

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

“Heritage is not about preserving or recreating pasts. It is not possible to preserve what no longer exists. Heritage is aspects of an imagined past as used in the present or bequeathed to an imagined future.”¹ “Culture always includes questions of identity and difference, and cultural identity is always linked to a past and a tradition.” (Chakraborty 2008: 185). The economic, political and cultural transitions are inevitably connected to moral traditions in society. As “classical Indian dance becomes fully integrated with the marketplace of global consumer goods, dancing bodies once again emerge as the embattled site for questions on ethical and moral conduct.” (Ibid)

The purpose of the preceding study and discussion has been to appraise the journey of the religio-ritual tradition of Sattriya Dance from being performed in an insular sacred space, to the wider world non-sacred, and non-ritual in character and spirit, my purpose has not been to uphold or criticize its ‘validity’ as a Classical dance tradition of India. Neither has it been to put the efforts made, in recent times towards achieving this goal under scrutiny. The development of any art form is organic. It cannot be claimed or ascertained what Sankardeva’s idea in totality was when he decided to present *Cihna Yatra* to the ‘public’. Was it only to spread the philosophy of faith that he envisioned? Or did he consciously try to construct a holistic performing system with its own distinct language tuned with his understanding of the people and the society that he aimed at reaching? Or both? However, it can be argued for sure that he understood the power of the ‘visual’ with its composite frame and so did his apostles.

The art form in the Sattriya did not happen in one single day and neither did it grow in a single day either. Any field of ‘Art’- visual and performing, has a history of invention, assimilation, imagination and technical skills which run down through many generations to give it a concrete language of its own. It is a language, sound with its own respective grammar and its own respective process of evolution. In respect of the Sattriya traditions of art, the process of evolution is found/seen to be concretised in the hands of all *Bhakats*- devoted to ‘their Lord’, in trying to offer the prayers through their innovation which led to a complex dance form (allied with other forms) which we see today. As I mentioned earlier, Sattriya is not any one man’s construction nor is it a making of one

night. From Sankaradeva's Ankiya Nat to various dance forms within the ambit of the ritual theatre to a 'classical' identity of its own, Sattriya dance has evolved, contextualizing and re-contextualising itself over the centuries. Interestingly, it has evolved a binary meaning – of being a ritual and of being a proscenium performance art form.

As the art forms of the Sattras have travelled through that history in time and space, they have had innumerable research scientists, performance scientists, linguists, poets, musicians, choreographers, visualisers, theatre directors, costume designers and many more creative minds who have contributed to the enduring 'Performance Culture' of the neo-Vaishnavite movement and built a large cultural space intertwined with the fabric of a huge population of this land. Unfortunately their names, over the 500 years of its existence have been submerged in the orality of the traditions.

Cultural history, as studied today, implies to a broad spectrum in terms of both its subject matter and theoretical perspectives. "Several scholars have viewed it from different standpoints and have aptly put forward theoretical dimensions with aesthetic and literary discourses."² "'Culture' describes the many ways in which human beings express themselves for the purpose of uniting the others, forming a group, defining an identity, and even distinguishing themselves as unique."³ Every culture belonging to a society has its own history and hence a cultural heritage. This makes all heritage- tangible and intangible- a cultural construction done by the practicing community and in certain cases its cognoscenti.

In the 19th century when Maniram Dewan (1806-98), a martyr in the early years of resistance against the British rulers in his *Buranji-vivek Ratna* (1838) identified the Vaishnavite culture, and Sattras for that matter, as sites of Assamese heritage. This idea of cultural nationalism or heritage construction, although in a nascent form, took a longer dimension in the hands of the doyens of Romanticism in Assamese literature like Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938), Hem Chandra Goswami (1872-1928), Kanaklal Baruah (1872-1940) and other compatriot litterateurs. Among them Bezbaroa in particular, coming from a family with deep commitment to the Sattriya culture, championed and promoted the multi-faceted contributions including literature, music, drama etc. as glorious sites of Assamese heritage, through his series of writings

(*Bezbaroa Rachnavali Vol III*, ed. Jatindra Nath Goswami, Sahitya Prakash, 1968, Print). The corpus of literature as well the rituals possessed by the Sattras and Namghars in villages, and the personality of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva through this process came to be looked upon as sign posts in the cultural history of Assam. Writings of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and their posteriors also found pride of place in a multi-volume anthology of Assamese literature compiled and edited by Hem Chandra Goswami as text book for introduction of Assamese in the Calcutta University, a move steered by the then Vice-Chancellor, Ashutosh Mukherjee in the early years of the 20th century - the *Asamiya Sahitya Caneki*. The joint initiative supported by the then British Govt. also led to another path-breaking publication *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* (1930) by Calcutta University with Hem Chandra Goswami as its editor. The work was a catalogue of Assamese manuscripts most of which are preserved in the Sattras. (Personal Communication with P.J. Mahanta on 21 December 2014)

The contributions of Sankardeva and the Sattras which came to be constructed as heritage by the larger Assamese society in the course of time, particularly through the passage of the movement for India's independence went further to be seen as representations of Assamese cultural identity. Within the holistic appraisal, provided in this thesis I have detailed each of the components of this broad cultural site- from a discussion of Sankardeva as the founder of the Assamese cultural identity, to Sattriya Dance, Music, Theatre and other plastic arts being looked upon as different markers. The move taken by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, to identify Sattriya Dance as a National stream is in a sense the culmination of this political process of representation and identity.

Since, the second half of the last century, the cultural history of Assam has seen the recent –groundbreaking events that remain recorded or at least recorded in the memory of people still. The steps taken by Raseswar Saikia Barbayan and a few enthusiasts were monumental in the history of this performance tradition of Sattriya. Breaking out from the conventions of the institution responsible for one's identity and existence and believe in what was considered 'profane' (to teach a woman dancer, since he came from the celibate order). Alongside withstanding the stiff resistance of not only the establishment but also one's own teachers, colleagues and students. What you considered the purest that is the sheer language of the dance which indeed was the language to reach the

divine, could not have been easy. This subversive act opened the doors for new dialogues to happen, new inventions to be made and the evolution of dance to continue. Raseswar Saikia's zeal opened a whole new dimension for generations to come inside the Sattras as well as outside. What he began eventually became one of the identity markers of not only a small community but a whole state.

Similarly, the foresight of Prof. Maheswar Neog to work on the revalidation of the tradition as a heritage and his documentation of the art forms from the Sattras at a time when no one else was working or rather 'funding' the process, was initially important for the development of the art form, I have been told, that he was working at a time when the majority of people within Assam weren't even much aware of the richness of the trajectory of the art traditions in the Sattras, especially Majuli.

Most important was the tireless effort of the people who worked towards its greater understanding and explication at the national level as a heritage, which administratively involved a lot of paper work, endless writing in terms of reports and proposals, meetings with the right people, study and analyses and demonstrations, timing and lobbying to achieve State Government's support and the list is endless. Needless to say, it involved a lot of criticism from within and without. So, this study is not to question any anonymous name who contributed towards the making of a performance form in the history of time or those in the recorded history.

However, there have been a few observations that the researcher would like to bring. I asked the question- 'What does Sattriya mean to you?' to virtually everyone I ever met in the field of the present research work. Ghanakanta Bora, the celebrated exponent and a teacher said, "...it is 'from Sattras' and it means where we take God's name and sing in His praise, where there is *sat-sanga*. It has been told in the *Bhagavata*. Where there is *sat-katha* and *sat-sangat* [the place] is known as Sattras." Anwesa Mahanta reflected, "... the definition of Sattriya again is like dance itself... the meaning of Sattriya has varied at different points of time in different ways... the definition doesn't remain constant. It evolves through your understanding varying in time and space." Bhabanada Barbayan summarized, "Sattriya is a system of practice of spirituality, not only of prayer but also Art and Culture through an aesthetic way of thinking and applied in daily hood life of a normal human being, propounded by Srimanta Sankardeva." A *bura-bhakat* said,

“anything from the Sattras is Sattriya”, which I can surely claim is not something that anyone and everyone (i.e. the general public or the intelligentsia or the government authorities) believe.

There are about 700 Sattras in the state of Assam belonging to various sects and sub-sects of neo-Vaishnavism and existing at various levels of subsistence. As stated in the introduction that the *samhatis* are Brahma, Purusha, Kala and Nika. And all of them together constitute the Sattria culture of Assam or the cluster of Sattriya arts. All of them are marked with a distinctive performance tradition and the path of reaching the Divine-some within their practice, have a defined and an evolved grammar of the arts and some others do so without such an evolved grammar. Nonetheless, the presence and existence of this diversity amongst the Sattras from all the sects is definite.

However, the charter of the National recognition have only acknowledged one type of ‘*dhara*’ i.e. style from the Kamalabari group of Institutions. The reason may be because of their strong polished performances. But if citizens of the state and the country are considered equal in the eyes of the Government, then so should be their beliefs, which indeed are very diverse. By standardizing a particular set of art form practiced by a sect, the Government leaves out a much wider population of people and their talent.

The ‘Project Proposal on the Protection, Preservation and Development of Sattria institutions of Assam (Phase-I)’ which was submitted to the Government of Assam, Cultural Affairs Department, Directorate of Archaeology, Ambari, Guwahati- 781001 reads, “The Government of Assam has adopted a cultural policy to develop the age old *sattria* institutions of Assam and a high powered committee has been constituted under the Chairmanship of an Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam with a few Sattradhikars and a few *sattras* of Assam, scholars, and the Director, Directorate of Archaeology Assam and Director of Cultural Affairs, Assam, as its members, a Task Force has also been formed to work out a comprehensive project proposal for protection, preservation and development of the *sattras* with due care to be taken for restoration of the five hundred years old institutions imbued with rich tradition and cultural heritage of the people of the farthest region of the country i.e. Assam.”

These lines do not only talk of a 'Cultural Policy' adopted for the development of 'all' the Sattras but also constitutes a committee of people from within these institutions and outside to supervise various aspects of the work intended. It is rather curious to think that India as a nation with 5000 years of recorded history of art, culture and society does not have Cultural Policy. In the absence of a 'National Cultural Policy' with a scope for amendment from time-to-time, the responsibility of the work to be done in the field of arts falls on all the National Institutions which were all initiated by the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru in a recently acquired independent India when some negotiations with some princely states and other governances were still in the process. Hence the 'Nehruvian' vision overlapping with 'Nationalistic' ideologies command the functions of these institutions. The entire purpose of development, preservation and recognition falls short as India as a country after so many years of National and State governance has evolved from the 'princely' and 'tribal' state rules where the slogan of 'unity in diversity' had to be asserted to pronounce India as one 'Nation'.

Development of Art is organic, therefore the support needs to be given to its practitioners so that they may yield their best creative talents. But that right comes to all regardless of what anyone's expertise levels are. A policy in place must ensure that it promotes the best of what is there and then work what is there in its best and the work towards the development and growth of the ones that need attention.

According to Gregory J. Ashworth,

“Ritual could be viewed as a means of transmitting heritage ideas, messages and experiences to consumers, whether as participants or spectators. Ritual could also be regarded as a heritage resource in itself to be packaged with similar, and dissimilar, resources into heritage products for local and external markets. Both dimension depend upon the creation and application of the concept of intangible- as opposed to tangible-heritage.”⁴

S.B.P. Roy, President of the All India Music Conference, made the following remark in his foreword to the Conference Newsletter (24 December 1958): “the resurgence of our ancient culture and desire to draw inspiration from its traditions are both a cause and effect of our political freedom.”

Pallabi Chakravorty in her book *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India* states,

“Accordingly centrally funded institutions like the Sangeet Natak Akademi promoted dance by organizing seminars and festivals, and by providing dancers with scholarships, programmes and funding... The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), a separate administrative body, was created and financed by the Ministry of External Affairs. Its primary objective was to establish and continue cultural relations between India and other countries... the ‘Festival of India’ was introduced in Britain, USA, Germany, Sweden, Japan, China and former USSR ‘to remove perceptions of Indian culture as fossilized and high-light tradition and change’.”⁵

Just as the museum exhibits stand on the pedestals in isolation from their context, the intangible heritage can end up being presented as ‘objects’ without relevant contexts... Ashworth says, “Treating rituals, ‘whether ‘living’ or resurrected, as heritage changes their nature as part of a process of museumification.”⁶ “...their antiquity, ingenuity, beauty... but possessing and conveying no intrinsic ideological message of any significance to the present or the future.”⁷ It did not matter to other dance forms as much as most of them had to be resurrected, such as Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi and Odissi (which was created from three dance traditions-*nartaki*, *mahari* and *gotipua*) as these dance forms, during the colonial period were looked down upon (being a part of the ‘*devdasi*’ culture) and had gained a very ‘infamous’ reputation. Eventually the practitioners were marginalized, almost to the extent of their extinction. After India gained its independence, the nationalistic fervor swept the country when this Nation started looking for its own ‘cultures’. During this time the nationwide arts revivalist movement started. However, Sattriya was always living, also in the urban matrix of the society. It never needed an asserted ‘revivalism’ or ‘resurrection’.

As Anwesa Mahanta says, “it is one aspect to understand the arts related to the Sattras but at the same time it is very important to understand the entire culture related to the Vaishnava Art forms in which the culture and society go together. So Sattriya in a sense signifies one who might not be dancing but he is working in the congregational chanting,

he is also known as Sattriya performer...’ However, the National Institutions led to developing a strategy which when employed, turned these survivals, representations of a culture into “museum exhibits [of] art objects and curiosities interesting but devoid of any context, meaning or significance with its respective context.”⁸ Similarly, Ashworth writes, “In this way, heritages are contained, decontextualised, and marginalized as curious colourful and somewhat quaint survivals from the past, which can be treated as museum artefacts or folklore...”⁹

Another problem that has likely occurred is that of Vernacularisation. Vernacularisation was a post- industrialization European phenomena (Ashworth in Brosius and Polit) which stressed the “ordinary and mundane, the everyday life of an imagined entity usually labeled the ‘common people’, the ‘folk’ who are viewed as possessing values from and morally superior to the social, cultural and political elite.”¹⁰ In Europe it was a certainly a reaction to Industrialization which tried and sought to elevate the hand-made over the industrially mass-produced, the rural over the urban and the cohesive local community over a diffused, wider society. When intangible cultural heritage, is ‘presented’ as a part of the strategy with a National perspective, it is important to probe the meaning of the cultural value as it pertains to ethical and moral conduct of the ‘cultures’ that a particular art form represents. “The economic, political and cultural transitions are invariably connected to moral transitions in society. As classical Indian dance becomes fully integrated into the market place of global consumer goods...”¹¹

The Indian government stimulates and promotes languages, traditions, rituals and craftwork of the ‘folk’ through its organization- the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, treating them as anthropological survivals and folklore curiosities seen as ‘exotic, colourful, primeval and unspoilt.’ The transformation of cultural groups into ‘folk objects’ by their representation as part of the exotic, mysterious land and beyond, adding to the definition of the concept of ‘Exotic India’; marks them immediately as of no significance to the visitors’ present or to the modern society. As Christian Brosius and Karin M. Polit, in their introduction in the book *Ritual, Theatre and Identity: Politics of Culture and Performance in a Globalised World* state, “To vernacularise heritage is to render it irrelevant to the present, and thus to remove any threat to contemporary society from it.”¹²

In a world where culture has itself come to mean dynamism, creativity, fluidity, difference and commodity production, the process of socio-cultural change must encompass the idea of 'sustainable pluralism' in order for various dance forms and their practitioners to prosper in various contexts. Thus ethical culture must encompass new opportunities and gain deeper commitments from cultural institutions- both local and global- and new opportunities for the inclusion of marginalized voices, enabling them to fully participate in all forms of cultural production as both producers and consumers.

In Chapter 4, I described a completely different kind of development of the Sattriya Dance from various perspectives which are as follows:

- Institutionalisation of Sattriya Dance as a representation of heritage and performing art with setting up of schools and other organizations for its training outside the Sattra environment
- Nationalisation of a ritual performance
- Inclusion of women dancers in a big way
- Inclusion of non-Assamese learners
- Research work initiated not only at the commissioned level but also at the academic level in universities where new discourses take place

The most important development was the establishment of various dance academies and institutions- state sponsored and private learning centres opened by various exponents of this dance form. This enabled a formal learning space for young disciples. Just as the Sattras served as the centre of learning of the neo-Vaishnavite philosophy and other aspects, the centres had the same purpose and motive. However, there was one major problem, that of the 'contextualisation'. Once any intangible or tangible heritage is removed (naturally or forcefully) from its original location in terms of space, the meaning is bound to change, in turn changing the characteristics. A 'living heritage', now being taught in urban areas, was devoid of the day-to-day activities and lifestyle that the monks of Kamalbari Sattras lead. One of the grave problems that any heritage professional faces is the loss of original context of the artifact or a site, without which it is an 'invented tradition'. The new institutions like the Sangeet Sattra that impart the teaching of the Sattriya Dance certainly impart knowledge subscribing to a particular curriculum, regulated by them. However there are limitations to the learning under their

tutelage. These institutions can only ensure the base line of ‘quality’ of learning of the Dance, there is no way one can analyse its ‘excellence’, particularly in respect to its inherent philosophy which elevates to a joyful spiritual experience.

This dislocation from the Sattras changed the ‘performance dynamics’ of Sattriya permanently. A Namghar acts as a ‘circular theatre’ structure where the audience i.e. the devotees in this case, are sitting all around. To be able to allow everyone to see the performance, all performers have to keep stopping and repeating at all corners of the theatre arena so that everyone is able to see the ‘ritual’. There are ‘ritualistic’ entry and exit of the performers from specific gates of the Namghar. The movement of the performers has been explained in Chapter 3. But on a proscenium stage, the audience is there only on one side so the speed/tempo/pace of the performance needs to be attuned. Moreover, the entry and the exit can only be from the wings. This naturally changes the ‘ritual’ into a ‘stage performance’. (Please see Figs. 90 A and B for a comparative stage structure of Sattriya in a *Namghar* and a Proscenium Stage)

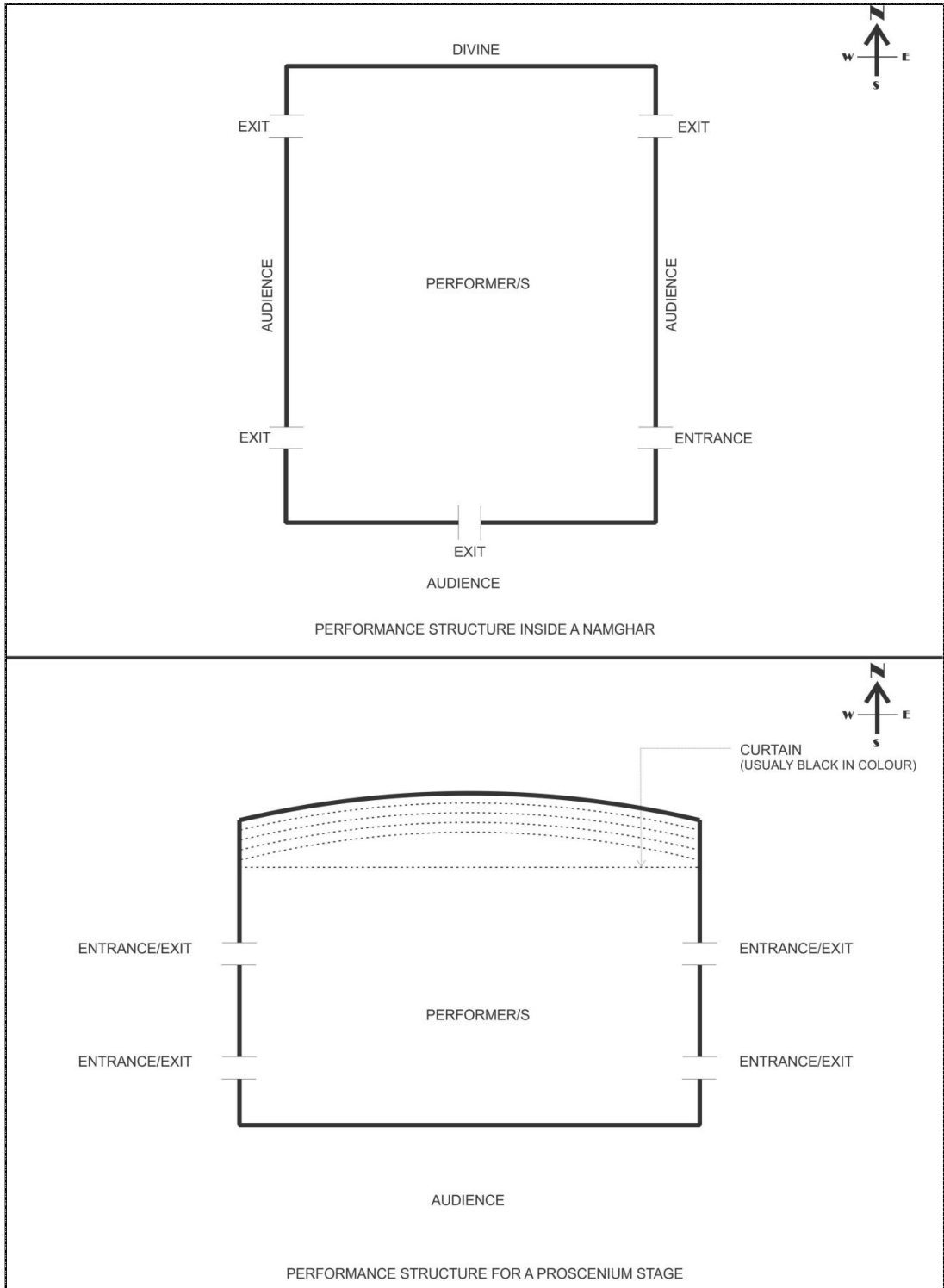


Fig 90 A AND B

With the continual in the changes that have happened, there are also a few integral changes that are taking place. New experimentations are taking place few such productions that have led to controversies may be mentioned.

The first of these was the production of 'Sattriya Dance' into the compositions of late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika by Mallika Kandali (please refer to Appendix VI for the complete interview). Hazarika was a renowned music composer and singer who has set to tunes many compositions in not only Assamese language and movies but also to several prominent Hindi movies. He is known for the sensuality in his writings and music structures. Now at an experimental level this was fine and accepted but in the name of Sattriya Dance, it led to a public outcry after the production was not only staged but also telecast on DD North East (the regional television network, a subordinate office of the national television network of India, Doordarshan, in short DD) as Sattriya was and still is living with its 'pure and pristine' tenets, absolutely rid of the *sringara rasa* i.e. the eroticism. Moreover, Kandali, does not hail from any Sattria and completely takes her dance not as a 'religious language' but as a form of expression. This contradicts the doctrines and ways of this 'living tradition' which, while it has come out in the urban space, has yet not lost contact from its place of origin. All decisions for taking the Dance to the national level, and thereby 'legitimising' its structure for such a non-sacred space was and is always done in accordance with the Sattras as most of the *gurus* hail from there.

Another such example was a production by Bhabananda Barbayan. He produced and performed a 'Sattriya' production based on the *zikirs* in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2014. The *zikirs* are a set of 'sufi' songs composed by the Azan Fakir, an Assamese Muslim preacher. It may be remembered that this set of 'Islamic/Sufi' devotional compositions are respected by all including the Sattras as a distinct component of medieval Assamese culture. However, *zikirs* are not accommodated in the ritual services inside the Sattras. Even though the content of the production was primarily *bhakti*, it was considered to be 'outrageous' venture by the Sattria fraternity and serious dance cognoscenti in Assam because it broke the closed religious boundaries of the Sattriya tradition. Bhabananda Barbayan is a talented dancer, but before all of that he is a celibate monk from the Uttar Kamalabari Sattria with the title '*barbayan*' conferred on him by the Sattria to be the chief teacher in the Sattria. Sattras are not non-resistant to other castes and creeds. Infact, all

are welcome with open arms as long as one doesn't disturb the 'spiritual' existence of the inmates and their daily lives. Anyone can also take *sarana*, provided they have gone through the necessarily philosophical training. But, the term 'inclusion' does not mean stepping out of the tenets of the faith as the disciplinary boundaries of the tradition.

Another example is that of the 'duet' productions. Duet, in itself popularly refers to the sensuality of the two sexes. But 'traditional' Sattriya is bound by the 'Ora' or the gender orientation in a performance. The monks brought up in such an environment can easily adapt to this and more so because the presiding emotions are mainly *vatsalya rasa* or *bhakti (dasya) rasa*. So the productions need to be choreographed accordingly. However, this is not always possible as now in a duet performance, the stage can be shared by a male and a female dancer. The discomfort finds reflection in many a recital unless both the dancers are on the same page about the philosophy of faith.

Under such circumstances, Sattriya today stands at a strange juncture of events. How does one answer about which is pure and which is not? What is Sattriya and what is not? These issues are amplified in India, as discussed in Chapter 2, there are no rules, regulations, policies or jurisdiction which would work as a guideline and a framework to safeguard our cultural heritage. There is a law in place to penalize theft and stop the trading and smuggling of antiquities. But that does not suffice for the preservation of India's cultural heritage. It is almost unsaid that the meanings need to be derived from UNESCO's ethics and definitions. Although, UNESCO consciously encourages all countries to make their own respective laws and policies to 'safeguard' the heritage in the absence of laws or guidelines in respect of preservation, commercialization or commodification of heritage traditions, with these multiple situations to accommodate, Sattriya stands in the middle of some difficulties.

'Intangible' and the 'Tangible' are inseparable from each other. Moreover they are encapsulated into the environmental and geological landscape. In the case of the preservation of Sattriya Dance, several points arise in the context of the preservation of this Intangible Heritage. How does one define the ambit of the Sattriya performance, not in terms of grammar but in terms of content and presentation, in ever changing space and contexts in the modern day scenario? How does one preserve the intangible without its natural habitat? Majuli is shrinking with each passing day and there will be a time in

future when all the Sattras will have to leave the land of nurture if decisions at the scientific levels are not made or a policy framework has not as yet evolved governing the ways of presenting these elements of intangible heritage- of Sattriya Dance, Music and Theatre- in decontextualised cultural space, in order to be able to stop the wave of dilution that has started happening in.

There is more to it though. As Pallabi Chakraborty says, “There is no doubt that culture-global or local- is now a core component of capitalist production.” Therefore despite the threat of ‘cultural homogenization’ and ‘global capitalism’, all cultural products (in this case, Sattriya dance) have an increased circulation through global networks. Chakraborty further says, “The unprecedented reach of the global market, the spread of mass media and technological innovations during the last decade have accelerated the hybridization of cultural forms with tremendous force. As a result the classical or traditional forms are now in turbulence. The new emphasis on ‘production values’ has blurred the line between culture and commodity.” Alongside, she also states that, “many cultural critics believe that the easy accessibility of classical forms due to democratization has promoted mediocrity, where pursuit of excellence is not favoured over democracy and where the cultural value is not favoured over production value.”

Globalisation has created significant shifts in the shaping of cultural identity. Forces such as the media and the transnational flows are changing the ‘national narrative’ of Sattriya. Structural shifts and cultural changes are not new in any field of performing or visual arts, be it classical, folk or tribal. Over a passage of time, Sattriya has ‘re-invented’ itself many a time even within the ritual space in the Sattras and later as it travelled from the Sattras to urban spaces, then to the state and national academies and finally to the ‘global market’. An interesting observation during this research work has also been the ‘pace’ of the cultural change driven by global flows and new rules of modern cultural politics. These socio-economic changes have caused and are still causing vital shifts in the ways Sattriya is taught and circulated among diverse audiences- resulting in significant changes in its aesthetics and politics of cultural production.

The National and the State patronage: Once the central government became the official patron of cultural forms and properties through diverse promotional efforts after independence, the social organization of Indian ‘classical’ dance forms changed

dramatically. Initially majority of the art forms in India, were based on the *Guru-Shishya Parampara*, where the quality and the standard of the learning process was in the hands of the mentors. However, in a Government administration, the system demands the democratization of the teaching and the learning process in an institutional framework. And this system necessitated setting some standards especially in the form of a chartered curriculum prescribed by the affiliating institutions. Some such examples are the Bhatkhande Vidyapeeth, Lucknow, Kathak Kendra, New Delhi, Kalakshetra, Chennai and such other institutions throughout the country. Such institutions, including some Universities (Benaras Hindu University and Indira Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh, Kalamandalam, Thrissur) have introduced multiple disciplines of performing arts under one umbrella, as a part of this process of democratization. So when Sattriya moved out of the Sattras (discussed in detail in Chapter 4), and entered a more secular space and came into consideration for government intervention for its promotion and patronage, the immediate need to set standards for the proscenium performances inevitably necessitated taking into consideration the performance systems to raise them as more polished and presentable. It so happened that most of these were from the Kamalabari Group of Sattras receiving such promotional attentions. Automatically other styles of 'Sattriya' performances got marginalized in the larger scheme of events. This further led to the production-consumption dichotomy in respect of the Sattriya productions. As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, all the Sattriya arts, the dances in the present context, were strictly meant to serve the religious and ideological purpose (Vaishnavain faith) was open to 'artistic' alterations, not always adhering to the ritualistic rigour. Probably, the word 'innovation' can be used to describe this new situation. "...although used as a buzzword in popular media" (Chakraborty 2008: 95), the term is of significant importance for the articulations of changes in Sattriya due to a variety of factors. The proliferation of intercultural (Anwesa Mahanta and Bhabananda Barbayan's experiments as evident from their observations- Please see Annexures III and IV) and intracultural (Mallika Kandali's productions- Please see Annexure VI) fusions and collaborations now begin to challenge the past ideology of the 'pure' ritualistic performance, transitioning into a 'classical' dance form for the modern proscenium stage.

It is no surprise, then, that the arguments that rage in certain quarters of classical Indian dance are about traditional values and acceptable norms. This, however, raises a few

pertinent questions with regard to Sattriya dance such as: How much can the 'classical' forms altered to foster innovation? How can one experiment with them and yet are respectful of the tradition which has been hallowed for generations? What should be the levels of 'cultural appropriation' of specific traditions for creating an artifact? What is the connection between formal innovation and ideological transformation? How these questions are answered is something, only time can tell. Coming back to the point I had raised on page. 4, that is, today, the Sattriya arts exist within a matrix of intersecting systems of religious beliefs, ritual, faith, globalization and modernity.



Figs. 91 AND 92 *BHAKATS* OF UTTAR KAMALABARI SATTRA PERFORMING SATTRIYA DANCE ON ZIKIR UNDER THE DIRECTION OF BHABANANDA BARBAYAN
(Courtesy: Bhabananda Barbayan)



Fig. 93 AN EXPERIMENTAL CHOREOGRAPHY BY BHABANANDA BARBAYAN
IN PARIS, FRANCE
(Courtesy: Emmanuelle Freget)



Fig. 94 MALLIKA KANDALI PERFORMING 'SATTRIYA NRITYA'
ON THE COMPOSITION OF LATE DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA
(Courtesy: Mallika Kandali)



Figs. 95 AND 96. MALLIKA KANDALI AND BHABANANDA BARBAYAN
PERFORMING A DUET RECITAL AT INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, NEW
DELHI, MONSOON FESTIVAL IN 2013

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Endnotes for Chapter 5

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