



## INDIA CANADA FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

*...forging close ties among Canadians with an interest in India*

**announces its lecture event**

### ***Dance and Music in the Vaishnava Monasteries of 16<sup>th</sup> century Assam***

**by Dr. Arshiya Sethi**

**on Sunday, 09 September 2018, 3:00 – 5:00 PM**

**Special Venue: Richelieu-Vanier Community Centre (Workshop #5),  
300 Des Pères-Blancs, Ottawa**



**Synopsis:** In the West, our idea of monastic ritual involves prayer and quiet reflection. But there are monasteries in Assam, in the far reaches of northeastern India, where prayer has always been, and continues to be, expressed through dance. Srimanta Sankardev was a 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century Assamese polymath: a saint-scholar, poet, playwright, social-religious reformer and a figure of importance in the cultural and religious history of Assam, India. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sankardev brought a new type of Vaishnavism (a major tradition within Hinduism) to Assam. It was based on the Bhagavata Purana (sacred texts) and expressed through dance and music. Sattriya, as this dance form is known, became one of the eight official classical dance forms of India only in 2000 – since then, its visibility has grown beyond the monastery walls. A growing number of monks have begun to teach Sattriya in Assamese towns and cities, and perform and teach live outside the monastery as far as Delhi and North America. The dances depict male/female characters, are graceful and incantatory, without the strong, rhythmic footfalls that characterize other Indian dance forms like Bharatanatyam or Kathak. The musical accompaniment in Sattriyas consists of drums, cymbals, flute, voice, violin or harmonium. Dr. Sethi, who has a doctorate in the politics and religion of 16<sup>th</sup> century Assam, will give an illustrated talk on the arts of the Sattria. Dr. Sethi is a dancer and an independent scholar and brings many years of scholarship to this interesting talk which will appeal to all ages.

**About the Speaker:** Independent scholar, Dr. Arshiya Sethi, twice a recipient of the Fulbright Fellowship, writes and speaks on cultural issues, in India and internationally. After three decades as Consultant, building tangible and intangible cultural equities, being dance critic, commentator on Dance and Music on Doordarshan's archival National programme of Dance and Music for more than three decades, and then advisor on India's national arts channel, she established and runs the Kri Foundation, which promotes different ways of looking at the Arts, especially 'Artivism'- Art directed at Activism. Her doctoral research has been on the dances of the Vaishnav monasteries of Assam called Sattras from which has emerged the eighth classical dance style of India, Sattriya. Her current scholarly research focuses on diasporic constituencies of dance, and through a multi-disciplinary lens, on cultural ecology at the intersection of politics and society, studying the ways in which artistic practices, especially dance, links with governance, gender, environment, cultural rights, identity issues and beyond, and social justice paradigms. She has just concluded a yearlong Post Doc attachment under the Fulbright fellowship at the University of Minnesota.

**Venue: Richelieu-Vanier Community Centre (Workshop #5), 300 Des Pères-Blancs, Ottawa**

#### **About India Canada Friendship Circle**

India Canada Friendship Circle (ICFC), a non-profit Canadian organization, operating in Ottawa since 2004 and conducting lectures by prominent speakers, encourages dialogue on India in a non-religious, non-partisan and harmonious environment. The words "friendship" and "circle" in its name convey an explicit desire to forge and maintain close ties among Canadians with an interest in India. ICFC's mission is to promote awareness and dialogue between India and Canada in the areas of philosophy, history, literature, industry, the arts, science and technology through prominent speakers.

*For further details and online registration, please visit our website: <http://icfc.us>*