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4.1A INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, you have been introduced to writing practices (narrative fiction and non-fiction) that have been instrumental in highlighting the processes and contestations in the formation of the Indian nation. These processes have been shown to be preoccupied with the question of gender, and more specifically women’s social existence and private lives, which has influenced both the thematic content and the form of nationalist and postcolonial writings such as the novel, drama, essay, pamphlets and the short story. This Unit will illustrate the imaginative reach of literature into the national question through modes such as the song, classical music and theatre around each of which national ‘tradition’ has been formed. You will read about artistic traditions from the past as these were refashioned to justify an emerging nationalist tradition and how in this process gender relations were reformatted and recast as ‘traditional’. You will also be acquainted with the emancipatory force behind art forms, especially theatre and music, as these were practiced and developed in the independence struggle. This Unit will also offer ways of imagining literature and creativity
across the compartmentalized disciplines of writing, music, film, theatre and dance, primarily through a focus on women writers and performers. We will explore these in order to illustrate the contemporary relevance of debates about the idea of the Indian nation within the field of artistic production and women’s creative production.

4.2A OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you should be able to:

- Outline a history of women’s performance traditions in the context of nationalism;
- Analyse modern literature, drama and its imagination from a gendered perspective; and
- Provide an overview of women’s participation in artistic production as a counter to nationalist myths about women’s idealized social roles.

4.3A POPULAR VERSUS NATIONAL SONGS

While nationalist thought imagines the nation as a sovereign, undisputed, unified entity, any history of nationalism inevitably begins at the moment when this idea came into being through deliberate thinking and imaginative reconstruction in concrete practices such as the printing press, newspapers, literature, political parties and public sphere debates. Thus, even while claiming millennia-old roots for the nation, nationalists have had to show continuity between national pasts and the contemporary vision of nation-building. Some cultural forms and modes of creative expression are deliberately chosen as representing this continuity through their presumed stability and antiquity. For example, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894), one of the pioneers of the Bengal Renaissance, proposed a reworked mythology of Krishna from the Puranas as the exemplary man of action for a nationalist age. This was in stark opposition to the prevalent Bengali Vaishnavite devotional tradition in which Krishna appeared as the soft, emotionally-coloured, even erotic object of attachment and worship (Kaviraj, 1995). The former, i.e. ‘modern’, version was claimed to be more antique, and therefore more relevant to the concerns of nineteenth-century politics and public life. Thus, even when claiming the dawn of a new age in the life of the nation, nationalist thought has had to take recourse in what it first labels and then praises as the ‘traditional’ or ‘ancient’ source of national life.

Bankim is also known for writing the famous Bengali nationalist song “Bande Mataram” in his equally famous novel Anandamath (1882). The song’s surging nationalist feeling has popularized it beyond its novelistic context,
becoming, through the modes of the film song, rituals of national celebration and state-funded nationalized education, a ‘national song’. The history of Bankim’s famous song also comprises of a history of opposition to its exclusive terms of address to a Hindu-identified female divinity which is hailed in the figure of the motherland to which true Indians are thought to belong. Communities and cultures which were deemed to be in minority within the mainstream nationalist movement were ignored within the surge of music, emotion and nationalist pride of this song. Thus, even more than the social reformist novel or the anti-colonial treatise, the nationalist song became the most immediate and unquestionable bearer of the nationalist sentiment. To understand nationalist songs and poetry we must take note of the subtle shifts in the content and nature of musical performance taking place in the milieu of Bengal and the rest of India in the late nineteenth century to which we now turn.

4.3.1A Women’s Performance Tradition

The many folk traditions of musical performance and entertainment in the Indian subcontinent defy the categorizations of ‘high’ literature and ‘classical’ music because the latter define themselves in contrast with the popularity of these folk traditions. A good example of such folk traditions centering on the woman performer are the Tamasha and Lavani song-and-dance performance traditions in Marathi, which you have earlier come across in MWG-004, Block 1 in Unit 4. However, the folk, or popular forms, have always circulated along with, and in conversation with the purportedly superior forms of raga-based music, whose domains were primarily the court and places of devotion. It can be obvious continuity between folk and ‘classical’ musical forms was the creativity, performance and efforts of women whether as oral reciters of folk poems (for example, songs sung by weavers, spinners and farmers) or highly trained and sophisticated courtesan performers associated with feudal courts and kingdoms. At the time of the nationalist revival in the subcontinent, coinciding with the decline of pre-modern forms of government after the 1857 rebellion, women’s performance traditions were strongly visible as the last remnants of ‘traditional’ Indian culture faced by the onslaught of colonial culture and government.

4.3.1.1A The “Semi-Classical” Repertoire

The tawaif in the north and the devadasi in South India became figures of deep anxiety for the nationalist middle class. Although allegations of prostitution and unconventional kinship structures were the obvious points of attack against these women belonging to hereditary castes, their performance repertoire and its popularity among the leisured as well as labouring classes caused deeper anxiety for the middle class interested in producing a unified, moralistic national idea. Interestingly, today the genres
associated with these female performance traditions are included under the ‘semi-classical’ label: particularly *thumri* (a Hindustani singing format loosely based on *raga* rules and predominantly of secular-erotic content), *ghazal* (the sung form of the Persian and Urdu poetic form), *geet* (a melodic, freer elaboration of song often based on folk rhythms and themes), *javali* (a Telugu and Kannada song format based on the classical *padam* but of a distinctly erotic nature). Almost all these forms, and several related ones, were sung in dance performances by courtesans either at the court, or private assemblies of local male patrons (i.e. salons). Some of the performers were associated with devotional practices at temples, such as the *devadasis* in South India, but this was by no means their only sphere of performance. Another running theme in these musical forms was the thematic of Vaishnavite devotion towards the lover-god Krishna (e.g. *bandish ki thumri* and *javali* songs) and a general sense of abandon in the pursuit of physical and emotional pleasure. Finally, this performance tradition was not simply a literary or cultural domain, but due to the gender of the performers it soon became a battleground for the very identity and future of the emergent nation.

4.3.1.2A From Song to Recorded Music and Film

Although we are hard pressed to find names of illustrious women poets and writers from the period immediately preceding colonialism, the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century may be regarded as a period of female excellence in the musical and poetic arts. The names of singers and performers such as *Badi Malka Jan* (*fl. late nineteenth century*), *Veena Dhanammal* (1867–1938), *Gauhar Jan* (1873–1930), *Rasoolan Bai* (1902–1974), *Siddheshwari Devi* (1907–1976), *Akhtari Bai* (1914–1974), *Gangubai Hangal* (1913–2009) and *M.S. Subbulakshmi* (1916–2004) are celebrated in nationalist history, but seldom invoked as the distinct participants in a women’s performance tradition whose roots, motivations and artistic formation lie in pre-colonial social life. Thus, although most of these women belonged to hereditary castes of entertainers and performers, and lived on the patronage of feudal clients and patrons, they are the pioneers of modern forms of singing, performance, private entertainment and public poetry, as we know them today.

This will become clear through the career of an exemplary early twentieth-century woman performer. *Gauhar Jan* cut the first *Hindustani vocal record* with the Gramophone Company in Calcutta bringing at one stroke, as Vikram Sampath points out in his biography of the singer, the hallowed domain of Hindustani music into the modern capitalist entertainment industry (Sampath, 2010, p. 95). This was not simply a debasing of a purely classical form, but the first attempt at making music respond to the concrete conditions of modern society. While the brevity of the record format necessitated ‘classical’ songs to be sung with the barest elaboration and abbreviated conventions,
it circulated traditional music among a wider public which was being educated for the first time in the protocols of hearing music outside the feudalist salon setting. This also meant the division of music and dance components of traditional performance, and the emergence of the recording artist in her own right as a professional musician, without the community identification of a particular caste or residing in a particular ‘disreputed’ quarters of the city.

However, not every woman singer from the old dispensation was able to make the transition from traditional performer to modern artist. Rasoolan Bai ((1902 -1974) and Asghari Bai (1918-2006) were recognized in post-independence India but lived in straitened circumstances and died in penury. Significantly male singers of the early twentieth century were more reluctant to enter the recording studio, and when they did, overwhelmed by the popularity of singers such as Gauhar Jan, took to singing in the higher registers mimicking the female voice. However, this trend was reversed very soon with the nationalist reappropriation of women singers like M.S. Subbulakshmi and, to a lesser extent, Begum Akhtar (earlier Akhtari Bai) as ‘respectable’ performers upholding classical values and national popularity. Both had a brief career in early cinema, popularizing the sensation of singing-actresses, and thus a partial throwback to the courtesan tradition which expected multiple accomplishments from the performer.

4.3.1.3A The Balasaraswati-Rukmini Devi Debate on Sringararasa

The ‘rediscovery’ of Bharatanatyam is one of turning-point moments in the larger process which we now know as the invention of tradition. Known in the pre-colonial period as sadir, the dance form became a battleground for the invention of a pan-Indian tradition taking the form of both a legal reform movement in the 1930s against the ‘dedication’ of young girls as devadasis (thus reconfiguring what was a salon-based art into a temple-based art) and an aesthetic movement pioneered by the theosophist and dancer Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986). At stake in both movements was the redefinition of the content of the ‘classical’ dance repertoire. For both sets of initiatives this repertoire was no longer adequate for stage-based performance of the hoary tradition of choreography now directly traced back, with nationalist intentions, to ancient Sanskrit treatises like Bharata’s Natyashastra. While the legal movement (anti-nautch movement for short) was resolved with the abolition of the notorious practice of devadasi dedication after independence, the artistic reform movement became famous in the form of a debate between two representative voices: T. Balasaraswati (1918-1984), belonging to an illustrious family of professional women performers, and Rukmini Devi, the reviver of the ‘ancient’ art using Orientalist textual scholarship and her own status as a high-caste, but modernized woman performer.
Both women were path breaking in their personal formation and professional achievement. Balasaraswati resolutely placed the older traditions of performance on to the proscenium stage and took her art to universities and schools in the west. Rukmini Devi reconceptualized the dance performance as essentially spiritual in nature, thus contributing to the national spirit assumed to reside in the ‘classical’ arts. The bone of contention however between these two visions of modernized Bharatanatyam was the question of *sringara*: one of the emotional moods in Sanskrit aesthetic theory of the *rasas* (emotional moods) that signified the erotic aspect of performance and reception. While Rukmini Devi argued for a de-eroticized dance performance (she is believed to have pioneered the use of the Nataraja idol on stage to mark the devotional or *bhakti* aspect of the dance), Balasaraswati, again wary of the staged aspects of the erotic mood, argued for the inherence of *sringara* in *bhakti* (Soneji, 2010, pp. 192–204). This debate highlights the clash of two intellectual arguments meeting on the plane of nationalism: the pronounced erotic aspect of the Krishna mythology which is central to the performance practice and reception of such varied artistic media as the *thumri*, *kathak*, *sadir*, *padam* itself becomes the ground of debate about what constitutes the proper national tradition and how to interpret it. Although claiming to recover the ‘original’ tradition, Rukmini Devi’s vision of dance was first shaped by witnessing the performance of two *devadasi* dancers, Rajalakshmi and Jeevaratnam, who had dared to enter the modern stage leaving the salon culture (Soneji, 2010, p. xxiv). In this way, the modern traditionalism of Bharatanatyam was derived from the work of women who were being discredited as mere temple-performers and prostitutes, even as their art was being touted as the last remnant of ancient culture. The case of Bharatanatyam shows the intimate links between nationalist thinking and the religious coding of so-called national traditions through the bodies and labour of women.

### 4.3.1.4A Poetry as Modern Literature

The reformist-nationalist claim about Indian artistic traditions was that they were representatives of the creative spirit of the people. While dance and music had to be taken out of their popularized performance domains (i.e. in the salon, local courts and in the *tawaif* quarters), to fulfill this claim the related art form of poetry, which in pre-modern times was fused with the courtesanal arts and performance, was gradually subsumed under ‘literature’ as one of its kinds. Not all poetry had been meant for performance, but the binary of poetry and prose as the basic kinds of literary expression is a very modern phenomenon. Thanks to the rediscovery of ancient specimens of Sanskrit poetry by Orientalist scholarship and the continuous traditions of written poetic expression in all the major languages of the subcontinent, poetry attained a symbolic value in nationalist thought. This development was buttressed by both existing Indian poetic writing and
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poetics (e.g. the Urdu ghazal and Brajbhasha poetry) and the emergent discourse of literary criticism in the form of English literary studies in the colonial university. The upshot of this development was the use of poetic forms such as long narrative poems and geets (songs) by early nationalists in the task of social criticism and nation-building.

4.4A THE MODERN LYRIC

Like the dance reform movement of the 1930s in South India, the last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a similar national reformist effort in Urdu poetic circles in north India. The question of the ‘nation’ was posed differently in this context as the primary question facing the Urdu reformists was the uplift of the community (qaum). For the followers of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s Aligarh movement, the most pressing social issue was the spread of education among the Muslim community of north India and the creation of a politically conscious middle class within it. These early Muslim reformist movements have been largely read within the logic of ‘Muslim separatism’ which in turn is simplistically understood as inevitably leading to the partition of British India. However, questions of reform and national literary expression raised by the Aligarh movement reveal preoccupations shared with other early nationalist movements. These common concerns included development of nationalist prose, reform of pre-modern (often seen as too erotic) elements in the literary tradition, fashioning the ‘new’ woman, and codifying gender relations in newly unearthed traditional scriptures and religiosity.

Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914) followed his mentor Sir Syed in arguing for a new literary style for the politically conscious Urdu-speaking middle class. He decried the saturation of Urdu poetry with the ghazal’s themes and symbols, and theorized and wrote a new kind of poetry addressing the themes of widow remarriage, women’s education, national solidarity etc (Pritchett, 1994). He read the English Romantic poets and Victorian critics such as Macaulay in order to produce a new poetic canon for Urdu (Pritchett, 1994, p. 152). Although Hali continued writing ghazals in the old format, he infused these with a new concern for romance between real human beings and not idealized lovers and beloveds. In this way, he reinvented the Urdu classical tradition as a modern literary tradition open to western influences as well as critically aware of its own past. Some of Hali’s most famous long poems (nazm) are addressed to the women of the community (‘In praise of silence’ and ‘The Widow’s Lament’), and for the first time, give voice to the female experience, albeit from a male perspective (Minault, ed. 1998).
While the personal voice of the Urdu woman poet would be heard only in the twentieth century, Indian English produced one of its first poets in Toru Dutt (1856–1877), a woman poet writing from both Bengal and England. She belonged to the famous Dutt family which was a pioneer in Orientalist scholarship and literary innovation. Toru, along with her sister Aru, were the first Bengali women to visit Europe, and attended classes for women at Cambridge. Although she died in her youth, Dutt left behind a posthumous collection of lyrical poetry, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882). The poems echo the contemporary fashion of revisiting Sanskrit legends and classics and rendering them into the idiom of Victorian verse but, as Rosinka Chaudhuri notes, Toru Dutt’s style always placed mythology and tradition within the experience of the individual, woman poet (Chaudhuri, 2003, pp. 68–69). For example, in her poem titled ‘Sita’ the poet recounts Sita’s story through its effects on three children listening to their mother’s narration of it. The three children are identified as the poet and her siblings. Dutt thus becomes one of the first Indian English poets to demonstrate that English and poetry written in it could capture the sensibility and experience of an Indian writer. Dutt was equally famous for some of her writings in French.

Subramania Bharati’s (1882–1921) canonization as a nationalist poet has overshadowed the lyrical and romantic nature of his Tamil poetry. In fact, it is the amalgamation of the nationalist idea and a lyric, even erotic, sensibility that characterizes Bharati’s poetic achievement. A large part of his oeuvre includes rousing poems about right action and collective effort, often drawing on Sanskrit classics for parables, but the popularity of his poems belongs to the subtle modulations of mood and emotion in his more lyrical poems such as the ones written to Kannan (Krishna) in a woman’s voice and the set of poems titled ‘Kuyil Pattu’ (Koel’s Song). In the latter (*Kuyil Pattu* 2), for example, the poet recognizes the sound of nature (represented by the traditional symbol of the koel bird) in both the natural and modern-urban spheres: “In the teeming city and in nature’s wilderness, / In all these notes I have lost myself” (Bharati, 2012, p. 11). Bharati’s example, along with Toru Dutt and Hali’s poetry, shows that the nationalist poem necessarily relied on popular lyric forms in order to express a new kind of subjectivity that was anti-colonial and self-consciously modern. It is important to note that the nationalist sentiment is not purely political or an abstract product of historical circumstances but draws on the energy and popularity of intimate emotions like love, romance, even sexuality. The poems of these three poets are representative examples of this aspect of the nationalist imagination and show that the ‘popular’ traditions of singing and performance discussed earlier lived on in new poetic forms and aesthetic sensibilities in the modern nation.
Check Your Progress:

i) Do you agree that women have contributed to the tradition of performance? Justify with help of suitable examples.

ii) Discuss the contribution of Altaf Husain Hali and Toru Dutt in the tradition of poetry.
4.5A DRAMA AND THE NATIONAL IMAGINATION

In the previous section we have examined the role of some important women poets in the context of the formation of the idea of the nation. Let us look at the role played by women in the domain of drama from a similar perspective.

4.5.1 A The Popular Tradition

In large parts of northern India a form of popular theatre called *nautanki* was widely prevalent. Plays performed in this genre depicted mythological figures such as Raja Harishchandra who gave up his kingdom, wealth and children in order to keep his word, (which was also the subject matter of Dadasaheb Phalke’s film of the same name), the crazed Majnun who died for his unattainable lover Laila, and newly woven heroic acts of people such as the legendary figure Sultana Daku who robbed the rich to give to the poor, or the woman warrior who avenged her husband in battle in *Virangana* Virmati. Making a beginning in the late 19th century and well into the 1960s *nautanki* entertained the people in small towns and large villages. Amongst its legendary performers was Gulab Bai (1926–1996) whose life reads like a rags to riches story and was the queen of *nautanki* in her times. As a performative tradition with all its glamour and its stigma, *nautanki* was turned into the memorable film *Teesri Kasam* (1966) by the lyric writer Shailendra, and was based on a short story by Phanishwar Nath Renu. While slowly losing ground to the mass produced cinematic medium, the *nautanki* form came to be used to spread nationalist ideas and opposition to colonial government. Due to this form’s straddling both popular-rural and dramatic-urban, *nautanki* performances allowed for crossing of gender and social boundaries. For example, female parts were mostly played by male actors, but Gulab Bai is known to have played male parts as well (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 101).

A more urban form of theatre which has had a great impact on early cinema was the Parsi theatre, named so because of the predominant Parsi ownership of the theatre companies. It had a significant Urdu base and originated in Lucknow and then travelled to Calcutta, Amritsar, Lahore, Bombay and finally all over the country. Themes derived from fantasy, history, western drama were performed in these newly emerging urban centres in theatres that used props, painted scenes as backdrops, and with a liberal dose of music punctuating the narrative—as was the case in *nautanki*. Female roles were often performed by male actors some of whom became hugely popular with the audience. Habib Tanvir, the well known actor-director, recalls how his romance with theatre began when in childhood he watched *Mohabbat Ke Phool*, a popular play of the Parsi theatre repertoire, being performed. His brother played the female lead and a neighbor played the role of the hero.
The Parsi theatre tradition of cross-dressed male performers was questioned most strongly in Bengal with the rise of female stars of the theatre such as Binodini Dasi (1863–1941). The demand for female performers for women’s roles marks a shift in the nature of representation in modern Indian theatre. Dramatic conventions were expected to become more realist in terms of adequately relating to the performance to a generalized social context. However, the rise of the female performer did not herald a broadening of artistic and creative opportunities for women. Although reigning as the queen of Bengali theatre in the 1880s, and establishing a theatre with her own earnings, Binodini was forced to accept a change in the name of the theatre that she had financed and which she had wanted to have her name from Binodini Theatre to the Star Theatre. A woman of humble origins could not be accepted as the mistress of a theatre named after herself even if she had funded its construction. Apart from acting on the stage, Binodini was an accomplished poet and musician, and it is this generation of singing actresses that paved the way for the early sensations of Indian cinema such as Begum Akhtar, Sitara Devi, Jaddan Bai and Suraiya.

4.5.2 A The Political Tradition

Dinabandhu Mitra’s (1831–1873) Neel Darpan (1859) was the first overtly political play in the 19th century. Based on the exploitation of the Indigo producing peasants in Bengal under British companies that exported Indigo to the rest of the world the play was regarded as seditious and banned. A court case followed and its translator, a Christian missionary was charged. This western-theatre oriented tradition brought first into crisis the relationship between the colonial state and the masses. The controversy over the play, and its subsequent censoring by the colonial state led to the passage of the Dramatic Performances Control Act in 1876, which still exists in independent India’s statutes. These developments, both artistic and political, show the emergence of urban theatre as a nationalist phenomenon. Aparna Dharwadker notes “modern Indian drama had thus begun to function as an anticolonial medium at least a generation before the formation of the Indian National Congress officially launched the nationalist movement in 1885” (Dharwadker, 2005, p. 144).

On the other side of the subcontinent Marathi theatre was widely popular as it reworked mythology to allude to colonial and racist humiliation of Indians and thereby forge a strong nationalist sentiment using strong women characters to make political statements. Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar’s (1872–1948) Keechaka Vadha (1907) was one such example where the middle class viewership read the plays as subversive and deeply political. Using the story about the violation of Draupadi from the Mahabharata, the play allegorizes the dishonour of Mother India at the hands of the colonial state’s representative Lord Curzon. Draupadi as Mother India regains her honour through the masculinist efforts of Bhima, representing a resurgent
nationalist masculinity. This play too became the target of colonial censorship and simultaneously marked the emergence of a nationalist script for gender relations.

4.5.3A Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA)

The Indian People’s Theatre Association was set up as the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India in the early 1940s at the time of the Bengal famine. Initially it was concentrated on a singing troupe that toured the countryside but it soon turned into a full-fledged theatre tradition that had units in Bengal, Bombay and Lahore in particular.

Young writers and actors were drawn to the IPTA; some wrote plays and directed them, others such as Balraj Sahni and Damayanti acted in the plays whose themes dwelt on exploitation of the underclass, especially workers and peasants, and depicted a progressive nationalism with a strong emphasis on secularism. The IPTA turn in the history of modern Indian theatre brought together the so-called folk idiom with more modernist tendencies such as antirealism and political protest. In this way the early IPTA plays were able to both criticize the commercialized aspects of urban theatre and show the creative possibilities of modern and traditional dramaturgical modes. One of the earliest IPTA plays was *Nabanna* (The New Harvest, 1944) produced in Bengali by Shombhu Mitra and written by Bijon Bhattacharya.

Along with anti-imperialist and anti-fascist messages, the IPTA plays of the 1940s and early 50s tackled pressing social issues such as communalism, partition and the growing repression against the leftist party workers. The Urdu writer and playwright Rasheed Jahan (1905-1952) wrote topical plays about the status of women in upper-class Muslim society. Her play *Parde Ke Peeche* (Behind the Curtain, published in the infamously radical anthology *Angare* in 1931) offered a glimpse into the nature of women’s seclusion through the physical effects on their bodies and reproductive health. While this play was never performed, this period saw the emergence of the idea of the play as text which enjoys a life even outside the world of performance. The dramatic play thus became an important genre of feminist protest literature. With the preponderance of men and ungendered scripts in the IPTA repertoire, the contribution of women to this political turn in modern Indian theatre has been eclipsed.

*Shanta Gandhi, Reba Roy, Dina Pathak, Shaukat Kaifi*

An important element in the IPTA was that young women were drawn to its work. What was significant was that these women were from middle class backgrounds who went into theatre not necessarily as ‘actresses’ but as part of their political work and their radical ideas. Living in communes and travelling across the countryside they broke with familial bonds or were
outcasted by their families, thus making a break from existing ‘traditions’, and thus challenged gender norms. There is a rich reservoir of memoirs from which their creative and social lives can be read. Some of the most iconic actresses in IPTA plays include Shanta Gandhi, Dina Pathak, Shaukat Kaifi and Reba Roy. Many of them achieved popularity for their singing skills thus pointing to the amalgamation of popular theatrical traditions (music, dance, and acting) with serious political commitments. This quality is visible in both the theatrical and poetic developments in the mid-twentieth century. Apart from being an actress, Shanta Gandhi was a renowned director of plays and an exponent of the bhavai form of Gujarati folk theatre.

4.6A LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have read about the expression of the nationalist idea in representative poetic and performance traditions (including music, dance, theatre and film). You have seen how the energy of poetic and performance modes is important both for anti-colonial nationalism as well as for marginalized groups within the independent nation-state. This energy is exemplified by the thriving women’s performance traditions and poetry whose content and form, reworked by nationalism, determined the trajectories of mainstream modern poetry, theatre, cinema and music. Women’s writing, indeed all the major women’s performance traditions, changed form and direction with the coming of the modern nation-state but continue to develop along lines of protest, debate and critique. You have been familiarized with some of the social and political struggles (feminism, Dalit movement, voices against state oppression) that took charge of the traditional modes of poetry and turned them around to their political and social goals. Along with cinema and theatre, poetry in this continuing history can no longer be seen as merely an aesthetic tradition detached from its immediate social and political context.

4.7A GLOSSARY

**Thumri**: A vocal genre in the Hindustani music tradition known for its improvisation, only loosely bound by raga rules and referring to the erotic tradition of Krishna devotionalism.

**Geet**: A melodic song with a refrain, often of folk origin.

**Tawaif**: Urdu term for a professional courtesan proficient in singing, dancing and poetry.

**Virahini**: Term from Hindi poetry describing one of the conventional heroines of lyric poetry who is a woman pining for her lover.

**Ghazal**: A lyrical genre in Urdu and Persian poetry consisting of distinct couplets connect by rhyme. It is often sung with musical accompaniment.
**4.8A UNIT END QUESTIONS**

1) What is meant by the nationalist reinvention of tradition? Elaborate with examples from any one of the popular performance traditions, that is, music, dance or poetry.


3) Describe the role of women performers in the growth of modern theatre in India.

4) What role did the *geet* play in nationalist poetry? Describe with the help of any two examples of poets who wrote *geets*.

**4.9A REFERENCES**


4.10A SUGGESTED READINGS


