

## Meet Madhusmita Bora “Madhu” (she/her/hers)

I was 4 when our village *deo* (priest) recruited me to play Krishna in the annual *raax* festival. On the wintry night of my performance, a group of men surrounded me. “Go home,” they barked. “You are not allowed to dance here.” I came home and sat crying in my grandmother’s kitchen. “Don’t waste your tears,” *aita*, my grandmother said. “They barred you from dancing in the village, but one day you will be dancing on the world stage.”

*Namaskar*. I am Madhu, a storyteller, a Sattriya practitioner, and an activist. I am one of the co-directors of Sattriya Dance Company ([www.sattriyadancecompany.com](http://www.sattriyadancecompany.com)). Sattriya is a 500-year-old ritualistic dance and music tradition from the Hindu monasteries of Assam, in India. Assam is in the northeast corner of India. It is home to Asiatic elephants, one-horned rhinos, and lush tea plantations. I grew up in a tiny village called Madhabgaon, and the rhythms and movements of Sattriya were part of everyday life. As the only professional Sattriya dancer and teacher in Philadelphia, I take great pride in sharing the dance in my adopted country. I use my body as an archive for this oral tradition. As a first generation immigrant, my practice is also ritualistic and helps me stay connected to my roots, self, and heritage.

Sattriya was born in the 15th century. Sankardev, a polymath and social reformer, created the dance and music tradition to propagate his philosophy of a classless and equal society. After his death, Sattriya would be confined to monasteries and performed by celibate monks as part of their daily rituals. Women had very little access to the dance until the late 20th century.

In my workshops, I lead communities in mindful meditation, movement, and music. I share masks, instruments, and stories about Krishna, the monks, and their monastery on the island of Majuli.

Sattriya is my way of life. I have trained under acclaimed teachers Padmashree Jatin Goswami, Guru Ramkrishna Talukdar, Guru Naren Barua, and Adhyapak Gobinda Kalita from the Uttar Kamalabari Satra. My Sattriya work in the U.S. officially began in 2009. I have presented the dance across India, the U.K., Mexico, and the U.S. in venues and festivals such as New York University, Symphony Space, Erasing Borders Festival in NYC, San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, and Philadelphia Museum of Art.

My purpose is to preserve and share the joy and gift of Sattriya. I have done that by immersing myself in its study with different master artists, meticulously documenting it, and continuously seeking opportunities to present it in a unique way to a newer and wider audience. I am forever chasing the illusion of perfection in my dance and music. I feel blessed to be a lifelong student of this incredible tradition.