, danced and played instruments in front of the Buddha. These artistes were called 'Natakittithiyo' who were well trained in the art of music and dance. 'Theragatha', another Buddhist treatise, mentions a troupe 'Talaputa' which consisted of 500 professional actresses. This indicates the existence of a large number of professional female performers who could earn their livelihood from performances (Iravati, 2003, p. 70). Similar instances are found in Jain texts too which refer to the existence of professional performers who were invited to perform in public festivals.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) *What do you understand by the term 'Vadhu Natak Samgha'?*
- 2) *Who are 'œailu?a'? Why did they attain social approval?*
- 3) *What are the rules laid down by Kautilya relating to women performers?*

10.6 MEN PERFORMING ARTISTES DEPICTED IN ANCIENT INDIA

The literature of the ancient period proves the fact the performativity is not only gender neutral for audiences and spectators, but also stylistics and postures vary accordingly. Ancient Indian literature is not only rich with references to male performers who played significant roles in various artistic traditions, but also a diverse array is there who created a different kind of gendered performances and diluted the whole notions of performativity. Performances in ancient India comprised of not only women performers, but also male and transgender performers. There are a huge number of such performers, but we will only talk about some major traditional performers and religious performers that are traced in the contemporary literature.

The term 'nartaka' or 'nata' refers to male dancers who performed in ancient Indian dance dramas. These performers were trained in the art of portraying different characters on stage. They would use incorporating intricate footwork, hand gestures (*mudras*), facial expressions, and body movements to convey emotions and depict various roles in dramatic performances. In the ancient Indian theatrical tradition of *Natyashastra*, male performers were also known as *natyacharyas*. They were highly skilled in various aspects of theater. They were adept at acting, dancing, singing, and recitation. *Natyacharyas* played important roles in preserving and propagating the art of theater. Tandu is a legendary figure mentioned in the *Natyashastra*. He is credited with being the originator of dance and is considered the first known male dancer in Indian mythology. You must note that, Bharata Muni, who wrote *Natyashastra* and is considered the father of Indian theatrical arts, is revered as a highly accomplished performer himself.

10.6.1 Traditional Male Performers

In ancient India, storytelling was done through performances, and males only told stories and they were mainly *kathakars*, *sutradharas* and *kavis*. *Kathakars* were storytellers who recited religious and mythological tales through dance and narration. They would perform Kathak, a classical Indian dance form, accompanied by musical instruments. *Kathakars* were known for their expressive storytelling and rhythmic footwork. *Adi Parva CCVI.2-3*, Mahabharat, Book 1 talks about the importance of kathakars:

वेदवेदाङ्गविद्वासंस्तथैवाध्यात्मचिन्तकाः ।

चौक्षाश्च भगवद्भक्ताः सूताः पौराणिकाश्च ये ॥2॥

कथकाश्चापरे राजञ्श्रमणाश्च वनौकसः ।

दिव्याख्यानानि ये चापि पठन्ति मधुरंद्विजाः ॥3॥

Followed by the scholars of the Vedas and Vedangas, and by those who ponder on their soul,
by persons skilled in music, by the devotees of Bhagavata,
by *Kathakas* (reciters of the sacred lore), by dwellers of forests,
by those who sweetly recite celestial histories.

In Sanskrit drama, the *sutradhara*, meaning “holder of the strings,” was a male performer in ancient Indian theater, and served as the director, managing the stagecraft, coordinating actors, and providing commentary on the performance. He would also often perform as a narrator, guiding the audience and spectators through the story. The *Sutradhara* was responsible for coordinating the various elements of a play and ensuring its smooth execution. The most remarkable sutradhara is *Sanjay* of Mahabharata. In ancient Indian literature, *kavis* were male poets who composed and recited poetry. They were highly respected for their mastery of language, eloquence, and ability to create profound and beautiful verses. *Kavis* often performed in royal courts, reciting their compositions to entertain and impress the audience.

In the field of music, the male performers took part with sheer dedication or ‘*sadhana*’. The *Vadya Vidushaka* was a male performer in ancient Indian drama known for his skills in playing musical instruments. He provided comic relief through his witty remarks and accompanied the action on stage with his music. *Mridanga Vadakas* were skilled percussionists who played the mridangam, a traditional double-headed drum. They provided rhythmic accompaniment to various forms of classical music, dance, and theater. *Mridanga Vadakas* were highly regarded for their rhythmic precision and improvisational skills. In the field of classical music, ancient Indian literature refers to male musicians who excelled in the Karnatik (Carnatic) music tradition. These musicians were proficient in playing instruments such as the veena, flute, violin, mridangam (percussion instrument), and vocal singing. Harisena was a 4th-century Sanskrit *kavi* and *vadya vidushaka* in the court of Gupta emperor, Samudragupta II. His most famous poem, written c. 345 C.E., describes the bravery of Samudragupta and is inscribed on the Allahabad Pillar.

10.6.1 Religious Male Performers

The major religious performances that were carried out were by *Yakshas* through their *yakshaganas* or *yaksha nritya*. You will learn about it later in this unit only. Male performers played important roles in religious ceremonies and rituals. They would often enact mythological stories and epics through dramatic performances, dance, and music. These performances were meant to entertain and educate the audience about religious narratives and principles. The male performers, known as priests, would also conduct elaborate rituals and recite hymns to invoke the deities and seek their

blessings. They performed classical dance forms, such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Odissi, and Kathak. These dance forms were typically based on mythological stories and were performed in temples, royal courts, and public gatherings. Male dancers would often portray both male and female characters, using intricate hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to convey emotions and narratives. It is interesting to note that ancient India had various forms of martial arts and physical performances that showcased masculine strength and agility. Examples include Kalaripayattu, an ancient martial art from Kerala, and Mallakhamb, a traditional Indian sport that combines gymnastics, yoga, and acrobatics. These forms of performance required rigorous training and displayed the physical prowess and skills of the male performers. Apart from these forms, religious performances that were dedicated to the gods, Shiva and Krishna were also performed by male performers.

Shiva, one of the principal deities in Hinduism, is a significant deity in Hinduism, particularly in the Shaivism tradition, and associated with various art forms, including dance. His cosmic dance, known as the Tandava, represents the rhythm and movement of the universe. Shiva is often portrayed as Nataraja, the divine dancer. It is a significant figure in ancient Indian art and mythology. The term 'Nataraja' translates to 'King of Dancers' or 'Lord of Dance' in Sanskrit. The Nataraja iconography symbolizes the eternal rhythm of creation, preservation, and dissolution, as well as the interplay between the divine and earthly realms. This dance was considered a sacred art form and was primarily performed within the framework of religious rituals and temple ceremonies. Male performers in ancient India, played a vital role in these performances, and their portrayal of Nataraja's dance reflected both artistic expression and spiritual devotion. They underwent rigorous training in various dance forms and were highly respected for their skills. They were seen as conduits of divine energy, channeling the power and grace of deities such as Nataraja through their performances. Their physical prowess and ability to convey complex emotions through dance were appreciated and admired. Overall, the depiction of Nataraja and the prominence of male performers in ancient Indian dance highlight the deep-rooted connection between art, spirituality, and gender roles in the cultural fabric of ancient India.

The term 'Krishna Leela' refers to the divine play and pastimes of Lord Krishna, a prominent deity in Hinduism, and is considered the eighth avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu. Lord Krishna and his life and exploits are described in various Hindu scriptures, particularly the ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata, and stories of the Bhagavata Purana, and the Harivamsa. These texts depict the life and exploits of Lord Krishna. Krishna Leela is a significant aspect of Indian mythology and has been celebrated and depicted in art, literature, dance, and drama for centuries. It encompasses various episodes from Krishna's life, including his birth, childhood, teenage years,

and his role in the epic battle of Kurukshetra. Krishna is revered for his multifaceted personality and divine playfulness. Krishna is often depicted as an expert flutist and a mesmerizing dancer. His Gopal Leela deals the tales of his mischievous childhood activities, such as stealing butter (Makhan Chor) and playing pranks on the Gopis (cowherd girls). His enchanting dance, known as the Raas Leela, depicts Krishna dancing with the Gopis in the moonlit nights of Vrindavan. The Raas Leela symbolizes the divine love between Krishna and his devotees and is celebrated as a joyful and ecstatic dance of union and devotion. Apart from these two, episodes of Govardhan Hill, defeating and slaying various demons, such as Putana (a demoness who tried to kill him as an infant), Kaliya (a poisonous serpent), and Bakasura (a crane-like demon); showcase Krishna's divine powers, and his compassion towards his devotees. His dedication to protecting righteousness is in its sublime when one saw the performances of Bhagavada Gita. In the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna serves as the charioteer of Arjuna and imparts spiritual wisdom in the form of the Bhagavad Gita. This discourse on duty, righteousness, and the nature of the self is considered a philosophical treasure and a guide for leading a righteous life. Regarding this performance of Bhagavada gita, there used to be a fair organized in ancient Tamil Nadu, known as Bhagavata Mela. It is a traditional dance and music performance art form. It features male performers who enact episodes from the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata. These performers, known as Bhagavata Mela artists, portray various characters singing devotional songs, and present intricate dance sequences.

10.7 TRANSGENDER PERFORMERS IN ANCIENT INDIA

You all are aware by now that ancient India had a rich cultural and artistic heritage that included various forms of performing arts. While information specific to transgender performers in ancient India is limited, it is known that diverse gender identities and expressions were present in Indian society throughout history. The concept of transgender or non-binary identities has been present in Indian culture for centuries, *klib* and *kinnar*; and historical references to transgender performers can be found in various texts, scriptures and art forms. In many Hindu religious texts, there are references to transgender figures and deities, such as the Ardhanarishvara, a composite form of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati representing both male and female energies. The tradition of transgender performers are known as *jogappas* or *aravanis* in the southern parts of India. *Jogappas* were transgender women who dedicated themselves to the worship of the Hindu deity Yellamma, also known as Renuka or Yellammadevi. While *Aravanis*, also known as *Alis*, were attached to the Hindu deity, Iravan, also known as Iravat and Iravant, the son of Pandava prince Arjuna (one of the main heroes of the Mahabharata) and the Naga princess, Ulupi. Iravan is still worshipped as a village deity and

is known as Aravan. Ramayana also mentions them, but not as performers. In Kama Sutra, their performances are established as essence of purity and bliss. The transgender performers were often associated with temple rituals and would perform ceremonial dances and songs during religious festivals; and these performances varied across different regions and time periods in ancient India. They would also perform in dance dramas, folk theater, and other theatrical productions. Their performances involved vibrant costumes, makeup, and elaborate storytelling. Their performances brought a unique and different perspective to performances, challenging traditional gender norms and adding diversity to the artistic landscape of ancient India. But note here that the available information is often based on fragmented accounts, religious texts, and oral traditions, which may not provide a comprehensive picture of transgender performers and their experiences in ancient India.

10.8 GENDER AND PERFORMANCES AS REFLECTED IN NATYASHASTRA

The most important treatise relating to the performing arts is Natyashastra written by Bharata (2nd century BC to 2nd Century AD) in which he dealt with all kind of performing arts with special emphasis on theatre arts. By the time of Bharata performing art was quite developed. Two types of music, Gandharva Gaan and Aranya Geya Gaan of the Vedic Era had taken a definite shape. Sculptures in different temples also suggest that folk and classical art existed side by side. There were clear demarcations of the type of music to be sung during Vedic rituals, social rituals and performances for entertainment and women were an essential part of all kinds of performances. In this period women started giving individual performances; they performed on the Flute, Vina, Lyre, Lute and even percussion instruments which is seldom seen in contemporary times. In this scenario Bharata thought it appropriate to add instructions for female artistes too. He gave equal importance to both male and female artistes; rather in some cases he gave more importance to female artistes. According to his preference the preliminary rituals in Purvaranga which included dancing, should be performed by the female artistes only as they possessed the natural physical beauty and grace. Likewise vocalists in a troupe were also mostly women due to natural sweetness of their voice.

Much architectural evidence from the temples at Bharhut, Sanchi, Mathura, Gandhara, Kondana, Karla and Udaygiri caves confirms the participation of both men and women in performing art forms. Women are also depicted performing acrobatics in the panels of Bharhut Temple. But according to the interpreters these women were mostly professional women who performed to earn money. Depiction of noble women performing dance & music are rare. Even some sculptures and textual depictions suggest that women

performers would disrobe and make overt display of their bodies. For instance, *Avadanashataka*, written in early centuries of Christian era, speaks of a beautiful actress, Kuvalaya, who was a part of a troupe from south and who came to perform at Rajgriha, who seduced many pious monks by her talent and physical attraction (Iravati, 2003, p. 66). Bharata was not in favour of this practice and clearly instructed that female artistes were not to disrobe in public.

Though Bharata preferred enactment of role according to the gender and age of the character i.e. “Anurupa Prakriti”, he laid down certain rules for enacting the roles by the actors. According to him -

- I) Men, women and children could enact roles in accordance to their age and sex, viz. an old man should play an old man.
- II) Actors could enact roles contrary to their natural age; viz. children could enact the roles of old men or old men the roles of children.
- III) Actors could enact roles contrary to their sex, viz. men or women could enact roles of the opposite sex. This might have been obvious as we have seen earlier too that troupes of all women actors and all men actors existed from the Epic period and Kautilya has mentioned Stree Preksha in his *Arthashastra*. This is still practiced in some of the traditional regional drama practices in India where troupes consisting of all men, women, or boys enact all kind of roles in a play.

The *Natyashastra* does, however, state that it will be more effective if women are represented by women because of their daintiness (*sukumara*). The *Natyashastra* recommends all actors including female performers to undergo special training to enhance their abilities in the dramatic representations.

10.9 THE STATUS OF GANIKAS AND APSARAS IN ANCIENT INDIA

Apart from the professional performing artistes a tradition of prostitutes called as ‘Ganikas’ was also taking shape in ancient India. They contributed to the field of art tremendously. In the Vedic period, they were regularly invited to perform during the sacrificial rituals. They were expected to be expert in sixty-four arts and crafts, and were trained under the best of the ‘acharyas’ with the help of state patronage. Their profession demanded sound knowledge of vocal and instrumental music, dance and acting. According to Bharata they could be included in the panel of judges for evaluating artistic performances.

The Ganikas were regarded as auspicious and became an essential part of all kinds of religious and social rituals because of their beauty, knowledge

and delightful performances. They were regarded as the custodian of art and Kings used to take pride in having them in their State. They had their own luxurious palaces in one part of the city. References in the plays written by Bhasa and Kalidasa point towards the fact that often intellectual discussions took place in the palaces of the courtesans where city intellectuals used to participate. This suggests that the Ganikas were supposed to know about the intellectual pursuits as well as contemporary politics of the State. Among Lichhavis it was a custom to appoint the most beautiful girl as Ganika, also called as Janapada Kalyani, which was regarded as a highly valued status. This status of Ganikas in the society started declining steadily after the fall of Gupta Empire and by the advent of the medieval period Ganikas were reduced to mere courtesans in the court of Kings.

Apart from Ganikas there was another group of professional women artistes called Apsaras. According to Bharata Apsaras were created by Brahma to enrich the performing art. They were full of grace and were experts in dance, music and theatre arts. Often they are mentioned as the wives of Gandharvas, the celestial singers; this indicates that they were professional performers. Apsaras were also invited to perform in all kind of rituals and celebrations to give performances and enhance the grace of the occasion.

10.10 THE STATUS OF YAKSHA IN ANCIENT INDIA

Let us discuss the religious perspective of gendered based performances that are mentioned in ancient scriptures or carried it out on the cultural front till today. One of them is the *Yaksha* or the *Yakshaganas* (*Yaksha* performances). *Yakshaganas* or *Yaksha Nritya* were an integral part of ancient Indian culture and were prevalent during the Vedic period, around 1500-500 BCE, as well as in subsequent centuries, and played an important role in the cultural and religious traditions of the time. *Yaksha* was considered to be a celestial being or nature spirit in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. They were often associated with fertility, abundance, and guardianship. *Yakshaganas* or *Yaksha Nritya* combined elements of dance, music, mime, and drama; and took the form of theatrical and dance presentations, primarily performed in open-air venues such as courtyards, gardens, and temple precincts. *Yakshaganas* or *Yaksha Nritya* was a popular form of entertainment, education, and religious expression. These performances were characterized by elaborate costumes, makeup, and music. They were highly stylized, with distinct choreography and gestures that conveyed emotions and narratives. The dancers would perform intricate footwork, hand movements, and facial expressions to bring the characters to life. The music accompanying the performances featured traditional instruments like mridangam, chande, harmonium, and flute, creating a rich and melodious backdrop. Beside their entertainment value, *Yaksha* performances had religious and cultural significance. They were often performed during religious festivals and

ceremonies, as offerings to deities or as a means of seeking divine blessings. These performances were believed to bring prosperity, ward off evil spirits, and believed to be a form of worship and a medium to communicate with the divine. Yaksha performances featured various elements, including storytelling, dance, music, and mime. They often portrayed mythological stories, episodes from ancient texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, or local folklore. *Yakshagana*, a traditional form of dance-drama from Karnataka, is considered to have its roots in ancient Yaksha performances.

10.11 THE TRADITION OF DEVADASIS IN ANCIENT INDIA

Devadasis are the women performers dedicated to temples in the service of the deity. Perhaps seeds of this tradition lie in the sacrificial rituals of the Vedic era. As we have seen earlier in this unit, professional women performers were invited in the Vedic sacrificial rituals where they had to perform as the part of the ritual. Perhaps this custom gave rise to the tradition of dedicating young girls to the temple deities. The duties of Devadasis were to do daily services for different rituals performed for the deity like bathing, dressing, offering flowers, including singing and dancing.

We come across the word “Devadasi” for the first time in the *Arthashastra*, written by Kautilya in circa 350-283 BC, where he says that a Devadasi, retired from her temple duties in her old age should be employed in spinning work. This statement indicates that by the time of Kautilya employing Devadasis in temples to the service of the temple deity had already become a regular practice. At the same time, Ganikas or courtesans were invited in the temple for ritualistic performances of dance and music up to the very early centuries of Christian era. So it seems that earlier the devadasis were simply the girls who did temple duties like cleaning the premises, making garlands, etc. Regarding retired devadasis, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* does not indicate that the Devadasis had anything to do with performing arts. Gradually the Devadasis started replacing the Ganikas and took part in ritual dance and music and soon it became part of their duty. Around the medieval period (10th - 11th Century AD) this tradition reached its height. The Devadasis came to be regarded as a part of the normal embellishment of temples; their position was next only to priests. Their primary work was dancing, singing and playing musical instruments in honour of the deity. However in some temples, Devadasis continued to clean the temple premises, fetch water, make garlands of flowers, etc. as their secondary duties.

Dedicating dancing girls to the temples was practiced in many other ancient civilisations too. Ancient empires like Babylonia, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Syria were also known to employ young girls to appease their deities in the temples. The amalgamation of Vedic ritualistic

religious practices and the indigenous religious practices gave rise to the tradition of worship of personal deities who could be housed in a temple. This consequently gave rise to the custom of dedicating young dancing girls to the temple deities. This custom was soon looked upon as the most affordable way to earn merit in order to ensure one's transition to heaven after death. So not only the kings and merchants but also the poor started dedicating girls to the services of the god. Sometimes queens and princesses of the defeated kings were also forced to join the temple. The number of Devadasis employed in a temple would mark the wealth and prestige of the temple. At one point of time, there were four hundred devadasis attached to the temples at Tanjore and Travancore.

Devadasis were married off to the temple deities and were expected to remain celibate through all their life. The practice was more widespread in the southern part of India and continued until very recently. However, decaying traditions gave rise to exploitations and marginalisation of the Devadasis by the temple priests due to which the Britishers declared this tradition illegal.

10.12 THE TRADITION OF DEVADÂSAS IN ANCIENT INDIA

The term 'devadâsa' derived from two words: 'deva' meaning 'god' and 'dasa' meaning 'servant' or 'slave'. It literally means 'servant of the deity' in Sanskrit. In ancient India, a devadâsa referred to a male temple servant or attendant who dedicated his life to the service of a particular deity in a temple or religious institution, and lived within the temple premises. Devadâsas were an integral part of the temple culture and played various roles within the temple premises. They were responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of the temple. They would perform daily rituals, assist priests during religious ceremonies, arranging offerings and decorations, assisting the priests, and taking care of the daily needs of the temple and its visitors, and engage in other tasks related to the worship of the deity. The life of a devadâsa was typically characterized by a strict code of conduct and celibacy. They were expected to lead a disciplined and devoted life, focusing solely on their service to the deity. They would often receive offerings and donations from devotees and manage the temple's affairs under the supervision of the temple administration. The devadâsa also often acted as intermediaries between the deity and the devotees, conveying prayers and offerings on behalf of the worshippers. In some cases, they might also participate in singing hymns or playing musical instruments during religious ceremonies.

Check Your Progress 3

Do you see any differences between the women and male performers in ancient india? Justify.

10.13 WOMEN PERFORMERS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA (1200 AD - 1800 AD)

10.13.1 Women Performers in the Court of Turko - Persian and Mughal Rulers

From the thirteenth century onwards India experienced frequent invasions from the North-West by Central Asian nomadic tribes and the Persian Empire. Unlike earlier conquerors who became an integral part of the prevalent social systems, Central Asian and Persian conquerors maintained their religious identity and initiated new legal and administrative systems that brought drastic changes in prevalent systems of social conduct, cultural traditions, religious practices, lifestyle and ethics of India. Although the Southern part of India was less affected by these invasions, northern India was almost devastated due to frequent invasions. Consequently performing activities took a backseat in the cultural life of North India. Under the circumstances these art forms could remain alive either under the shelter of the rulers or in the temples as religious activities. The credit for keeping the intangible heritage of performing arts and their sanctity alive mainly goes to the Devadasis in the south; while in northern India the way of life took a new turn with the amalgamation of indigenous and Muslim culture.

The Turko - Persian rulers, who ruled India in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were known to be connoisseurs of music and dance. There were many women performers who held an important place among the court musicians. There are references in the writings of Amir Khusro Dehelvi (the great poet and musician) and Ziauddin Barani (historian and political thinker) about some very accomplished women artistes who could sing, dance and play a variety of musical instruments. These women performers in the courts of Turkish rulers were slaves to the king and great efforts were taken to train them in dance, music and other pursuits. Shihabuddin al Umari, an

Arab traveller who visited India during the period of Sultan Muhammed -bin-Tughlaq writes in his comments that “great care was taken in the refinement of Indian slave girls and their good breeding; they could write, recite verses and stories, play chess and backgammon and they excelled in music and playing lute. Their prices amounted to 20, 000 tankas or more” (Nijenhuis, Delvoye, 2010, p.35-64).

Theatre took a back seat in the courts of these rulers due to their lack of interest in this art form.

10.13.2 Women Performers during the Mughal Period

Most of the Mughal emperors were known for their keen interest in music and dance, except Aurangzeb. Emperor Akbar was a trained musician in Dhrupad style of singing. He took keen interest in bringing the best of instrumentalists and vocalists and dancers from all over India in his court. Inmates of Mughal harems also took keen interest in music and dance. Except for the period of Aurangzeb, performances for inmates of the harem by women performers were very common. There used to be a female superintendent of music and dance inside the Harem. It is also learnt that Jahanara Begum was quite fond of singing and dancing. The courtesans in the Mughal court were very well trained in vocal and instrumental music as well as dance. The best of the courtesans were wealthy and lived in luxurious palaces. They used to travel on elephants gifted by the kings and other nobles.

However, outside the courts only courtesans used to practice the classical art forms. Socio-ritualistic music remained alive in the households of the commoners in form of ‘Sanskar Geet’ songs which were mainly sung by the women folk.

10.14 MALE PERFORMERS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

The gendered performances in medieval seen a major shift from deities to kings and rulers. Performances encompassed in royal courts and at public gatherings. Temple-based performances for male performers had almost become non-existent. The historical twist of Muslim rulers brought a lot of changes in performances; and new forms of performances were added in the already existing list. You must note here that performances were not much affected by religious rulers or their policies, male performers continued to do their assigned work with dedications.

10.14.1 Performances Outside the Royal Courts

Bards or *charans* were poet-singers who composed and recited poems and ballads, often in praise of Hindu rulers and nobles. For the Muslim rulers, bards or *shayars* were there. They also composed and recited poetry, often

accompanied by music. They were considered repositories of history and knowledge and performed in royal courts and public gatherings. They traveled extensively and entertained people with their storytelling and musical skills. Bhands were male performers who entertained the audience through humor, satire, mimicry, and storytelling. They were skilled in various performing arts like music, dance, and drama. Jesters, similar to bhands, were entertainers who amused people through their wit, jokes, and acrobatic skills. There was an emergence of folk theaters in India. Bhavai is a folk theater form that originated in the state of Gujarat. Male actors played significant roles in Bhavai performances. They often portrayed different characters, including heroes, villains, and comedic figures. Bhavai performers were known for their energetic performances and witty dialogues. Similarly, Nautanki is a popular folk theater form that emerged during the medieval period in northern India. Male performers enacted plays and musical dramas from mythology, legends, and social themes, with lively dialogues, songs, and dances. They were a form of storytellers to entertain the audience. They entertained rural and urban audiences with their humorous and socially relevant performances. Pranjivan Parshad and Kanhayalal became famous for their performative skills as nautanki artists.

Another form of performances by men became quite popular, especially depicting valorism and physical power through martial arts. Various forms of martial arts were practiced and performed. Male warriors and fighters showcased their skills in combat and weaponry in front of audiences, often as part of festivals, processions, various combat techniques or military displays, including sword fighting, archery, wrestling, and other forms of physical prowess, for example Kalaripayattu of Kerala. The word *alaripayattu* is a combination of two Malayalam words - *kalari* (training ground or battleground) and *payattu* (training of martial arts), which is roughly translated as 'practice in the arts of the battlefield'. Kalaripayattu is mentioned in the Vadakkan Pattukal, a collection of ballads written about the Chekavar of the Malabar region of Kerala. Beside the martial arts performances by the men, jugglers and acrobats also were performed by men. Male performers specializing in juggling, acrobatics, and other physical feats were popular entertainers during medieval India. They amazed audiences with their agility, balance, and daring stunts.

Religious performances continued as it was in ancient times but in very few places, while the Muslim rulers introduced their religious beliefs to the medieval India. Qawwali is a form of devotional music that originated under the Muslim rulers. Male singers, known as Qawwals, performed soulful and ecstatic Sufi poetry accompanied by musical instruments such as harmonium table, and other traditional instruments. They captivated audiences with their powerful vocals and improvisational skills. They sang mystical verses and engaged in musical conversations in praise of God, and

delivered spiritual messages through their soulful renditions. Prominent Qawwali singers from medieval India include Amir Khusro, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki. While under the Hindu rulers, bhakti saints sang songs addressing to the different avatars of Lord Vishnu, a Hindu deity.

10.14.2 Performances for the Royal Courts

The royal courts saw the major changes in medieval periods. Male performers, like the women performers, also had their own position and artistic skills to display. The famous Dhrupad a classical vocal genre had originated in medieval India, in both Hindu and Muslim royal courts. Male Dhrupad singers or *Dhrupadars* specialized in singing devotional and classical compositions in the royal courts. This genre was highly regarded for their mastery of intricate melodies, rhythmic patterns, and improvisation. They were known for their deep resonant voices and mastery of the complex ragas (melodic modes). Some notable Dhrupad singers from medieval India include Swami Haridas, Tansen, and Baiju Bawra. Later, Ghazal, a form of poetic expression that is sung, became part of Muslim royal courts. Male Ghazal singers, such as the renowned Mirza Ghalib, mesmerized the royal courts with their soulful renditions of Urdu poetry. Their performances were marked by emotional depth and intricate vocal improvisations.

Kathak is one of the major classical dance forms of India. In medieval India, it was predominantly performed by male dancers called *Kathakars*. They often entertained the royalty with their skillful performances, but sometimes they performed at public gatherings also. They were often accompanied by musicians or *vadyakars*. They performed intricate rhythmic footwork, intricate hand gestures, and expressions, graceful movements, and expressive storytelling through dance movements. Some renowned male Kathak performers from that era include Jaipurwale Maharaj, Lucknowwale Maharaj, and Achchan Maharaj. Medieval Indian courts had a tradition of patronizing musicians who performed classical music and instrumental compositions. Male musicians or instrumentalists or *vadyakaras* showcased their expertise in playing various traditional Indian musical instruments, like the veena, sitar, shehnai, sarod, tabla, and pakhawaj. They accompanied by both male and female dancers, singers, and sometimes performed solo recitals. Male *vadyakaras* played a crucial role in the courtly music ensembles. It is also noted in several royal courts of medieval South India. Mridangam, a classical percussion instrument, was widely used in traditional music and dance forms. Male mridangam players provided rhythmic accompaniments during performances, and enhancing the overall musical experience. The dhol is a large double-headed drum widely used in traditional Indian music and dance in medieval Indian royal courts. Male dhol players were an essential part of courtly music ensembles. They also provided rhythmic company and added energy and excitement to the performances. Apart from these, *jogis* and *bauls* were wandering mystic minstrels who traveled across medieval

India, including royal courts. These male singers and musicians were associated with spiritual traditions and performed devotional songs, expressing their spiritual experiences through their music and lyrics.

Interesting Fact: Nothing much is known about the transgender performances in medieval India. The texts and scriptures available do not deal with transgenders as performers. But yes, relevance of their roles as 'harem-keepers' or 'pataranis' are available. Only one dance performance by the transgenders is mentioned - 'lavani', a unique dance form originated in the state of Maharashtra during the medieval period. Lavani is a lively and expressive dance style known for its sensuality and performed by both men and women, including transgenders. In this dance form, transgenders often dressed in traditional female attire and used their performance as a means of livelihood and social recognition.

10.15 WOMEN PERFORMERS IN MODERN INDIA

Around the 19th Century, a new chapter unfolded in the field of performing arts. This was the reformative period for all types of performing arts. On the one hand music and dance institutions were set up on the lines of institutions in Britain; and on the other hand musicians started moving towards the colonial cities for better opportunity as temple and court patronage declined. In the South, the Brahmin elite took keen interest in reviving Karnatak music and dance and encouraged upper caste women to learn dance and music and perform on the public stage. Some of the nobles and wealthy people who were connoisseurs of music and dance started organizing musical soirées at their home. In this way, common householders started coming closer to the court music or classical music. Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar in Mumbai and Raja Sourindra Mohan Tagore and later Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal took huge steps in popularizing classical art forms among the common people. Pt. Bhatkhande also started collecting the repertoires and notating them which enabled the household women to learn the songs sitting in the privacy of their home. Pt. Paluskar established a school for music in Mumbai. A new wave of interest in Indian music and dance resulted in female members of the family were being encouraged to learn these art forms. In the household of Rabindranath Tagore, performing music, dance and drama written by him and other family members was a regular feature in which women of the family also participated. This encouraged common people to encourage women of their family to acquire training in these art forms. In Mumbai and Pune some organisations organised 'Mehfils' where court musicians gave solo performances on the public stage. This stage was shared by the courtesans or 'tawaifs' too. Many foreign scholars like Capt. Willard, Curt Sachs, Fox Strangways and others, were impressed by the beauty and depth of Indian music and dance. By the beginning of 20th century, Indian

music and dance established themselves as classical art forms widely patronised and practiced by the upper castes and new middle class.

However, the circumstances in the household of traditional Muslim musicians did not change much. By the 19th century the 'gharana' system was fully established in north Indian music and almost all the originators of the 'gharanas' were Muslim court musicians. Gharana in musical terms means a particular school of music which follows a particular way of delineating the ragas. The names of the 'gharanas' have been given according to the place where the originator of that particular 'gharana' lived. The 'gharana' system considered the legitimate male children of the originator as the only authentic carriers of the tradition. Unfortunately, the female members of the family were always kept out of this intimate fold. There were a few exceptions like Babli Bai and Zohra Bai of Agra, who could boast of being bearers of the traditions of their gharana. The degree of disparity was so great that the identity of the male singers were marked not by their quality of performance but on the legitimacy and authenticity of their family. This disparity was also seen in sixteenth century when the 'dhrupad' style of singing was popular among the court musicians and their patrons. It was considered that 'dhrupad' depicted masculinity so it did not suit the female voice. However, with the advent of 'khayal' style of singing women got more space to perform as this form suited female voices. From the 20th century onwards many women musicians trained under the 'gharanedar ustads', however, they were essentially Hindu women from progressive families. As in many Hindu families, discriminating against the female members of the family from learning music and dance is still prevalent in Muslim 'gharanedar' families. In the contemporary times also there are very few Muslim female artistes in the field of dance and music.

However, the 'gharana' remained a 'homosocial' space for a very long time. The place for women disciples was seen from a different perspective in such a space. The task of teaching music to both male and female disciples fell upon the master male musician of the court. This set up a patriarchal atmosphere for almost all courtesans or 'tawaifs' had to learn music from a male vocalist. This drew lines of gender discrepancy. For example, the male tutor never cared to adjust the scale of his voice with that of a female disciple. It resulted in overstraining of voices of the female disciples and consequently the voice became hoarse. Listening to the earliest recordings of the female artiste reveals how these artistes sang in a very masculine tenor. This gender discrepancy changed only after Hira Bai Badodekar entered the stage. Her way of presentation of the music and the way she carried herself on stage won acceptance for her. This paved the way for many women artistes of 20th century. Gradually women tutors also gained acceptance in the male dominated world of classical music.

At the end of 19th century the Devadasi System became one of the targets for social reform. In 1947, the practice was legally abolished. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the social reform movements and colonial ideas about associating prostitution to the degenerating devadasi system made it one of the prominent issues in the agenda of social reform. The Madras High Court denied Devadasis the status of artistes due to the stigma of prostitution attached to them. Revivalists, like E. Krishna Iyer, Rukmini Devi Arundale and others, considered the music and dance of the devadasis to be part of an ancient Indian tradition that extended far beyond the lives of devadasis. Their effort was to rid music and dance from the prejudiced psyche of music and dance being associated with prostitution. Rukmini Devi was one of the first Brahmin women in the 20th century to perform south Indian dance on the public stage and later established a reputed dance institution too; her goal was to prove that girls from any family could dance, not necessarily they ought to be prostitutes.

The 20th century gradually saw the emergence of many women artistes from the upper and middle classes of the society. The emergence of the electronic media also provided a stage for women in varieties of musical forms. Women artistes often have to fight against discrimination from the fellow male artistes and the audience as well as in the society. Women artistes continue to face discrimination at the hands of the 'gurus' and organisers of cultural events alike. They are often expected to perform their traditional domestic roles along with their art, and are, therefore, highly dependent on familial support. Due to the conflict between culturally determined traditional duties that women are expected to fulfill, and the rigorous demands of performing arts, many women are still unable to dedicate themselves to music and dance. However, changing cultural norms and greater awareness of gender disparities are gradually helping to transform this situation.

10.16 MALE PERFORMERS IN MODERN INDIA

You are already aware about the singing and dancing performances of women; and germination of thumri, kathak and tawaaif traditions in the previous section. In this section, we will try to see how male performers contributed to the cultural traditional heritage that has been running for centuries. Out of all, the nautanki performances continued to build up more vehemently all across India. Like the kathakars, dhrupad singers also developed thumris to continue the traditions. Thumri being a semi-classical genre of vocal music, it is known for its emotive and romantic expressions. Male singers, such as Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, were known for their mastery of thumri. He was an exponent of the Hindustani classical music tradition and was known for his powerful voice, emotive renditions, and mastery over intricate ragas. The male performers would sing compositions

portraying various moods and expressions, often drawing inspiration from folk and classical music traditions. Another male performer of the 19th century was Ustad Allauddin Khan. He was a versatile musician and composer who played the sarod, a stringed instrument. He was a maestro in Indian classical music and was instrumental in popularizing the sarod as a solo instrument. Ustad Allauddin Khan's contributions to Hindustani classical music were immense. Bande Ali Khan, more commonly known as Ustad Bande Ali Khansaheb or Bande Ali Khan Beenkar, was an Indian classical rudra veena player. Khan was an ancestor to major contemporary Hindustani Classical music gharanas including Indore, Mewati, Kirana, and Dagarbani. Regarding the dance traditions, Krishnattam, a traditional dance-drama performed in Kerala, originated in the 17th century, continued to be of importance even in the 19th century. Male performers, known as *Chakyars*, played the lead roles in Krishnattam performances. They would do elaborate costumes, apply distinctive makeup, and bring to life various episodes from the life of Lord Krishna. Interestingly, in the courtesan tradition of tawaaf, the male performers were also an integral part, like the women. Known for their skills in classical music, dance, and poetry, the male performers performed for the aristocracy and were patrons of arts and culture in continuation of the courtesan tradition in India, particularly in places like Lucknow, Delhi, and Kolkata. Dance forms, like Bharatnatyam of Tamil nadu, Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh, Kathakali of Kerala, continued to be in limelight for its unique artistic creativity through the male performers also.

Theatrical traditions took a new contour of cartographical exhibitions as the contemporary society and culture demanded. Nautanki continues its charm till the present day and the male performers still are quite in demand. Along with baul, jatra became a very common theatrical production, and originated in Bengal as a popular folk theater form. In the 19th century, male performers called 'jatra pala artists' or 'jatra kalakars' entertained audiences with their performances, which included music, dance, and dramatic storytelling. Jatra plays often depicted historical or mythological tales, social dramas, and historical tales. They would showcase their acting skills, dance, and deliver dialogues to engage the audience. Parsi theater, also known as 'nautch', emerged as a prominent form of entertainment in the 19th century. Male actors in Parsi theater, such as Bal Gandharva, became renowned for their versatile acting abilities, including impersonating female characters known as 'nautch girls'. Narayan Shripad Rajhans, popularly known as Bal Gandharva, was a prominent male singer and stage actor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His performances in musical plays and his contributions to the development of Marathi theatre have left a lasting impact on the cultural landscape of Maharashtra. Parsi theatre had seen many ups and downs during the British period. Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Jagannath Shankarseth, Faramjee G. Dalal, Khawasji Khatau are some prominent names during the initial period of Parsi theatre.

In the 20th century, India witnessed the emergence of several influential male performers across various fields. Their talent, creativity, and dedication have left an indelible mark on Indian culture and continue to inspire generations of performers and contributed significantly to the nation's cultural heritage. Some of the famous *vadyakaras* are Ustad Bismillah Khan (shehnai), Pandit Ravi Shankar (sitar), Zakir Hussain (tabla), Sundaram Balachander (veena), Hariprasad Chaurasia (bamboo flute), Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma (santoor), Ustad Amjad Ali Khan (sarod), Ustad Asad Ali Khan (rudra veena), Tota Ram Sharma (pakhawaj) to name a few. Apart from the musicians, there is a huge list of singers or *gayakaras*. Their powerful voice and emotive renditions captivated audiences around the world, Pandit Kumar Gandharva (Hindustani), Pandit Bhimsen Joshi (Hindustani), Ustad Amir Khan (Hindustani), Pandit Jasraj (Hindustani), Pandit Vishwanath Rao Ringe (Hindustani), Ustad *Ali Akbar Khan* (Hindustani), Balamurali Krishna (Carnatic), Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar (Carnatic), Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer (Carnatic), G. N. Balasubramaniam (Carnatic), Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (Carnatic) to name a few. There is also a huge list of male *nrityakaras*. Their dynamic footwork, graceful expressions, and intricate rhythmic patterns have captivated audiences worldwide. Their talent, creativity, and dedication have left an indelible mark on Indian culture and continue to inspire generations of performers. Pandit Birju Maharaj (Kathak), Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra (Odissi), Vempati Chinna Satyam and Raja Reddy (Kuchipudi), Guru Gopinath (Kathakali, Bharatnatyam), Guru Bipin Singh (Manipuri), Guru Shreejith Krishna (Bharatnatyam), to name a few. But Pandit Uday Shankar is one such famous dancer who popularized the Indian classical dance forms globally with rough blending Western ballet and modern dance techniques, creating a unique style, that is why, his name requires to be mentioned separately. Apart from these male performers, we have musicians, singers, dancers and actors of filmdoms of India.

10.17 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we embarked upon the construction of performing tradition in context of India, especially through the gender perspectives. Being the first unit of this block on performance, this unit tried to explore the historical background beginning with the pre-Vedic period upto the modern period. This unit unfolds the basis for discussion on other issues of performance which the subsequent units will deal with.

10.18 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the differences between the rituals of Vedic and post-Vedic period of India.
2. Explain the Devadâsis and Devadâsas traditions of ancient India.
3. Illucidate the modern performers of India.

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