

## **Performing Arts as Intangible Heritage vis-à-vis the Sattriya Dance of Assam**

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**Abstract:** An artist and his medium are both intermeshed and inseparable. The artist gets the perfect medium to portray all the varied, myriad facets of life through his art. Performing Arts which encompasses dance, music, theatre, opera, puppetry etc. can be said to be a cultural bridge – a glorious link between the past and the present; a way of keeping the tradition of a people alive and kicking – in other words, an intangible carrier of heritage. Sattriya is the eighth classical dance form of India. It owes its origin in the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE to the great Vaishnava saint and reformer of Assam, Mahapurusha Sankardeva who used it as a medium of propagating Vaishnava faith. Originally the domain of male dancers in the ‘Sattras’ (monasteries), Sattriya Nritya (dance) gained prominence and popularity once it came out of the rigid confines of the cloistered sanctum of the ‘Sattras’ in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sincere and laudable efforts of some pioneers have succeeded in focusing on the aesthetics of this hitherto neglected form of art and brought it to the centre stage of the country and the world. It has also succeeded in bringing the focus of the world to Assam – a region which is a melting pot of various cultures, traditions and beliefs. The cultural heritage of Assam draws its sustenance from its rich repertoire of dance and music. A noteworthy feature of this dance form is that it is a ‘living tradition’ – where much of the technique and style it incorporates today have remained unchanged over the years unlike other dance forms. This paper focuses on Sattriya as representative of Assam’s glorious heritage. It will also try to portray the shift from a predominantly male – based to female – based dance form. We shall showcase this through some ‘hastamudras’ (hand gestures) and dance moves. An attempt has also been done to see if the dance form, in its present state, suits the contemporary world stage, and, if not, how to make it more appealing to the present generation. Interviews with some renowned ‘gurus’ in this regard have helped us in formulating our views.