CHAPTER III

THE NEO-VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT

I. Stages in the growth of the Chaitanya movement.

In the early years of the sixteenth century the movement inspired by Chaitanya unleashed new forces in the social and religious life of Bengal. As the movement passed through certain stages of evolution, these new forces also underwent a corresponding change in character. In the earlier part of Mughal rule in Bengal, Neo-Vaishnavism may be said to have reached a final form. It was in this finalised form that the Chaitanya cult exercised an enduring influence on Bengali life.

(i) Early development in Bengal: deviations and divergent elements.

In the earliest phase of the Post-Chaitanya Vaishnava movement in Bengal two distinct trends developed simultaneously at Navadvipa and Vrindavana. The ideas and outlook of the Navadvipa followers are reflected in the lyrical writings of our earliest authorities—Murari Gupta, Kavikarnapura, Narahari Sarkar and the like. Their vague ecstatic outbursts of adoration show no signs of even a beginning of an organised system. Adoration of Chaitanya as the highest and ultimate object of worship was the dominant note of their works. To that was added the belief that he was the incarnation of Krishna and Radha at the same time. In the writings of Kavikarnapura, the ecstatically emotional form of devotion (‘raganuga bhakti’) was distinguished clearly from the devotion which follows the way of scriptural injunctions (‘vaidhi bhakti’) and the former was definitely exalted over the latter. It was further asserted that the prime motive for Krishna’s descent as Chaitanya was to refute the doctrine of Monism and preach devotion to Hari.

Another doctrine prevalent among some of the Bengali
followers was represented by Sri Narahari Sarkar of Srikhanda and others. This doctrine known as 'Gauranagarabhava' conceived Chaitanya as the beloved or 'nagara' and his adorers as the women in love or 'nagaris'. In an allegorical sense, Chaitanya's life at Navadvipa was conceived as a counterpart of Krishna's love-dalliances at Vrindavana. The religious attitude of the devotee according to this new conception became identical with that of Radha and the milkmaids who forsook society for the love of Krishna. Only on the pedestal of the adored now stood a new image,—the image of Chaitanya,—an ecstatic love for whom was prescribed as the high road to freedom from the petty bondages of the world.

At about the time when the Chaitanya Bhagavata was composed the Chaitanya movement apparently did not present a picture of unity. Differences of opinion and divergent loyalties to individuals created a number of sects. A large number of Bengal Vaishnavas were bound together by a common allegiance to Advaita. The followers of Advaita still constitute a considerable portion of the Vaishnava community in Bengal. Their present ways of life and thought as also the common traditions regarding their past agree in suggesting that they represented from the beginning a comparatively orthodox trend within the Vaishnava fold. Another similar sect developed round the personality of Gadadhara, 'Gauraparamyavada', the basic doctrine of this sect,—supposing it was the same then as now,—consisted in an adoration of Chaitanya as the supreme object of worship. It is extremely doubtful, however, if all believers in 'Gauraparamyavada' belonged to this sect. A faction fight far more important in character developed round the personality of the unorthodox Nityananda. His detractors were obviously many and the Chaitanya Bhagavata is full of tirades against such opponents. The conflict between the two rival groups, once so important in Bengal's religious history, has not entirely died out even to-day.

Besides the development of mutually exclusive sects within the body of the movement, signs of deviation are noticeable even in the early literature of the Vaishnavas. Jayananda's Chaitanyamangala, written some time after Vrindavanadasa's famous biography of Chaitanya, apparently indicates the growth of some new tendencies within Bengal Vaishnavism. In
one place the work represents Chaitanya as expounding the principles of Yogic mysticism in a language alien to the Neo-Vaishnava tradition. More surprising still, Jayananda tells us of many high-caste women of Nadiya who followed the traditional path in their daily life, but were initiated through Chaitanya’s touch into the spirit of the Vrindavana milkmaids and came to the Master by night for secret worship. This almost surpasses the worst vagaries of later Sahajiya thought. Here apparently is a new deviation from the main current of the movement. One however wonders whether Jayananda’s version of Chaitanya’s teachings is merely a casual statement for which the author alone is responsible, or whether it represents a genuinely new tendency reflecting the views and practices of a section. In support of the former supposition one may point out that Jayananda’s views do not find any corroboration in any other known work of the period. Besides, the work in question also includes a large amount of matter extraneous to the faith and practices of the majority of Vaishnavas and as such do not enjoy any high reputation with the more orthodox. But a casual statement in Srichaitanyachandramrita of Prabodhananda written shortly after Chaitanya’s death would suggest that the second supposition is more correct. In the said work the author lamented the sad degeneration among the followers of Chaitanya who had fallen far from the ideals of the Master. Some shrank from activity, some were vain of their knowledge, some perverted the ways of worshipping Govinda, others still had recourse to meditations, austerities and Yoga. And when again we hear the echoes of Jayananda’s words on Yoga and secret worship in the later works of the Sahajiyas, we seem to catch a glimpse of the missing links which connect the highly Tantricised Vaishnava Sahajiya cult of the later 17th and 18th centuries with the movement inspired by Chaitanya. It seems that the Tantric-Yogic cults which deluged Bengal’s socio-religious life ever since the days of decadent Buddhism and was still a power to reckon with in the lifetime of Chaitanya, early entered the fold of the Chaitanya cult along with the lower class converts and gathered momentum by the time of Jayananda. Discarded by the orthodox Vaishnava, they continued to flourish and reclaimed from among the lower orders of Vaishnava society perhaps the bulk of their flock which had
strayed into the folds of the Chaitanya movement.

Such then were the conditions of Bengal Vaishnavism on the
eve of our period. The ‘Gauraparamyavada’ of the earliest epoch
still flourished as the dominant faith of the Bengali Vaishnavas.
Beside it, perhaps as a less powerful force, the ‘Gauranagara-
bhava’ continued to exist. The Yogic-Tantric deviation, early
lamented by Prabodhananda and reflected in the Chaitanya-
mangala of Jayananda, was perhaps consolidating itself in this
period. The faction fights mentioned by Vrindavanadasa more
than a quarter of a century ago still continued, to be sure. This
was the state of Vaishnavism in Bengal when a new factor
entered the stage and completely transformed its features.

(ii) The work of the Vrindavana gosvamins and
their followers

While the Bengali followers at Navadvipa were pouring forth
their devout sentiments in ecstatic lyrics, biographies and
biographical dramas, another sort of work was going on in a
different region. Ever since the Master’s death, the gosvamins at
Vrindavana were enunciating in scholarly seclusion the basic
dogmas of the faith, chalking out the great outlines of their
mystic philosophy, building the foundations of the new rhetoric of
mysticism (Bhakti-rasasastra) and drawing up the code of daily
conduct which the Vaishnava was henceforth to follow. Of the
six gosvamins Raghunatha Bhatta alone wrote nothing, while the
chief work of Raghunathadasa consisted of impassioned lyrics
in adoration of the mystic-erotic love of Radha and Krishna.
Works of far greater importance were produced by the four
others. The theological and philosophical bases of the cult were
first formulated by Sanatana. Rupa’s Samkshepa-Bhagavata-
mrita further developed and expounded the system of theology.
The latter’s genius was predominantly lyrical, and his
Bhaktirasamritisindhu and Ujjvalanilamani laid the foundations
of Vaishnava Bhakti-rasasastra, a new branch of mystical
rhetoric so far as Bengal was concerned. Jiva, the gifted
nephew of Rupa and Sanatana, carried these various develop-
ments to their climax and completed the structure of Vaishnava
philosophy. Another gosvamin, Gopala Bhatta, laid down the
regulations for the guidance of the Vaishnava’s daily life. Thus
the entire structure of a regular and organised cult-system in all
its varied details was hammered out in course of long strenuous years.

Rupa's writings belong mainly to the period between 1533 and 1550. Some at least of Sanatana's works were written as late as 1554. Haribhaktivilasa of Gopala Bhatta was composed before 1541. Thus by the middle of the 16th century the foundations of the system were deeply laid. It was at this point that Jiva took up the work. Beginning to write in about 1555, he continued till 1592 and perhaps till 1599.

The influx of the new system, which had nothing of the indefiniteness of the Navadvipa school, occurred in Bengal during the later part of Sri Jiva's lifetime. The genius of the six gosvamins had already secured for the Bengali school an ascendancy over the other rival Vaishnava systems at Vrindavana. But, surprising to say, the works of Vrindavanadasa, Jayananda and Lochanadasa of the Navadvipa school seem practically unaware of this rising eminence of the six gosvamins. The case seems to have been one of genuine ignorance rather than of sectarian jealousy. We are told that at the positive behest of Sri Jiva, the works of the gosvamins were carried to Bengal by three of his ardent followers—Srinivasa Acharya, Narottama Dasa and Syamananda,—in the last part of the 16th or the early days of the 17th century. The ceaseless activity of the Vaishnava missionaries soon secured an ascendancy for the Vrindavana school. But the older sects and ideas were not entirely submerged. The conflict between the adorers of the unorthodox Nityananda and his detractors still continue. The image of Chaitanya is still worshipped by some at Nadia and elsewhere as the highest religious act. With Srikhanda in the Burdwan district as its chief centre, 'Nagarabhava' still enjoys some popularity. Those who owe their spiritual allegiance to Advaita are also not few in number.

(iii) Growth of the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya cult

That a force fundamentally alien to the Chaitanya cult had entered the fold of the movement is clearly proved by a work composed in 1598 A.D. This work, Rasakadamba, indicates that the development of Post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya thought and practice had made considerable progress by the
end of the 16th century, though perhaps in a somewhat incoherent and nebulous form. Four works, more definitely known to be products of the Vaishnava Sahajiya cult,—*Agama, Anandabhairava, Amritarasavali* and *Amritaratnavali*,—are attributed to the latter part of the 16th or the early years of the 17th century, though on the basis of insufficient data. These together indicate considerable growth in Sahajiya thought and practice. Yogic-Tantric mystic culture tempered and permeated by the ideal of love, characteristic of the Sahajiya system in its final stage of development, first appears in a clearly discernible form in these works. This, apparently, was a consummation of a long process of growth. Stray verses in the writings of Jayananda and Prabodhananda, referred to above, obviously indicate the entry of extraneous elements within the fold of the movement. Nityananda and Virabhadra admitted into the Vaishnava ranks many who belonged to the lower orders of society. Many of these neophytes were perhaps followers of the Yogic-Tantric or the earlier Sahajiya system. This remark is surely true of the *Neda-Nedis* (men and women with shaven heads), converted by Virabhadra according to tradition. Their older beliefs and practices had died too hard to be eliminated all of a sudden. It may not even be too much to presume that they persisted at least partially in their traditional ways under the easy garb of conventional Vaishnavism. A reconciliation was evidently sought between the old and the new. The pliable ideals of *parakiya*<* love and *prakriti sadhana* familiar to the Chaitanyites supplied a convenient means for the same. The new Vaishnava Sahajiya developed on the basis of a successful combination of these ideals and a reverence for the Vaishnava saints on the one hand with Yogic-Tantric and older Sahajiya thought and practice on the other. All this is partly conjectural, but nevertheless probable in the extreme.

Clear indications of this fresh growth is however not noticeable before the last part of the 16th century. From then on we have

* The word *Parakiya* means "belonging to another", i.e., a married woman, in this context. "Love to a married woman . . . forms the central theme of the later Parakiya doctrine of the school, in which the love of the mistress for her lover becomes the universally accepted symbol of the soul's passionate devotion to God." (De). The Sahajiyas preached the ideal of *Parakiya* love as the basis of their mystic culture.
an ever-growing volume of Chaitanyaite Sahajiya literature indicating no doubt a proportionate growth in the strength of the movement. The old and abhorred features of the original Sahajiya cult now came clearly to the foreground. For all we know the division of Chaitanya’s followers in Bengal into two mutually exclusive classes,—Vaishnavas who are respectable householders deviating little from the traditional path and the less conventional and less respectable Vairagis,—must have started at least as early as the latter part of the period under review.

II. The Vrindavana gosvamins and the Vaishnava pioneers: their life and outlook

During this period the most significant feature of the Vaishnava movement in Bengal was the growing hold of the orthodox school fashioned by the Vrindavana gosvamins. An analysis of the life-histories of its founders throws considerable light on the true nature of this school and its implications as a social force. For this purpose one may leave out two of the six gosvamins,—Raghunatha Bhatta and Raghunathadasa, whose influence on the growth of Bengal Vaishnavism was less significant. Of the remaining four, Rupa and Sanatana were Karnataka Brahmans by birth. Their great-grandfather Padmanabha, who first settled in Naihati, is said to have been the dispossessed scion of a princely Brahmin family of Karnataka. Sri Jiva, who individually exerted the greatest influence on the growth of the movement, was the son of Anupama, the youngest brother of Rupa and Sanatana. Little is known about the life-history of Gopala Bhatta. But all the conflicting traditions which later arose about the history of this eminent gosvamin had one thing in common, viz., that he was a South Indian Brahmin. So of the six gosvamins, the four who exerted the greatest influence on the growth of Bengal Vaishnavism, traced their descent from non-Bengali ancestors. Definitely in the case of three of them and probably also in the case of the fourth, these ancestors belonged to the South, the traditional home of Hindu orthodoxy, particularly during the period of Muslim rule.

As to their education, Sanatana is known to have studied Sanskrit at the orthodox school of Vidyavachaspati of Navadvipa and his works bear eloquent testimony to his thorough
acquaintance with the traditional scriptures. Of Rupa’s early education, we know little beyond such evidence of a profound knowledge of the Sanskrit language and literature as his writings afford. Sri Jiva studied at Benares under Madhusudana Vachaspati, an accomplished grammarian, deeply versed in Smriti and Vedanta as well. That Gopala Bhatta also had a similarly thorough grounding in the traditional scriptures, the Smriti works in particular, is amply proved by the copious references to them in his Haribhaktivilasa.

As to the social and religious outlook of these gosvamins, the few available facts are sufficiently illuminating. The Bhaktiratnakara tells us that Rupa and Sanatana invited a number of Karnataka Brahmans to settle near Ramakeli. This fact apparently shows that they kept up their inherited social and religious practices. They were also “in touch with the Navadvipa Vaishnavas and had from the beginning an obviously Vaishnava disposition”. Further, they considered themselves impure for their contact with the ‘Mlechchhas’ (the impure followers of alien creeds) and abstained from visiting the temple of Jagannatha from such considerations. The social and religious outlook of Sri Jiva, whose training in orthodoxy was even more thorough than that of his uncles, was very probably similar. The views of Gopala Bhatta seems to have been slightly more liberal than those of the three others. For he permitted the worship of ‘salagrama’ by non-Brahmins and women. Beyond this there was little to distinguish between him and his fellow gosvamins. He paid lip-service to ‘raganuga bhakti’, but the entire system of a Vaishnava’s life as conceived in the Haribhaktivilasa is regulated at every step by scriptural injunctions.

Lastly, in studying the life and outlook of the gosvamins, as an important factor in moulding the shape and character of the movement, one must not fail to take note of the circumstances of their later life and the environment in which their works were produced. Ever since they retired to Vrindavana to devote themselves to the service of the cause, their lives were those of scholarly recluses. Now their only interests consisted in devotional acts and the work they were immediately engaged in. Their only contact with the outer world was through discussions of a religious character with their disciples and
perhaps with the people of rival sects. 'Vairagya' or indifference to things of the world, was their common attitude to life. The exclusively personal, individualistic and asocial attitude which such a mode of living is likely to foster, was further intensified by the example and inspiration of Chaitanya. The entire latter half of the Master's life was a long chain of religious ecstasies with which the world or society at large had little chance of interference. The resultant outlook of the gosvamins, strongly individualistic in character, was however modified to some extent by the desire to establish their school of Vaishnavism in conflict with the other rival schools. This necessity no doubt had a considerable influence on the shape of the movement itself. For the atmosphere at Vrindavana, which had become a resort of pilgrims from all over India, was predominantly Upper Indian, and in trying to formulate a system that would win the support of the majority, the gosvamins, deliberately or otherwise, bowed before the deep-rooted traditions of their human environment.

The men who popularised the system propounded by the gosvamins naturally resembled their teachers in their attitude to society and religion. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, an erudite Bengali scholar of the Vaidya caste, was a disciple of Rupa and Sanatana and spent his later life in Vrindavana. A devout Vaishnava of the Chaitanya school, he exemplified to the highest extent the Vaishnava ideal of humility, but was surprisingly devoid of any correspondingly liberal tendency. His outlook was marked by a complete lack of the spirit of criticism and an unqualified faith in authority. His views on society were indifferent and traditional. His attitude to all but the professed followers of his sect was one of undisguised hostility. His acceptance of the system propounded by the six gosvamins was blind and unquestioning.

The lives and thoughts of Narottama and Srinivasa,—and to a lesser extent, also of Syamananda,—were in fact moulded after the same pattern, in so far as their education and environment were concerned. The first two were erudite scholars and they all took their lessons in Bhakti-rasasastra from Sri Jiva at Vrindavana. All these varied aspects of the lives of the pioneers,—their orthodox education, their traditional outlook, their training under the gosvamins,—could not but
deeply influence the shape and course of neo-Vaishnavism in Bengal.

III. The system propounded by the gosvamins: an analysis

The system which was moulded at Vrindavana was surprisingly traditional in character. All its texts were written in Sanskrit, the traditional language of Indian scriptures. In formulating their systems of theology, philosophy, Rasasastra and Smriti, the gosvamins accepted testimony as the highest source of knowledge. The method followed was consequently deductive. Dogmatic statements supported by appropriate and convenient quotations from old texts, specially those of the Vaishnavas, constituted their main stock-in-trade.

The works of the gosvamins conformed to the old Indian tradition, not merely in form, but also in content. The new reform movement under their guidance, unlike many older ones, did not take shape as a revolt against the Vedas and Vedic regulations. The Srutis and Smritis, on the contrary, were respectfully treated. The Puranas, however, were more copiously drawn upon as they were considered to be more suitable for the men of the Kali age. This conformity to Indian tradition profoundly affected the ideas and ideals which had first emanated from Bengal in a shape very different from that which later emerged. The dogma that Chaitanya was an incarnation of Krishna was still explicitly declared. But in contrast with the Navadvipa school, the new system looked on Krishna himself as the highest object of devotion. ‘Gauraparamyavada’ was thus discarded and ‘Gauranagarabha’ condemned in strong language. The object, conscious or otherwise, was perhaps to cater to the taste of the people of India at large, who had already accepted Krishna as the supreme deity in large numbers. Hence it would be easier to popularise the worship of Krishna who was born as Chaitanya than that of Chaitanya who was same as Krishna. To this fact perhaps was due the Vrindavana gosvamins’ immense literary output on the life-story of Krishna and virtual indifference to the life-story of Chaitanya. Hence perhaps in the Haribhaktivilasa the worship of Vishnu,—venerated even by the most orthodox,—was exalted over that of Krishna, so dear to the
heart of the Bengali Vaishnava.

The daily rules of life to be followed by the Vaishnava householder, as laid down by the gosvamins, were very similar to those sanctioned by orthodoxy. The practices prescribed in Gopala Bhatta’s Haribhaktivilasa and the later work Satkriyasaradipika ascribed to the same author, are much more in conformity with the traditional features of the movement than with its distinctive ideas of ‘raganuga bhakti’. Devotion to Hari (Hari-bhakti), no doubt, was accepted as the highest ideal; but ‘bhakti’ here implied devotion in accordance with scriptural injunctions. ‘Vaidhi bhakti’, in fact, was the key-note of the entire system expounded by Gopala Bhatta, each statement in his work being supported by copious quotations from the Puranas, Samhitas, Tantras and other scriptures and sectarian religious treatises. Dealing largely with topics proper to Smriti works, it evolved a Smriti of its own based on sectarian scriptures. The Satkriyasaradipika dealt with domestic rites and ceremonies, the ‘grihya’ ritual, on the avowed basis of the Smritis.

The Tantras, against which the Neo-Vaishnava movement was in many ways a conscious revolt, also exercised a deep influence on their practices and rituals. This was particularly true of the rites connected with initiation. The ‘guru’ was to be a person deeply versed in Tantric lore. The ‘mantras’ to be used were to be in part ‘vija-mantras’, apparently unmeaning sounds symbolising hidden truths. The form of initiation was avowedly Tantric, even a ‘yonikunda’* being dug for the purpose. The general anathema against all acts concerning other deities significantly excluded the observance of Siva-ratri. And the few instances here noted surely do not exhaust the list of Sakta-Tantric practices adopted or condoned by the Vrindavana gosvamins.

But still the fact of a conscious revolt against the excesses of Tantricism was there. And with the proverbial zeal of pioneers, the gosvamins carried this reformist tendency often to an extreme. Some widespread Tantric practices were definitely forbidden. But the motive here might have been as much sectarian as reformist. Avoidance of unclean food like fish

* Yonikunda—Sacrificial pit shaped after the Yoni, an important item in Tantric worship.
and flesh and of such Tantric occult practises as ‘uchchatana’, ‘vasikarana’ etc. was enjoined. The Vaishnava was asked not to use ‘Padmaka’, ‘Raktachandana’ and ‘Usira’ varieties of sandal, associated with Sakta worship, and also to abstain from the use of all animal products except musk in morning worship. These obviously were attempts to underline the distinctive features of the new system as contrasted with the widely prevalent Tantric practices, the influence of which could not be entirely shaken off. That many of the ritualistic prohibitions were also due to mere taboos and fetishes is proved by the long list of forbidden food, apparently harmless to all uninitiated souls.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the new system was its basic mystic ideals. However orthodox in their daily observances and general outlook, the gosvamins refused to compromise with traditionalism in this particular sphere. Devotion following the path of emotion and, unbounded by scriptural laws, became the avowed object of ultimate attainment. The asocial and amoral mystic love-longing of the milkmaids for Krishna, their selfless participation in his eternal dalliance with Radha, became the ideal pattern of devotion which the Vaishnava sought to emulate. Devotion alone counted and, in the last analysis, everything else became superfluous. The trackless path of ‘raganuga bhakti’ was open unto all and so might Divine Grace (prasada), descend on any one irrespective of caste and creed. Such beliefs, extremely emotional in character and not unattended by the dangers of anti-mundane reaction and moral perversion, drew their inspiration from older Bhakti cults centering round the Radha-Krishna legend and the Bhagavata Purana as also from the example of Chaitanya’s religious experience. These, to some extent, helped the liberating forces first unleashed by the Master.

The cult was thus based on a number of different foundations. Pre-Chaitanya Vaishnavism, as expressed particularly in the Bhagavata, seems to have been the chief source of inspiration. According to Dr. De, the movement was also much indebted to the Ramanuja sect of the Vaishnavas. In the works of the gosvamins the life and teachings of Chaitanya remained mostly in the background. But the higher esoteric ideal of
'Raganuga' was no doubt deeply influenced by the ecstatic religious experiences and frantic love-longing for the deity which marked the Master's life. A third basis of the movement was the traditional faith and religious life of the majority of the Indian people as it was then expressed in the Smritis and the Puranas. A source of no lesser importance were the Tantras which had become a terrific force in society and religion through centuries of growth. The Bengal Vaishnava movement, even leaving aside the deviations from the main current, was thus no simple homogeneous faith founded by a Master and preached by his disciples. It was a complex conglomeration of many currents and cross-currents of India's social and religious life as it was in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is necessary to discuss in this context the popular notion regarding the relations of Chaitanyaism with the mediaeval religious movements which owed their origin to the interaction of Hindu and Islamic influences. These religious movements which found such powerful exponents as Namadeva, Kabir, Nanak and Dadu, had certain features in common. Faith in the unity of the Deity, tolerance and respect for Islam and an open challenge to the caste system were the most important of such features. These, however, were in no way the strong points of Chaitanyaism, which is often supposed to be a cult closely allied to the above-mentioned ones. Unity of the godhead, — in the sense in which either the Upanishads or the Quran preached it, — was no part of Bengal Vaishnavism. The Chaitanyaites, on the contrary, were eager to prove the superiority of Krishna to other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. As regards their attitude to Islam, it was one of contempt, if not of positive hostility. Their attitude to caste, though much more liberal than that of the orthodox both in theory and practice, never constituted a direct challenge to the age-old social organisation of Hindu India.

Chaitanyaism, however, did have much in common with certain mediaeval Indian religious movements. Ever since the days of Ramanuja (12th century) the Bhakti movement, centering particularly round the cults of Rama and Krishna, had been gaining in strength in various parts of India. The Vaishnava movement, with its emphasis on personal devotion to the deity of a highly emotional character, also had a long
tradition in Bengal from Jayadeva to Chandidas. Chaitanyaism had obvious affinities with these two trends though the fact of their direct influence on the growth of post-Chaitanya Bengal Vaishnavism is difficult to prove. Mystic religious aspirations were the common urge behind them all. They, again, were all marked by a comparative indifference to social problems and inequities which were among the chief concerns of the movements originating from the composite influences of Hinduism and Islam.

IV. The social origins of Neo-Vaishnavism: a hypothesis.

For a proper understanding of the character of Chaitanyaism even in its later phases, it is necessary to take note of the social factors which were probably responsible for its origin. Though the Vaishnava literature of the mediaeval Bengal throws occasional light on the question, in the present state of our knowledge any conclusion is bound to be speculative in character.

The various facets of Bengali life in the sixteenth century were dominated by a number of distinct forces. Politically, the region was subject to the followers of an alien creed who, despite their virtual adoption of Bengal as their motherland, indulged in occasional orgies of fanaticism at the cost of the Hindus. Then, as now, the Sakta-Tantric creed dominated the religious life of the Bengali Hindus. Only it was a much more living and powerful force in the 16th century. In the realm of intellect, Navyanyaya with its extreme tendency towards scholastic subtleties was the rage of the day. Neo-Vaishnavism appears to have rebelled with varying degrees of emphasis against these three forces dominating contemporary life.

Faith, not logic, was declared emphatically to be the way to communion with the Deity. The logician was described as an 'evil-minded one' (Kuvuddhi) and a noisy jackal, while dry logic was compared to the tasteless oil-cake. Liberation of the misguided logicians was mentioned among the objects of the Chaitanya incarnation. The Chaitanya Bhagavata refers to the state of sad decline in which the cult of Bhakti had fallen at a time when even the expounders of Gita and Bhagavata were indifferent to the need for devotion. The Bengal Vaishnavas accepted without question the dogma that Advaita, through the
magnetism of his devotion, brought Krishna down on earth in order to restore the decadent cult of Bhakti. Chaitanyaism was thus a conscious reaction against the path of knowledge and the heartless scholasticism of the neo-logicians.

That it was an equally conscious reaction against the dominant cult of Sakta-Tantricism, particularly its perversions and excesses, is proved by various uncharitable references and the contemptuous mention of the sexual practices and drinking habits of the Saktas in the well-known Vaishnava works. Punishment of the 'pashandis', an uncomplimentary epithet applied to non-Vaishnavas, particularly the Saktas, was also held to be one of the objects of the Chaitanya incarnation.

That there was an element of opposition to Muslim influence in Chaitanyaism seems almost certain. The Premavilasa referred to Muslim rule as the root of all evils. In the Advaita-prakasa, the spread of Muslim ways of life was deplored. Jayananda mentioned the adoption of Muslim habits by Brahmins as one of the aspects of the manifold degradation characteristic of the Kali age. Chaitanyaism has been mentioned in a recent work as an important element in the attempts made by mediaeval Bengali Hinduism to save itself from the rising tide of Islam. This is a point which cannot be definitely established and to trace the origin of the Chaitanya movement only to this factor is undoubtedly a mistake. Still the fact remains that in west Bengal the very classes whose counterparts in the east were converted to Islam in large numbers, remained within the Hindu fold due, no doubt, to a great extent to Vaishnava influence.

Chaitanyaism, thus viewed in its proper perspective, appears as a revolt of emotionalism and simple piety against a regime of barren intellectualism and the unsatisfying path of knowledge, as a revival of Vaishnavism long cornered in Bengal by the rival Sakta-Tantric creed, as a reformist movement protesting against the excesses of Tantricism and finally, as one of the many defences set up by Hindu society against the onrush of Islam. When in our period Chaitanyaism acted as one of the chief forces moulding Bengali society, the significance of such elements in the movement became patent.

V. Nature of the Vaishnava Sahajiya cult: an analysis.

For a proper understanding of Chaitanyaism as a social
force, it is necessary to analyse the character of the Sahajiya cult which became virtually a part of the movement and, in one form or another, had a large body of followers. The Post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyas had, in course of time, much in common with the main current of the movement. The ideal of ‘raganuga bhakti’ going back to the days of pre-Chaitanya Vaishnavism permeated both. Approach to the Deity in the manner of a woman approaching her lover,—a characteristic of post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya in its earlier phases,—was another common feature, derived obviously from the same source. The later Sahajiyas were also devout worshippers of Chaitanya.

But the differences between the two were profound. While accepting the ‘raganuga’ ideal in common with the orthodox, the Sahajiyas completely discarded the practice of ‘vaidhi bhakti’ even for the meanest man. The only forms of ritualistic devotion countenanced by the movement was a sort of esoteric sexo-Yogic practice abhorred by the orthodox. In the second place, the practical culture of religion in the company of women was a feature derived from the pre-Chaitanya Sahajiya movement. Under the influence of Chaitanyaism, the true nature of the practice appears to have been toned down for a while. But in the next epoch this modification was discarded and practical culture in the company of women other than one’s wife was openly preached. Works of an even later date, like the Nayika-sadhana-paddhati, spoke in clear language of adulterous sexual union as the path which led to the Sahajiya’s supreme object of attainment. This apparently was the consummation towards which the movement had been leading. Thus the movement was but the continuation in a somewhat altered form of the older movement of which poets like Chandidasa were the exponents. The pre-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyas, unlike their earlier progenitors, the Buddhist Tantric Sahajiyas, at least glorified in theory the ideal of ‘nishkama parakiya’, i.e., ‘parakiya’ unpolluted by lust. But in the later phases there was an upsurge of the unwholesome traits of the movement until in the decadent days of the 18th century, there was little to distinguish between the secret religious practices of the Sahajiyas and those of the Tantric ‘kulacharis’. The Sahajiyas, however, never entirely discarded the ideal of sexless love which
now appeared under the name of 'marma-parakiya'. Further, it has to be noted that the bulk of the followers of this cult did not, in all probability, adopt the asocial practices recommended by their creed. In the case of the Sahajiyas, such practices appear to have been confined only to a comparatively limited number of mystics.

VI. Influence of Neo-Vaishnavism on Bengali society.

In evaluating the influence of the Chaitanya movement on Bengali society, one has to remember that Vaishnavism never became the creed of the majority of the people. Even now, the Sakta-Tantric creed is more popular among the Hindus of Bengal. If at any period of Bengal's history, the majority were converted to Vaishnavism, the present ascendancy of Sakta-Tantricism could be explained only with reference to some Sakta reaction at a later date. No such reaction is known to history. More positive evidence is supplied by the sections on 'digvandana' or invocation to the gods which appear in the Bengali 'panchalis' of the 16th and 17th centuries. The majority of the shrines mentioned in these lists, written in the heyday of Vaishnavism, are non-Vaishnava, being mostly dedicated to Tantric or local deities. Evidently the new movement, though it had made considerable headway, failed to dislodge the older cults from their position of primacy. If this was true even of West Bengal (where most of the shrines mentioned in the 'mangala-kavyas' were situated), it was more so of the east and the south-east. The men of the lower castes, who constitute the majority in Bengali Hindu society, accepted Vaishnavism in large numbers in West Bengal. But in the east, the majority of the lower as well as that of the higher caste Hindus stuck to the Sakta-Tantric creed. Thus Vaishnavism in Bengal never became anything more than the faith of a powerful minority.

In the life of this powerful minority, Vaishnavism introduced many far-reaching changes. The socio-religious atmosphere of Bengal in the 16th century, if we are to believe in the evidence of Vaishnava literature, stank with the bacchanalian orgies of Tantric ritual and the consequent spread of the drinking habit and also perhaps of sexual immorality. From such abuses of religion, the upper class converts to Vaishnavism were definitely freed. The drinking habit declined. Non-vegetarian food was
largely discarded. A change in life-habits was supplemented by a corresponding change in the ideals of character. The often-ridiculed humility of the Vaishnavas no doubt offered a pleasing contrast to the vanity of the logicians.

The purifying influence of Vaishnavism on the morals and ideals of the converts was, however, considerably modified by the growth of the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya cult. For sexual morality was never the strong point of the Sahajiya cult which now perhaps counts the majority of lower class Vaishnavas among its followers. Still, it is fairly certain, that Vaishnavism rescued from the squalor in which they were wallowing such sects as the ‘Neda-Nedis’. If their morals could not be perceptibly improved, their ideals surely were. The emotionalism of the Radha-Krishna cult and the esoteric ideal of ‘marma-parakiya’ had no doubt a mellowing effect on people who, prior to their conversions, were perhaps the adherents of sexo-Yogic practices of a perverted type. The anti-caste tendencies inherent in the Chaitanya movement, but circumscribed in many ways, also seems to have borne fruit among these humbler neophytes. The society of the Vairagis or Jat Bostoms is a casteless one to-day and one may presume that this particular feature is fairly old in view of its established character. Caste prejudice is so very strong even in the lowest strata of Indian society that three centuries seem hardly too long a period for the complete acceptance of such a revolutionary change. So this levelling process might have started in our period, even if it did not reach its climax then. The looseness of the nuptial tie gives a particularly emancipated appearance to the society of the Vairagis. This surely was no effect of Vaishnavism, but probably a continuation of the older customs of the low-born neophytes. The ‘parakiya’ ideal of the Sahajiya movement with its increasingly Tantric traits might have had something to do with it. On the whole, the conversion surely had beneficent effects on these people. Today, despite the looseness of the nuptial bond and the tendency on part of bad characters to flock within the Sahajiya folds, the Vairagi represents a finer spiritual and social outlook than the average member of the lower orders. The majority of them abstain from unclean food. Devotional songs and ‘nama-samkirtana’ (chanting the name of the Deity) give a religious emotional
touch to their daily life. Though a section of them has taken to Vaishnavism as a profession, many earn their living as honest householders and both the classes enjoy a certain status and prestige in many parts of Bengal. These purifying effects must have been first felt towards the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century when the zeal of the great pioneers from Vrindavana was extending the hold of Vaishnavism in Bengal and bringing in new converts from all classes of society.

It has been often supposed that Vaishnavism introduced a revolutionary change in the ideas and practices of caste in Bengal. So far as the majority of the Bengalis,—who were non-Vaishnavas,—are concerned, this theory may of course be summarily dismissed. Even among the Vaishnavas, the modification of caste-ideas and practices was much less revolutionary than is popularly supposed. The *Haribhakti-vilasa* throughout reveals a deep reverence for the system of caste. In the system expounded by Gopala Bhatta, the Brahmin continued to hold his place of honour. He alone could act as preceptor to all castes, 'gurus' belonging to the other castes being allowed only to initiate men of their own or lower castes. Initiation of men belonging to a higher caste by a preceptor who was on a lower rung of the caste-ladder (*pratiloma-diksha*) was strictly forbidden. Women and noble-minded Sudras were given only limited rights of initiation into Tantric 'mantras'. Such limited rights were no special feature of Vaishnavism, but granted by the Saktas as well, who even allowed women to act as preceptors within certain limits. Inter-caste marriage was not introduced. Even inter-dining, except on the occasions of the great festivals, did not come into vogue. On such occasions too the low-born converts apparently kept themselves aloof. For Krishnadasa Kaviraja mentioned with approval Haridas's abstention from the communal feast.

But granting these limitations, it is impossible to gainsay the fact that within the Vaishnava society the rigours of the caste system were considerably relaxed. The fact that the Brahmin's monopoly of the right of preceptorship was encroached upon and even a Sudra could be a 'guru' does in itself signify an almost revolutionary change. What is more, the prohibition of 'pratiloma-diksha' was flouted in practice when low-born Syamananda and Kayastha Narottama assumed the leadership
of the movement in the 17th century and counted among their disciples many belonging to higher castes. That even the ideas of untouchability were modified is proved by the story of Kalidasa, uncle of Raghunathadasa, who partook of the remnants of food eaten by a Sudra Vaishnava. And though the modification of caste-practices was less striking, the change in the realm of ideas, was truly revolutionary.

But some of the unwholesome features of the caste-ridden society gradually became prominent within the body of the movement. Jayananda’s Chaitanyakamangala first noticed the growth of a class of people who were turning their Vaishnavism into a profession. Brahmananda Giri, the famous Tantric ascetic, referred with contempt to Vaishnavas who lived by begging. The express provisions for the payment of ‘daksina’ (gifts) to the ‘guru’ mentioned in Haribhaktivilasa indicate the growth of a class of professional ‘gurus’ among the Vaishnavas. The reform movement was thus swamped by the old parasitical class, whose numbers were now definitely increased by the addition of non-Brahmins to their ranks.

The absence of any wider social outlook alone circumscribed the progressive character of the movement. As Dr. De points out, the intensely personal nature of the higher ideals of the movement, which consisted only in an emotional religious ecstasy of the mystic-erotic type and an exaltation of the sex impulse, denuded it of all intellectual virility. The emotional strain involved in the effort to participate imaginatively in the love-play of Radha and Krishna might easily have an enervating effect. That the social effects of such a devotional ideal were in fact enervating, does not necessarily follow. But still the fact remains that the ideal of virile manhood and any portrayal of the sterner virtues are conspicuous by their absence from the literature of the Vaishnavas. The traditional belief of the people that the Vaishnava does not represent the type of a very masculine male is also not entirely without significance. If one is allowed to speak in such vaguely general terms for a while, one may say that the Vaishnava movement, with its emphasis on devotion and softer sentiments, accentuated the emotional temper of the Bengali character. Tender emotionalism is at least the dominant note of the entire volume of Vaishnava literature.
The Chaitanya movement was not without its influence on the non-Vaishnava society of contemporary Bengal. The ideal of Bhakti assailed the thought and practice of Sakta-Tantrics as well and the awe and reverence which characterised the attitude of the Sakta devotee to his object of worship, gave place to love and devotion. A tender emotionalism permeates the ‘mangala-kavyas’ of the post-Chaitanya era, and Chandi, the fierce female deity, appears as a loving mother goddess in the masterpiece of Mukundarama. More direct evidence of Vaishnava influence is afforded by the same work, written in honour of a semi-popular semi-Sakta deity. For it openly preaches the ideal of Chaitanya worship and refers to chanting of Krishna’s name as a meritorious act. In non-Vaishnava works, the veneration of Chaitanya was soon supplemented by a veneration of Vaishnavas themselves in a language which vied with that of Krishnadasa or Vrindavanadasa.

A legacy of Chaitanyaism, which may to-day be looked upon as the common heritage of all Bengalis, is the vast literature it produced. Even leaving aside the immense volume of ‘padas’ inspired by the movement,—and these include some of the best lyrics in the Bengali language,—there were the numerous ‘nibandhas’ or religious tracts, the works on Rasasastra, a practically new branch of mystic rhetoric, and what was more, the biographical works, a completely new literary experiment so far as Bengal was concerned. For the first time in the literary history of Bengal, here was an attempt to glorify man instead of gods, to deal with facts in place of fancy. But an unwhole-some communalism and an infantile credulity marred this noble effort.

In fine, Vaishnavism in Bengal was much less a revolutionary force than is generally supposed. It failed to convert the majority of the people. Even on those whom it did convert, it failed to work a revolutionary change. Starting out from Bengal as an emotional upsurge, it returned in a subdued form,—Indianised, codified and cast in conformity with orthodox traditions. Its slightly liberalising and purifying effects and its immense literary products definitely cannot be ignored. But its direct effects on the upper classes were subject to numerous limitations. Its indirect effects were wider, but less
significant. Of the lower orders, those who were converted were largely reformed and liberalised. But considerable sections went back to older Yogic-Tantric practices through the back-door of the Sahajiya cult. The revolutionary potentialities of the Chaitanya movement thus floundered on the bed-rock of traditionalism and older Yogic-Tantric practices.

APPENDIX B

Rasakadamba—a Sahajaya text?

Rasakadamba is considered by some to be the first Sahajiya work of the post-Chaitanya period, while others have contradicted this view. True, ‘prakritibhajana’ (worship wherein the devotee assumes the psychological attitude of a woman and as such enjoys in contemplation the love-dalliance of Krishna directly or vicariously) which is the central theme of the work, was no idea peculiar to the Sahajiyas only. It was repeatedly mentioned in the Vaishnava works of our period and the highest form of mystic culture as described in the Premavilasa is practically identical with ‘prakritibhajana’. Still, many of the characteristic features of the later Vaishnava Sahajiya are unmistakably traceable in Rasakadamba. The conception of ‘sahaja’ or natural love which is the basis of the Sahajiya system is mentioned twice in the work with reference to Krishna’s relation with the milkmaids. Nityavrindavana, the eternal land where Krishna dallies with Radha,—a predominantly Sahajiya conception,—is described in detail. Yogic physiology, another characteristic feature, is discussed at nearly as great a length. Purely Sakta-tantric ideas which loomed large in later Sahajiya doctrine, such as the identification of Siva and Sakti with the primordial male (purusha) and female (prakriti) principles respectively, are also mentioned. An extreme form of adoration for the preceptor, who for all practical purposes was put on a pedestal even higher than that of the great Master, is another link which connects Rasakadamba with later Sahajiya thought and practice. A specific account of five types of relations with women in which abstinence is compared to the ways of the much-maligned followers of the path of knowledge, a contemptuous reference to the vulgar rabble who ridiculed the ideas of ‘prakriti-bhajana’ and love-culture and to the secrecy which
usually enshrouded the latter are further evidence of the Sahajiya character of Rasakadamba. Also in a typically Sahajiya fashion, the author bowed respectfully to the Vaishnava saints and sought to trace back his ideas to that lofy origin. Such evidence surely indicates that Rasakadamba was at least strongly influenced by the Vaishnava Sahajiya cult, even if it was not a product of that system.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Many of the conclusions stated and ideas discussed in this chapter have been treated in greater detail in chapter IV (the sections dealing with Vaishnava and Sahajiya thought). For detailed references, the notes on that chapter should be consulted.

I. For an analysis of ‘Gauraparamyavada’, see Chaitanya chariter upadana, 100-101. For ‘Gauranagarabhava’, see Srikhandara prachin Vaishnava, 34 and chapter IV of the present work. For the followers of Advaita, see Kennedy, 62-3. For the followers of Gadadhara, see Chaitanya chariter upadana, 187-88. For the people hostile to Nityananda, see Chaitanya Bhagavata, 57, 198, 201, 202 etc. For exposition of Yogic mysticism by Chaitanya, see Jayananda, 74. For an account of secret worship of Chaitanya by Navadvipa women, ibid., 84-5. For Prabodhananda’s lament regarding the degeneration among Chaitanyaites, see Srichaitanyachandramrita, sloka 38 (quoted in Chaitanya chariter upadana, 171).

For detailed account of the works written by the Vrindavana gosvamins, see De. For the traditional account regarding the manner in which these works were brought to Bengal, see Premavilasa, chapters XVI and XVII.

For the dates of the early Sahajiya works, see Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult, 202. For a discussion of the ideas expounded in these works, see Chapter IV of the present work. For conversion of the ‘Neda-Nedis’, Kennedy, 70-71.

II. For the life-stories of the Vrindavana gosvamins, see De, 93-6, 109-12. For Sanatana’s description of himself as a fallen creature, see Chaitanyacharitamrita, 349. For an account of Gopala Bhatta’s social and religious outlook, see De, 340-41, 355. For the illiberal and uncritical attitude revealed in Chaitanyacharitamrita, see discussions in chapter IV. The life-stories of the Vaishnava pioneers are told in Premavilasa, Karna-nanda of Yadunandana Dasa and Bhaktiratnakara, an 18th century work; also see the Vaishnava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal.

III. For the didactic and dogmatic method followed in the works of the gosvamins, see De, 171-172, 341; for their attitude to ‘Gauraparamyavada’ and ‘Gauranagarabhava’, see Chaitanya chariter upadana, 42-3, 104 etc. For exaltation of Vishnu, see Haribhaktivilasa, I, 21-6; Dr. De traces this tendency to S. Indian influence (343). For an account of Satkriyasaradipika, see De, 341, 403. For Tantric elements in Vaishnava rituals and practices
see Haribhaktivilasa, I, 34; VII, 42; II, 19-28; XIV, 63-86; III, 145; V, 48-54, 75-89, 147-151 etc. For the prohibition of certain Tantric practices and tabooed foods, ibid., II, 113; VI, 135-36; VIII, 5-6; XV, 61-63 etc. For the ideal of ‘raganuga bhakti’, see De, 171-76, 412-22. For Vaishnava attitude to Islam, see Chapter IV of this work. For relation between Chaitanyaism and earlier Vaishnava movements, see K. M. Sen, Vanglar sadhana, 54-57.

IV. For Vaishnava attitude to logicians, followers of the path of knowledge and Saktas and their belief regarding the object of Chaitanya incarnation, see Chaitanyakaritamrita, Adilila, chapters III, XVII; also 72, 257, 273; Chaitanya Bhagavata, Adi Khanda, chapter II, Madhya Khanda, chapter XIX; also 119. For attitude to Muslims, see Premavilasa, I; Jayananda, 139; Purva Pakistane Islam, chapter V, also 102 (extract from Advaita Prakasa).

V. The analysis of the principles and outlook of the Sahajiya cult is based on the fuller discussion of Sahajiya thought and practice in chapter IV. For the sexual element in Sahajiya practice, see Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult, 67-72, 73-80 (‘marma parakiya’).

VI. An analysis of the ‘digvandana’ sections in some of the more important Bengali poetical works of the 16th and 17th centuries discloses the following facts: of the 28 shrines mentioned in the Chandimangala, 2 are definitely Vaishnava, 22 Saka-Tantric, 4 of local godlings; Manasamangala of Kshemananda mentions 5 Saka-Tantric shrines, 4 dedicated to local deities and 3 sacred to Muslim pirs, but no Vaishnava shrines; Ruparama’s Dharmamangala mentions 9 Vaishnava shrines, 26 Saka-Tantric shrines, 25 dedicated to local deities and 5 to Muslim pirs. For Vaishnava caste practices see Haribhaktivilasa, I, 36-38, 91; Chaitanyakaritamrita, 257, 560-61. For permission granted by Saktas to women to act as preceptors, see Saktanandaatarangini, 36-40. For reference to professional Vaishnavas, ibid., 286. For payment of ‘dakshina’ to ‘gurus’, see Haribhaktivilasa, II, 74. For the effects of Vaishnava mystic ideals, see De, 412-23. For Vaishnava influence on the attitude of non-Vaishnavas see Chandimangala, 5, 132; Mansamangala, 7; Dharmamangala, I, 13; Madhyayuge Vangla O Vangali, 38.

Appendix. For the view that Rasakadamba is a Sahajiya work, see Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult, 203-06; for the opposite view, see Rasakadamba, introduction, 37. For ideal of ‘prakritibhajana’, see chapter IV. See Rasakadamba, 30, 45 (sahaja) X (Nityavrindavana), 32, 33 (Yogic mysticism), 27 (identification of Siva with ‘Purusha’ and of Sakti with ‘Prakriti’), 47, 61 (‘guru’ worship), 54, 65, (love-culture), 3, 82-83 (reference to Vaishnava saints) for the different aspects of the work and its connections with the Sahajiya cult.
PART II

THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE
CHAPTER IV
TRENDS IN RELIGION AND CULTURE

I. Inter-relation of religion and culture in mediaeval Bengal.

Throughout the mediaeval period, culture in Bengal was closely interlinked with the religious life of the people. In fact these were so inextricably dovetailed with each other that one must view the two as integral parts of one organic whole. This is particularly true of the period under review.

That religion was the chief source of inspiration of mediaeval Bengali culture is most clearly indicated by the literature of the period. Nearly the whole of it is devotional in character. In the Mughal period, as much as in the days of the Sultans, the poets and litterateurs expressed themselves either in ecstatic lyrics of a mystic-symbolic type or sought to immortalise the popular legends associated with the worship of particular deities, Aryan or local, or sang of the miraculous powers and activities of saints like Gorakshanatha or Gopichand. A large number of works sought to explain the philosophy and rituals of particular cults. And even when Bengali poets, under Muslim or Hindu patronage, undertook translations of the epics, their works were permeated with deep religious feeling. When, again, the influence of the Chaitanya movement opened new fields for literary activity, the immense output in Bengali and Sanskrit,—often experimenting with such entirely new themes as biography,—proved to be not merely religious, but positively sectarian in outlook.

What was true of literature was nearly as true of other forms of cultural activity. Of the architecture of the period, the only notable survivals are mosques and temples. Forts and other secular buildings that have survived the ravages of time are not merely much fewer in number, but perhaps also architecturally less significant. Of the paintings, only a few can definitely be
ascribed to the centuries preceding the eighteenth. Of these few, the themes are almost exclusively religious.

If religion was the dominant note of mediaeval Bengali culture, it was particularly so during the period under review. The first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal saw the high tide of the Bhakti movement which had received its most powerful impetus from the life and work of Sri Chaitanya. The deep impression of Vaishnava faith and dogmas on the thought-habits of the people was perhaps the most significant feature of the culture of this epoch. Even if we leave aside the overt acceptance of Vaishnava ideas in non-Vaishnava works, we seem to detect a more elusive element in the culture-pattern of the period, almost certainly related to the new doctrine of faith and cult of emotional love for the Supreme Being. We seem to catch glimpses of the cult of the child Krishna in the tender delineation of childhood in non-Vaishnava works. Legends which in a previous epoch sang of man’s revolt rather than his surrender to the will of the gods (e.g. the legends of Chand Sadagar and Maynamati), now emphasized above all, as told by the new poets, the element of divine grace. Powerful tales of defiance, when told by the poets of this period, betray obvious evidence of weak handling. They excelled more easily in the portrayal of all that is soft and mellow,—the tender ‘rasas’ triumphed over their more virile counterparts. True, no definite theory can be built up on the basis of such elusive data. Still, the significant hints strewn through the literature of the period are too numerous to be ignored.

But all that was produced during the period was not predo-
minantly religious in character. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Bengal attained a position of pre-eminence in India’s cultural life chiefly due to her achievements in the field of Navyanyaya. Religion had no direct bearing on the development of this highly abstract subject. Metaphysical discussions on the nature or existence of God might come within the purview of Navyanyaya, but method rather than matter was the chief preoccupation of the neo-logicians and their extreme emphasis on ‘pramana’ or ‘inference’ naturally excluded all tendency towards emotional religiosity. In Vaishnava circles, in particular, they seem to have become objects of pointed attack and the
epithet ‘Kutarkika’ or ‘evil dialecticians’ frequently occurring in Vaishnava literature, almost surely referred to the Naiyayikas and their godless spirit of criticism.

God or His men had also less obvious connections with another branch of culture, viz., the secular romantic literature which began to develop in this period under the patronage of the courtiers of Arakan. But even in these primarily secular works, the deeply religious temper of the age is often clearly reflected.

II. Religious life in Mughal Bengal: constituent elements.

The religious life of Bengal in this period was a complex conglomeration of several distinct elements. The lines of demarcation which marked out these several elements one from the other had, however, been blurred to a great extent and it was difficult to distinguish clearly the various constituents.

Hinduism and Islam were obviously the two most clearly distinguishable elements in the religious life of the people. But even there, if one takes full cognisance of the beliefs of the masses, one hesitates to emphasize the points of distinction. Within Hinduism, the most active and vital force perhaps was the Neo-Vaishnava movement which was now functioning as a militant proselytising creed. Within it, the Vaishnava Sahajiya movement with its strong Yogic-Tantric bias was being reborn in a fresh and somewhat unsavoury form. The Sakta-Tantric cult also was anything but moribund. Then, as now, it surely claimed the bulk of Bengal’s population among its followers. It was also producing men of some eminence as well as religious compendiums which still enjoy great prestige in Bengal. And lastly, there was the religion of the masses who, in their deep devotion, bowed to all and sundry. In their eclectic and extremely heterogeneous pantheon, deities of orthodox Hinduism stood side by side with the saints and the local godlings whose aspects were often altered in order to be invested with a certain amount of respectability. Even evil spirits were mentioned with reverence in the list of the objects of worship.

III. The Neo-Vaishnava thought system.

Of these numerous forces in the religious life of the epoch, Neo-Vaishnavism alone had genuinely creative potentialities,
though in a somewhat limited sense. The basic idea on which the entire structure of its thought system was built consisted in an inexorable faith in the superiority of devotion (bhakti) to knowledge (jnana) as the summum bonum of the life religious. In fact, the devout Vaishnava went even further and believed that 'bhakti' was the only acceptable creed. The author of Chaitanya-charitamrita described the founder of the faith as rejecting even devotion tempered with knowledge (jnana-misra bhakti) as an admissible ideal; devotion unmixed with knowledge (jnana-sunya bhakti) had his partial approbation; but the only ideal dear to the Master's heart was that of devotion to the Deity as a friend (sakhya-prema), as parents (vatsalya-prema), and as a lover (kanta-prema). The follower of the path of knowledge was compared to a crow sucking the bitter fruit of the nimba tree, while the adherent of the way of love was described as the cuckoo feasting on mango blossoms. Faith, not reason, was declared to be the way to salvation in emphatic language. "He who discards reasoning and listens with faith", said the author of Premavilasa, "receives the grace of Radha and Krishna at the end of his life". A lyrical passage in the Chaitanya-charitamrita beautifully illustrates the Vaishnava ideal of 'bhakti'. It tells the story of an illiterate Brahmin who daily recited the Gita with ecstatic tears. To him the flowing verses conveyed no sense. But the unmeaning words called up before his mind the dark beautiful image of Krishna, as he sat whip in hand on Arjuna's chariot. To this ignorant man, said Chaitanya, was the meaning of the Gita truly revealed.

The 'bhakti' which was the ideal of the Vaishnava was very specific in form. It was to be devotion to Krishna and Krishna alone. All actions, good and bad alike, which stood in the way of this devotion, were but the darkness enshrouding the souls of men. To Krishna's servant was opened an ocean of bliss; the knowledge of Brahman, attained a million times, was not comparable to a drop thereof.

The way to salvation was simple enough. It consisted merely in the recitation of Krishna's name (nama samkirtana). 'Samkirtana' was declared to be superior to all sacrifices; million horse-sacrifices were but equivalent to a single recitation of Krishna's name, which was likened to the wish-fulfilling tree. In Kali, the age of sin, such recitation was but the only
religion for man. The Vaishnava’s faith in the efficacy of this formula was carried to a ludicrous extreme. To him it appeared that the Muslim’s only hope of salvation lay in the fact that he frequently uttered the word ‘haram’ (unholy), which sounded like the faithful’s invocation of Rama’s name (ha Ram=Oh Rama!).

Faith in the divinity of Chaitanya and his chief followers was nearly as important an element of the Vaishnava credo as devotion to Krishna and his name. The devout Vaishnava accepted without question the theory that Krishna and all his associates of Vrindavana were born as the Lord of Navadvipta and his followers respectively. To know the taste of Radha’s love and preach the glory of Krishna’s name were the twin objects of the incarnation at Nadiya. The chief followers and preachers were each believed to be the incarnation of some particular deity or companion of Krishna. Thus Advaita was Mahavishnu himself, Nityananda was an incarnation of Balarama, Mukunda in his previous existence was Vrinda, while Srinivasa, Syamananda and others were in reality the milkmaids engaged in eternal dalliances with Krishna in the ageless land of Vrindavana.

The idea of Chaitanya’s Godhood was carried very far by certain sections of the Bengal Vaishnavas. The followers of ‘Gauraparamyavada’ looked on Chaitanya as the ultimate object of worship. The believers in ‘Nagarabhava’ portrayed him as a replica of the youthful lover of Vrindavana and preached the ideal of a devotion to the Master similar in spirit to the milkmaid’s love for Krishna. The latter had early received a powerful impetus from the leadership of Narahari Sarkar of Srikhanda, a direct disciple of Chaitanya. Narahari wrote only stray lyrics embodying the thoughts and feelings of ‘Nagarabhava’. Lochana, his disciple, composed a full biography based on this conception of Chaitanya in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. It is, however, a significant fact that passages clearly expressing the typical ideas of ‘Nagarabhava’ occur but infrequently in Lochana’s Chaitanyamangala, though the author composed many ‘padas’ similar in sentiment to those of Narahari. What is more, neither Lochana nor Narahari did ever picture their Master as indulging in youthful dalliances similar to those of Krishna.
They merely stated that his ‘lotus-eyes’ and ‘moon-like face’ roused a holy passion in the hearts of the men and women of Nadiya. Chaitanya, no doubt, was the eternal lover; but he was so only in a figurative sense. Unlike the later Sahajiys who attributed to Chaitanya a female companion for mystic culture, the followers of ‘Gauranagarabhava’ in portraying the life of Chaitanya, painted a clean and spotless picture which faithfully represented the Master’s personality.

The Vaishnava cult of absolute devotion and anti-rationalism necessitated a willing suspension of disbelief in all matters connected with the articles of faith. An unquestioning faith in miracles, often carried to a ludicrous extreme, was among the logical consequences of such an attitude. As Krishnadasa Kaviraja put it without mincing matters, “He who does not believe in the miracles of the Master, is doomed in this world as well as the next”. The earlier writings, like the work of Vrindavanadasa for example, are in no way deficient in miraculous anecdotes. But with the passage of time, the old habit seems to have died very hard indeed, so that authors like Krishnadasa Kaviraja pictured the life of the Master as one unending series of miraculous events. They began with accounts of the signs of divinity on the hands and feet of the infant Chaitanya, went on to describe the revelations of Godhood in his childish pranks, wrote enraptured passages on his acts as Nrisimha or Varaha incarnation and recorded with naive credulity the story of the wild animals singing the name of Krishna or the one about the leper being cured by the mere touch of Chaitanya’s hands. For the later authors, the scope of miracles was not even confined to the life of Chaitanya and one described without hesitation the appearance of the lord with his followers at the great festival at Kheturi, more than half a century after his death, through the power of Narottama’s devotion. The same Narottama, we are told, tore open his chest and showed the resplendent sacred thread within, in order to prove his Brahminhood. Strangely enough, Nityanandadasa, the narrator of such tales, was a contemporary of Narottama. His statements, we are told, were meant to be taken in a figurative sense. But in his work itself there is little to indicate such an attitude.

If unquestioning faith led the devout Vaishnava into the
blind alley of infantile credulity, it inculcated at the same
time an ennobling belief in the universal right to salvation. To secure salvation for the fallen and the lowly, was declared emphatically to be the prime object of the Chaitanya incarnation. The flood-gates of devotion, as Krishnadasa Kaviraja put it, were opened by Chaitanya and his associates; all men and women, both good and evil, were drowned in the waters of that flood. All created beings were to attain salvation without even tasting of the fruits of sin. Later preachers freely 'saved' Muslims and Chandalas and the later authors asserted openly that a devotee of Krishna automatically ceased to be a Sudra.

Modification of caste-ideas was a logical corollary of the doctrine of universal salvation. The grace of God, according to one of the fundamental beliefs of Chaitanya's followers, is not subject to Vedic institutions; nor does it respect the differences of caste and rank. This idea was carried to its logical limits by the later authors in particular. When Narottama was born, says the *Premavilasa*, caste was at an end and the Brahmin played freely with the Sudra through the intoxication of divine love. Elsewhere the same work, while extolling the spirit of 'aganuga', denounced the follower of caste and other scriptural injunctions as one whom the Lord would never accept as His own. The later Vaishnava preachers were repeatedly mentioned as being indifferent to caste and often even to barriers of religion. And through the example of the numerous saints from Haridasa to Syamananda, born outside the pale of the upper castes, the idea definitely gained ground that one could transcend the caste barriers through the purity of one's devotion.

But this ennobling view of devotion failed to act as a socially liberating ideal. For 'bhakti', as the followers of Chaitanya conceived and practised it, was no militant devotion like that which inspired the early Muslims, but an ecstatic religious emotionalism with a strong tendency towards effeminacy. In the post-Chaitanya Vaishnavism of Bengal, 'the dogma is implicitly accepted that Krishna is the only male in the universe, and the highest ideal of the devotee, like that of Radha, is the desire of a woman eternally seeking to satisfy her lover. The dogma is carried further when
the devout attitude becomes identical with that of Radha’s companions, the highest mystic experience being in this case the detailed imaginative participation, in a vicarious mood, in the erotic sports of the deity. The identification of Chaitanya’s devotional attitude with Radha’s ‘viraha’ (separation from the lover) in the thought and literature of the sect contributed much to this particular development. In later works like Premavilasa, the highest spiritual experience is described as an imaginative participation in Krishna’s love-sports at Vrindavana. The leaders and saints of the movement were venerated as incarnations of Radha’s female companions. No amount of gloss is sufficient to cover up the obvious tendency towards effeminate emotionalism inherent in such conceptions. The world of Neo-Vaishnavism, as revealed in its literature, appears to the uninitiated layman as a ‘dim vast vale of tears’. Tears flow in an unending stream on a wide variety of pretexts, both possible and impossible. Devotees clasp each other in tear-strained embraces nearly as often as they happen to meet. Fainting fits occur but all too frequently and ‘stambha’ ‘sveda’, ‘vepathu’,—fine nuances of physical emotion originating from religious ecstasy which can hardly be described in any foreign tongue,—loom large in that fantastic universe.

Apotheosis of tender virtues, however, brought in its train an ideal of character which was undoubtedly noble, though not particularly masculine. In the long lists of Vaishnava qualities occurring in the literature of the sect, quiet humility, purity, beneficence and exclusive devotion to Krishna featured most prominently. The Vaishnava was to suffer cruelty with the patience of a tree; like a tree, again, he was to give quietly unto others all that was his own. Goodness without vanity was one of his highest objects of attainment. The ideal of humility was stressed with particular emphasis. “Deep is his devotion to whom calumny be praise”,—sums up the Vaishnava ideal of life and conduct.

The militant sectarianism and bitter intolerance of the Vaishnavas offered a strange contrast to this ideal of humility and non-resistance. The Vaishnava authors pronounced a universal anathema against all who did not belong to their sect. ‘Pashandi’,—a term which literally means ‘evil ones’—
was the epithet applied to all such, including everyone who looked on Brahma, Siva and other deities as equals of Narayana or refused to honour Chaitanya. And, in the opinion of the devotees, such faithless ones,—little better than demons,—were sure to end in hell, even though they were punctilious in the observances of their own creed. Mercy, the much-vaunted ideal of Bengal Vaishnavas, was evidently not meant for those who persisted in their disbelief. Infliction of dire punishments such as leprosy on the bitterest opponents of Chaitanya and his followers is mentioned in Vaishnava literature, apparently as a warning to erring men. The Vaishnava sought to prove in detail the superiority of his creed. Pursuit of other creeds was like sucking at the milkless teat of a she-goat or, even worse, like the taking of poison. Those guilty of such folly were likened to dogs and swine. The ‘tarkikas’ or dialecticians and Samkarites (mayavadins) were the Vaishnava’s pet aversion. Even listening to an illusionist discourse was taboo to the devout, for they believed that the felicity of uttering Krishna’s name was for ever denied to those who indulged in such illusionist jargon as ‘brahman’, ‘atma’ and ‘chaitanya’. The dialecticians were likened to clamorous jackals. To prove the superiority of the Krishna cult to Saivism and Saktism, Siva and Durga were described as slaves of Krishna. Even such Vaishnava sects as did not believe in the efficacy of worshipping Krishna alone were considered to be deluded. Of all the manifestations of the Lord, that as Krishna only was declared to be worthy of adoration and subtle theological arguments were adduced to prove the inferiority of Rama and Narayana. All relations with non-Vaishnavas were strictly forbidden, and acceptance of the ‘mantra’ from a non-Vaishnava preceptor was described as being one of the shortest routes to hell. The attitude to non-Hindus was of course illiberal. The Muslim scriptures were declared to be false and insupportable. Rupa and Sanatana considered themselves ‘fallen’ because of their contact with Muslims. Syamananda, who converted a number of Muslims, most surprisingly asked the Raja of Narayanagad not to employ Muslim porters as was the usual custom there.

But this uncompromising fanaticism need not blind one to the fact that in actual practice toleration was not unknown
to the Vaishnavas. The community had thrown open its gates to neophytes of all ways of thinking. Like the Jesuit missionaries, they earnestly considered the ‘unbelievers’ to be poor deluded creatures and were eager for the salvation of even the ‘yavanas’ and ‘pashandis’. Their condemnation of other creeds was but a denunciation of what they honestly believed to be evil. Even in theory, a certain amount of toleration was often prescribed. Krishnadasa Kaviraja mentioned abstention from speaking ill of ‘other gods’ and ‘other scriptures’ as an obligatory duty of all Vaishnavas. But this surely was a duty in the observance of which the famous biographer was not very punctilious himself. Even he, however, was ready to make concessions where the signs of true devotion,—whichever deity might be its object,—were too patent to be despised; and he mentioned with respect Anupama’s devotion to Rama which he declined to give up even at the instance of his celebrated elder brothers, Rupa and Sanatana.

Vaishnava thought, even in its social aspects, was interlinked with the abstract philosophy of the movement. This philosophy, so far as the common run of the Bengali Vaishnavas were concerned, is perhaps better represented by the expositions of higher mysticism in the popular biographical works of the period than by the scholarly volumes of the Vrindavana gosvamins. The writings of the gosvamins had attained by now the status of religious scriptures, only next in importance to the Bhagavata. But one may assume without any risk of grave error that a knowledge of their ideas was transmitted to the humbler followers of the faith mainly through the medium of the more popular Bengali works.

The basic conception on which Neo-Vaishnava philosophy was built consisted in a differentiation of the two types of qualities of Krishna as the supreme Lord, viz., ‘aisvarya’ and ‘madhurya’. ‘Aisvarya’ connoted the manifestations of divine power in the ordinary sense of the term; Krishna’s love for his lawful consorts is its typical example. ‘Madhurya’ implied all the tender qualities in Krishna and included, when concretely conceived, much that was risqué from the purely social point of view; Krishna’s love for Radha and the milkmaids was believed to be its supreme manifestation. The superiority of ‘madhurya’ to ‘aisvarya’ was the first postulate of Bengali
Vaishnava philosophy. Hence ‘parakiya’, as manifested in Krishna’s extra-marital amours, was apotheosized in preference to his love for his legitimate consorts (svakiya). Hence, too, the exaltation of ecstatic emotions in religion and the lower status of devotion which followed the dictates of scriptures. From such mystic ideals was derived a religious outlook which, however circumscribed by orthodoxy, rejected at least in theory the scriptural laws of caste, ‘asrama’ and the like. Some authors like Krishnadasa, sought to modify the conception of ‘parakiya’ by referring to the conventional explanation that Radha and the milkmaids were really the lawful consorts of Krishna who merely sought to taste of their lord’s love in a more delectable form. In the later works, however, such modifications were considered unnecessary. But the purity of the ideal was throughout emphasized. In a verse familiar to all students of Bengali literature, Krishnadasa clearly distinguished between ‘love-devotion’ (prema) and ‘love-desire’ (kama). The latter was described as a desire to please one’s own senses; the former, as a longing to satisfy Krishna. Echoing these sentiments, later authors decried ‘samanya rati’ (desire in its vulgar form) and upheld the ideal of ‘Krishna-rati’, i.e., selfless devotion to Krishna.

IV. Vaishnava Sahajiya thought.

Closely related to, but in no way a mere part or product of the Chaitanya movement, was the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya cult.

The followers of this cult accepted early without question the Godhood of Chaitanya. Rasakadamba, the work which is supposed to have first embodied the new Sahajiya ideas, referred with deep respect not to Chaitanya alone, but to all his great followers as well. Anandabhairava and Amritarasavali also did the same, while Agama explained in detail the theory of Chaitanya’s incarnation. Anandabhairava traced back the origin of Sahajiya practices to Virabhadra, Nityananda and ultimately to Chaitanya, while Amritarasavali traced it back to the same ultimate source through Krishnadasa Kaviraja, the Vrindavana gosvamins and Nityananda.

The ideal of ‘prakritibhajana’, the starting point of the post-Chaitanya Sahajiya development, loomed large in the standard
Vaishnava works of the period. Spiritual participation in the love-dalliance of Radha and Krishna as a female companion of Radha witnessing the sport divine was the essence of this particular form of mystic culture. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, in narrating the discussion of Ray Ramananda with Chaitanya regarding the supreme objects of attainment, referred to this form of worship as the path leading to Krishna in Vrindavana. *Premavilasa* spoke of Narsottama’s initiation into this particular form of mystic culture by Srijiva. This was the attitude which the pre-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyas from Jayadeva to Chandidas (we may include the former in the list by a somewhat liberal interpretation of the term, ‘Sahajiya’) had cultivated in the main. The *Rasakadamba* was devoted chiefly to the exposition of ‘prakritibhajana’ and mentioned its three forms,—worship as Krishna’s consort, as Radha’s female companion sporting with Krishna and as a ‘sakhi’ witnessing the sport divine. The last-mentioned variety was extolled as the highest state of spiritual perfection.

In its final form, the Sahajiya cult was in many ways different from the simpler ideal of ‘prakritibhajana’, which became merely a submerged element in a complex pattern. Men and women were there conceived as temporal manifestations of Krishna and Radha, the eternal male and the female, the perennial enjoyer and the enjoyed. ‘Sahaja’ was the emotion of the purest love flowing between Radha and Krishna, or ‘Rasa’ and *Rati*, as the Vaishnava authors often called them. “For the realisation of this Sahaja nature, therefore, a particular pair of man and woman should first of all realise their true self as *Rasa* and *Rati* or Krishna and Radha,—and it is only when such a realisation is perfect that they become entitled to realise the *Sahaja* through their intense mutual love”. This attribution of divinity to man or ‘aropa’ and mystic sexo-Yogic culture in company of a woman other than one’s wife, inspired by the emotion of love without lust, became the characteristic features of the later Sahajiya cult.

We do not, however, come across this completed form in the works attributed to the period under review, though even these indicate a considerable progress in this direction. Many of the basic conceptions on which the final structure was built were already clearly formulated and Radha and Krishna were already
identified with the two basic principles underlying the universe,—‘Purusha’ and ‘Prakriti’,—according to the Samkhya and the Tantras. Radha and Krishna were but one self divided into two. In other words, Krishna was the Ultimate Being and Radha was his original ‘Sakti’. The eternal land where the primordial male and female sported with each other was known as ‘Nitya Vrindavana’ or ‘Gupta Chandrapura’. Another basic belief, which probably contributed to the theory of ‘aropa’, was the need for self-realisation. ‘To understand one’s self is to understand the universe’, the Sahajiya authors emphatically declared. The conception of ‘sahaja’, the basis as well as the ultimate object of attainment of the cult, was also clearly formulated. In spite of the veiled and mystic-symbolic language of the texts, it is not difficult to discern its nature. Sahaja, as described in Amritarasavali, was a supramental state, existing within the mind like a shadow; but through an incredible paradox, this state of bliss which the mind sought in vain was in an illusory way known to the body. The human body was the basis for the attainment of ‘sahaja’ and thus in ‘sahaja’ were united the elements of poison and nectar. That this physical element,—the element of poison,—consisted in psycho-sexual culture was made clear by statements to the effect that Krishna and Siva tasted of ‘sahaja’ in the company of the milkmaids and the Koch women respectively. So the ideal of ‘sahaja’ consisted in the attainment of a transcendental state of bliss through the culture of human love even in all its sexual implications.

But in describing the process which led to this supreme attainment, the texts clearly distinguished between pure love and vulgar desire and pointed out in unmistakable language the dangers which attended the latter. Two types of ‘kama’ (desire) were distinguished: ‘prakrita’ and ‘aparakrita’, the vulgar and the transcendental. ‘Prakrita kama’ or physical desire led only to hell, while ‘aparakrita kama’ was equivalent to worship. This transcendental state could be attained only by the elect. It was reached when a perfectly purified being (Visuddha-sattva) was united with one who had achieved unsullied spirituality (suddha-sattva) in an extra-marital (parakiya) asocial union. Physical union (sangama) in this supreme stage of ‘sadhana’ was surely not precluded. But, as the Amritarasavali pointed out, lust remained as hidden from the true lover as love from
the lustful ones. Only a perfectly non-attached being (*nirvikara*) could reach this stage, while one who started on the journey with evil passions (*vikara*) was damned. The man worthy of the highest achievement was like one dead in life and having attained 'sahaja' he could take the poison of bodily love without danger to himself. Of the two types of mystic culture, psychological (*maner karana*) and physical (*vahyer karana*), the former was declared to be superior.

Certain differences between the earlier and later forms of the system are noticeable. The theory of 'aropa' or attribution of divinity to man, which later became the corner-stone of Sahajiya belief and practice, is hardly discernible in the earlier texts, though perhaps the assertion that the knowledge of the universe was attainable through a knowledge of the self marked its first beginning. Secondly,—the most surprising fact of all,—though the ideal of 'parakiya' in mystic culture was definitely upheld, Radha was declared to be really a 'svakiya' companion of Krishna. Radha and Viraja, the wives of Krishna in Nityadhama were, according to the *Agama*, punished for their suspicions and querulousness and condemned to be born in Vrindavana as wives of others. But so that their chastity might not be affected in the least, Krishna himself was born as 'part incarnations' (*amsa*) in the form of cowherds who married Krishna's legal consorts, now born as milkmaids.

Still, there were obvious similarities between the earlier and later forms of the system, the basic elements being more or less identical. Two such noticeable traits were the extreme secrecy which enshrouded the cult and its close affiliations with the Yogic-Tantric systems. The *Amritarasavali* related in detail the miracles which had earlier prevented any publication of the secrets lest the vulgar should misunderstand and abuse it, and ended with a word of caution about its future secrecy. The authors spoke of the secrets of their faith in an extremely mysterious and veiled language. Symbolism and long allegories occurred frequently in their writings and even the strenuous efforts of experts have hardly succeeded in completely unfolding the mysteries contained in these.

Traces of Yogic-Tantric influence are writ large on these early texts. In *Agama* and *Anandabhairava* the high mysteries of the faith were revealed in the form of dialogues between Siva and
Sakti. In the latter, a detailed account was given of 'dehata			tva', i.e., the inner psychic basis of human physiology as
described in the Yogic writings, with some modifications (e.g.,
the three basic nerves, 'Ida', 'Pingala' and 'Sushumna' are not
mentioned). The preceptor or 'guru' featured prominently in
these writings, being mentioned first and thus preceding even
Chaitanya in the list of adorable ones. Tantric-Yogic influence
is perhaps discernible in this trait, but the psycho-sexual
practices which characterised the Sahajiya movement ever since
its inception are a more definite evidence of such influence.
It is interesting to note the attitude of the Sahajiya texts to
the orthodox Vaishnavas. Like all deviationists, the Sahajiyas
held themselves to be the true adherents of the unsullied
Vaishnava faith, while their orthodox co-religionists were
declared to be the deluded ones. For an understanding of the
high mysteries of this faith, they declared, love was an essential
requisite. Hence was the true realisation denied to the deluded
Vaishnavas (mayamohita Vaishnava) who stuck to orthodox ways
and falsely considered themselves followers of the gosvamins.

V. Ideas and practices of the Sakta-Tantric cults.

As already noted, the Chaitanya movement and its Sahajiya
appendage, despite their revolutionary potentials, failed to
dislodge the Sakta-Tantric cults and the worship of local godlings
from their position of primacy. In our period, no fresh or
significant development took place in the history of Sakta-
Tantricism. But the cult still counted among its followers,
eminent scholars and ascetics who produced a number of impor-
tant compilations. These compilations and similar works written
in the preceding epoch clearly indicate the trends in Sakta-Tantric
thought and practice in Bengal in the early days of Mughal rule.

Among the Tantric scholars and ascetics, definitely known to
have lived in this period, was Purnananda Paramahamsa Parivra-

daka. His Saktakrama, dealing in seven chapters with Sakta
rites, was completed in 1572 and Sritattvachintamani, dealing
with Tantric rites in general and with those concerning the
worship of Srividyā in particular, in 1577. Besides these, his
works include Tattvanandanatarangini and Shatkarmollasa, dealing
with black rites in the main, and the famous Syamarahasya, a
treatise on the worship of goddess Syama according to Kulachara.
Chandrasekhara, another Tantric author, wrote his *Purascharanadipika* on the ways and merits of repetition of ‘mantras’ attended with other rites probably in 1590 A.D. A work on *Kulachara*, known as *Kulapujanachandrika* is also ascribed to him. There are also several manuscripts of Tantric commentaries going back to our period,—e.g., one on *Anandalahari* by Mahadeva Vidyavagisa (Ms. No. 6694), dated 1605 A.D. and another on *Saratatihaka*, dated 1618 A.D.,—in the possession of the Asiatic Society. Mahadeva Vidyavagisa is also known to have written a number of works on Sakti, Siva and Vishnu, apparently in the same period.

Though some of these works are still considered highly authoritative, they reveal a surprising lack of variety and are devoid of any originality or profundity. They endlessly discuss with negligible variations the same rites and practices only with regard to different deities and, in so doing, base their statements on earlier standard works whose authority they accept without the slightest hint of a question. They are almost exclusively concerned with Tantra ritual and the laying down of processes and rules and, with few exceptions, are remarkably indifferent to the philosophy of the Tantras.

Such philosophy as is there in some of these works contain nothing new, but merely repeat some age-old concepts. The *Saktanandatarangini*, written in the previous epoch, briefly described the nature of the soul and the Supreme Soul, the Great Illusion, attachment and the ultimate way to salvation. Using the conventional imagery, the author analysed the fundamental oneness of the soul manifesting itself in many forms and of the Supreme Soul assuming the forms of various deities. The soul and the Supreme Soul were also described as being identical and thus the principle of Non-Duality underlying the Tantric system was clearly stated. The second basic postulate stated in this work was another commonplace of Indian philosophy, viz., the doctrine of ‘karman’. Action, good and bad, led to the accretion of results and thus caused an endless chain of rebirths. Action was caused by attachment (moha) and Mahamaya, or the great illusion, who enchanted even the gods was the cause of ‘moha’. But the same Mahamaya also opened the path to salvation (moksha). For she was of two types: ‘vidya’ (knowledge) and ‘avidya’ (not-knowledge). While ‘avidya’ caused attachment, ‘vidya’ led to non-attachment and hence to
salvation. Then came the question of worship. The Brahman being without qualities (nirguna), his worship was declared to be an absurdity. But for the convenience of worshippers, shapes and forms were conceived. When worship was offered with a consciousness of the separate existence of the worshipper, there was an accretion of good results. When such consciousness of duality gave place to a feeling of oneness between the devotee and the Absolute, a liberation from the chain of existence and merger with the Universal Soul followed. A statement in Tararahasya of Brahmananda Giri, also written in the previous epoch, supplements these basic postulates. There all men and women are declared to be identical with Siva and Sakti respectively. Puranamanda in his Sritattvachintamani declared emphatically his faith in the path of knowledge as the only one leading to salvation. He, however, pointed out a somewhat new line of thought by seeking to reconcile Vedanta with Tantra in a direct way, through the identification of ‘Sabda-brahma’ (Brahman manifesting himself as eternal sound) with the ‘Kundalini Sakti’ (the form in which the female principle underlying the universe resides in the body of created beings). He emphasised another point in Tantric philosophy, viz., the belief in ‘prakriti’ as the highest means for the attainment of supreme knowledge.

These dogmas do not mark any progress beyond the stereotyped theories of the Vedanta and the ancient Tantras. These, however, indicate that the followers of Sakta-Tantricism, in their preoccupation with rituals and mystic practices had not entirely lost sight of the basic philosophy underlying their cult. For some at least, the elaborate and often bizarre rites had not yet degenerated into mere lifeless form enlivened by no higher ideal.

“The age-old controversy about the admissibility of wine in worship against clear Vedic prohibition created in Bengal as elsewhere a sharp division of the Tantric worshippers into two rival schools popularly known as Pasvachara and Kulachara”. Besides eschewing wine in worship, the Pasvacharins generally adhered to the Vedic rites and rules of life modified through centuries of change and the influence of the Tantra. The Kulacharins, on the other hand, developed a form of mystic culture in which the notorious five ‘m’s.—wine, women, meat, fish and

* The names of the five objects essential for these practices begin with the letter ‘ma’. Hence the name, ‘pancha ma-kara’, i.e. five ‘ma’s.
fried cereals,—featured most prominently. The latter was regarded as the highest form of Tantric practice and, according to the earlier texts, only those who had already attained the knowledge of the Absolute (Brahmajñana) were entitled to practise it. *Pasvachara*, or the practice of animals, was meant for the common run of men who, in terms of spiritual growth, belonged to the animal level. Though *Kulachara* spread on an unusually large scale in Bengal, the majority of the works of our period is concerned with *Pasvachara*. And it may also be assumed that the majority of the householders who followed the Tantric ways, confined themselves to this less dangerous path.

The practices of *Pasvacharins* represent rather a particular approach to the question of religion and worship than a set of fixed and rigid formulas to be followed by the members of a sect. The works dealing with *Pasvachara* show an extreme eclecticism with regard to the choice of deities and, unlike the Vaishnavas, never insist that salvation is attainable only through the adoration of some particular god or goddess. The numberless gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are declared to be merely the various forms, male or female, assumed by the *Brahman* for the benefit of the devotee. The *Sriattvachintamani* prescribed the worship of Ganesa, the Sun, Siva, Parvati and Vishnu, while the *Tantrasara* laid down the detailed regulations regarding the worship of a far larger number of deities including even such purely Vaishnava gods as Krishna, Valagopala, Vasudeva and Lakshminarayana. Only the form of worship followed a somewhat fixed pattern based on beliefs peculiar to Tantricism.

The first three essentials of Tantrik worship were the ‘*guru*’, the initiation (*diksha*) and the ‘*mantra*’. The ‘*guru*’ who initiated the devotee into the secrets of worship was declared to be identical with Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara, nay, even with *Brahman*. Specific qualifications for preceptorship were described and supreme honour to the ‘*guru*’ and his family was enjoined. Initiation, which was the chief function of the ‘*guru*’, was attended with endless beneficial consequences. It led to salvation, according to some; to various heavens, according to others, while others still believed in its ability to destroy the results of sins accumulated through a billion previous existences. The ‘*mantra*’ was a cryptic symbol consisting of some apparen-
tly unmeaning sounds known as 'vijamantras' and was imparted at the initiation by the 'guru' to his disciple. From the initiation onwards this 'mantra' became the most important element in the disciple's formula of daily worship. The 'vijamantra', when deciphered, implied an adoration of some particular deity or other into whose worship the disciple had been initiated. The worship prescribed for Pasvacharins consisted largely in 'purascharana' or repetition of the "mantra" attended with appropriate meditation (dhyana) and rites. An important element in the daily worship was the various mystic symbols and diagrams known as 'yantras', 'chakras' and 'mandalas', one or several of which were associated with the worship of each particular deity.

But all these external rituals and formulas constituted only the lower form of Tantric worship. Even for the Pasvacharin a higher culture was prescribed which alone could lead to the ultimate object, viz., consciousness of oneness with the Brahman and the consequent merger with the Supreme Being after death. This higher culture in its practical form was identical with the Yogic practice of 'shaichakrabhedā'. Yoga conceived of a higher physiology according to which the human body was said to be in more or less concrete sense the seat of the eternal male and feminine principles underlying the universe. Inside the body six 'chakras' or lotuses were imagined, the uppermost of which (sahasrara) was supposed to be the seat of Siva and the lowermost (muladhara) that of Kundalini Sakti. Besides there were the thirty-five million nerves (nadi) of which the chief one, 'sushumna' passed along the spine through the six 'chakras' connecting 'muladhara' with 'sahasrara'. To rouse the sleeping Kundalini Sakti with appropriate meditation (dhyana) and mystic breathing exercises (nyāsa) and to lead her through the six 'chakras' to a union with Siva in 'sahasrara' was the highest object of the Yogic-Tantric practices. When this union was achieved, there followed a secretion of nectar (amrita) which the devotee tasted with his tongue turned back. Daily practice of this mystic exercise led to freedom from the bondages of this world.

Here, again, we come across nothing that is new. The works of our period only repeat without variation the commonplaces of Indian mysticism formulated centuries ago. That instead of
using the older texts on the topic, the Tantric scholars and ‘sadhakas’ described afresh the age-old belief and practices of Yogic ‘sadhana’ and did so with accuracy, perhaps proves a demand for such fresh exposition. These Yogic-Tantric practices, still far from being obsolete, appear to have been more in vogue at a time when standard compilations and treatises found it necessary to discuss them in detail and in a practical understandable form.

This continuation of older tradition in a practically unaltered form is also the characteristic feature of Kulachara during our period. Here, again, the best-known works expressly stated to be compilations based on earlier writings confined themselves almost exclusively to the practical aspect of mystic culture and referred but incidentally to the underlying philosophy.

The philosophy as expounded in a somewhat earlier work, Sarvollasatantra of Sarvananda, described Kulachara as the highest means for the attainment of a knowledge of ‘prakriti’ through which alone could union with Brahman be achieved. The culmination of Tantric mystic culture was a harmonious experience of the three forms of Sakti or ‘prakriti’—the ‘subtle’ one within the body, the ‘luminous’ one in various colours and the ‘gross’ form manifested as women. This experience was sought through a synthesis of the inner (i.e., mental) worship based on Yogic physiology and an outer worship with which the ‘panchatattva’ or the five m’s were associated. In Kulachara any goddess, i.e., any divine manifestation of the eternal Sakti, could be taken as the object of worship. The well-known treatises each dealt with the worship of some particular goddess or other though the worship of Tara and Kali was considered specially meritorious. But the rituals and practices as also the ultimate object were everywhere the same.

In practice, Kulachara combined an inner worship of the ‘guru’ and Sakti, with an external ritual in which coition and the associated acts featured prominently. The inner worship of the Kulacharin was practically the same as the shatchakra-bheda which the Pasvacharin also practised. Meditations on the ‘guru’, who was identified with the Sivas seated in the six lotuses, and on the form of the particular Sakti whom the devotee worshipped were about the only distinguishing features.
These works also describe a wide variety of gestures (mudra), breathing exercises (nyasa), incantations, diagrams (yantras) and the like, accessories to inner and outer worships more or less similar to those prescribed in the works on Pasvachara.

The rites associated with five m's and the mystic culture which had for its chief implement a human corpse (savasadhana) were, however, the most distinctive features of the system. The texts of our period nowhere discussed the why's and the wherefore's of such bizarre practices. These were just taken for granted on the basis of the testimony of standard authorities, and described in detail. The Tararahasya summed up the most important practice of Kulachara with the statement that it was the duty of the ‘sadhaka’ to give his own wife to the ‘guru’ and fellow devotees and to be united with the wives of others in the mystic circle (sadhana-chakra). Those incapable of such supreme detachment were advised to take prostitutes as partners in mystic culture. To be thus united with all women excepting the ‘seven mothers’ in a spirit of absolute detachment constituted the highway to success in mystic culture and to various miraculous powers. Thus in Kulachara ritual, as also in the images on which the Kulacharin meditated during his inner worship, sex and sexual symbols reigned supreme. In its extremest form, Kulachara identified the various sex-acts with the acts of worship and prescribed the sexual excreta as objects to be offered to the deity. In all these, there is nothing to suggest the use of symbolic language referring to mysteries other than those actually described. These practices, no doubt, were not meant for common men and that alone, if anything, can at all justify them.

But it seems hardly likely that Kulachara was confined in practice only to the elect few. In the 18th century, Kulachara held extensive sway not only in East Bengal, but also in Gauda, South Radha and other parts. As the Dikshanachandrika, an 18th century work, explained, not only those who had attained the supreme knowledge, but also their disciples as well as the descendants of those who had succeeded in their spiritual quest through Kulachara practices, followed this ‘left hand path’. It seems very likely that the tendency towards such a development became noticeable as early as our period. From the 15th century onwards we hear of a large number of
Kulacharins in Bengal who were said to have reached the desired goal through their esoteric practices. It would be surprising if the less saintly disciples of such successful (siddha) mystics did not seek to emulate their masters. The Vaishnava literature of the 16th century refers to the associations of wine and women with Sakta worship in a way which does not suggest mere falsehood prompted by sectarian hatred. What is more, the influence of Kulachara on the Pasvachara texts of this period clearly indicates its growing ascendancy.

In fact the works dealing with Pasvachara, unable to wriggle out of the influence of Kulachara, seems to have made a deliberate effort to modify and restrict the latter's baneful effect. The author of Tantrasara and following him, Brahmananda Giri quoted the authority of Srikrama to prove that the offer of wine and meat in worship was forbidden for all but the Sudras and, in the opinion of some, even for the latter. Various substitutes to be offered by the different castes were suggested. But, paradoxically, the very passage which the Saktananda-tarangini quoted in support of this contention contains a line directing the offer of wine beside the ‘chakra’ to the west of the goddess. Even the images to be contemplated by the Pasvacharins were influenced by Kulachara ideas. The ‘guru’ was to be worshipped as ‘kamakelikalatma’, i.e. the Sakti underlying the act of coition, as the preacher of ‘Kulapuja’ and even as Kulachara incarnate. In the meditation on the union of Kundalini Sakti with Siva seated in ‘sahasrara’, sexual imagery once more crept in. In ‘antaryaga’ (inner sacrifice) the devotee was to offer spiritually to the goddess within him ‘an ocean of nectar, a mountain of meat and a heap of fish’. The Sritattvachintamani even prescribed the offering, in a spiritual sense, of an object very typical of Kulachara practices, viz., ‘svayambhukusuma’ (the first menstrual mucus). What is more, even a work as ostensibly devoted to Pasvachara as the Tantrasara included sections on Kulachara which, besides describing ‘avasadhana’, also recommended mystic culture in the company of a female partner.

Ultimate merger into Brahman through esoteric practices was, however, not the only object of Tantricism in mediaeval Bengal. Things far more earthy, which now go by the general but misleading name of ‘occultism’, had become inextricably
interwoven with Tantric thought and rituals. Pursuit of worldly and often base objects through the attainment of miraculous powers, the invocation of the aid of supernatural agencies or mere magic rites was the key-note of such occultism. In its simplest and most harmless form, Tantric occultism prescribed the use of various amulets which still enjoy a surprising popularity among the high and low in this country. Harmless too were the ‘mantras’ or verbal spells prescribed as remedies for the various ills of man’s daily life, some of these even guaranteeing success in all undertakings. Then there was the dangerous path of ‘Yogini-sadhana’, by treading which the successful devotee secured the favour of some particular Yogini or other, a supernatural being, who became his mother, sister, wife or daughter,—whichever he might desire,—with varying results. Services of other supernatural beings such as Vetalas could also be secured, and recipes were prescribed for the same. The really evil element in Tantric occultism consisted in the ‘abhicharas’, the six notorious black rites, significantly described in Tantrasara itself as ‘krurakarmani’ or evil works. To pacify a person’s wrath, charm a recalcitrant heart, stop the course of nature, provoke hostilities and to cause death,—such were the objects of Tantric ‘abhicharas’. These rites appear to have been widely practised in one form or another.

Here we may note in passing the attitude of the Tantric texts towards caste. There was a marked difference in this respect between Kulachara and Pasvachara. Even a Sudra became a Brahmin through the practice of Kulachara, the Tararahasya emphatically declared, and Godhood itself was not beyond the reach of the low-born who followed this path. The Pasvachara texts, on the contrary, mentioned the different heavens to which the different castes were destined to go as a result of initiation. In Kulachara, caste-ideas were inevitably modified due to the association of lower caste women with the highest stage of ‘sadhana’. Besides, the condition precedent to a votary’s admission into the ‘chakra’ (secret circle) was ‘an exalted state of mind where all caste-bondage really disappears’. It is, however, extremely doubtful whether such exalted notions affected the daily social intercourse in any appreciable way. For the secret and higher ‘sadhana’ of Kulachara was in the nature of a mystic-esoteric cult with little reference to social
life and relationships as such. That *Kulachara* was not entirely indifferent to caste barriers is proved by statements in *Taratahasya* which referred to the different paths prescribed for different castes and allowed women and Sudras to use the ‘Pranava mantra’ only in a modified form. The Sudra’s right to utter the ‘Pranava’ was admitted by *Pavachara* also, as is proved by the testimony of *Saktanandatarangini*. But the same work prescribed the initiation of Sudras only into a limited number of ‘mantras’ and eternal damnation was mentioned as the consequence of any transgression on this point. What is more, preceptorship was openly declared to be the exclusive prerogative of Brahmins. That Bengal Vaishnavism was a progressive force in comparison is clearly proved by the encroachment on this exclusive privilege of Brahmins, which it sanctioned in practice.

Tantric texts throw an interesting sidelight on Sakta-Vaishnava relations in the 16th century. We have noted already the hostile and uncharitable attitude of the Vaishnavas towards all rival cults, the Sakta-Tantrics in particular. The Vaishnava literature of our period also contains numerous anecdotes regarding the persecution of Chaitanyaites by the majority community among the Hindus. The orthodox opposition to Chaitanya at Navadvipa mentioned in all his biographies is a story too familiar to require repetition. The *Premavilasa* tells us of an attempt made by a Brahmin of Sakta persuasion to persecute Chaitanyadasa, father of Srinivasa, for his Vaishnava leanings. The *Rasikamangala* described Orissa (which then included Midnapore) as an anti-Vaishnava country where ‘*samkirtana*’ was forcibly stopped and whence Vaishnavas were expelled. That such stories contained an element of truth is proved at least partly by a long passage in *Saktanandatarangini* strongly condemning the Neo-Vaishnavas of Bengal. Significantly enough, Vaishnavas of the conventional type who stuck to practices sanctioned by orthodoxy were approved of. But for those who had left the ancient track, abandoned ‘*sandhya*’ and ‘*gayatri*’, and having put on ‘*tilaka*’ marks and ‘*tulasi*’ wreaths, sweetly chanted the name of Hari to the accompaniment of dances and instrumental music, no question of toleration did arise. Eternal perdition was declared to be the fate of such ‘*sankara*’ Vaishnavas and all their ancestors and
descendants. The land where they lived was damned for ever. Even the very sight of their faces necessitated expiatory rites. Thus, at least in theory, toleration was not the strong point of Bengali religious life in our period, so far as the two major Hindu sects were concerned.

VI. Folk religion of the Hindus.

But in sharp contrast to the proselytizing Vaishnava and the fanatical Tantrika, the common man of Bengal was undoubtedly tolerant. The poets of the mediaeval Bengali 'panchalis' bowed before shrines of every cult,—including even those dedicated to Muslim saints,—in a spirit of almost universal eclecticism, evidently reflecting the general religious temper of the people. Though under Vaishnava influence some of them reviled the opponents of Vaishnavas, their invectives appear to be a harmless convention, rather than the expression of genuine rancour.

In the long lists of the adobable ones which constitute the prologues to the Bengali 'Kavayas', a very large number of gods and goddesses are invariably mentioned. Reverence for these numerous deities was the chief feature of Hindu religious belief so far as the masses were concerned. The deities of the Puranic pantheon of course continued to be venerated as of old. Ganesa, Siva, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Vishnu and his ten incarnations, the Sun, Brahma, Yama, Pavana, Indra, Ganga as also Rama with his brothers and Sita were all mentioned with profound respect. But the worship of the Puranic deities, with few exceptions, had ceased to be a living reality. 'Puja' in honour of deities like Ganesa, Lakshmi and Saraswati were apparently confined to annual festivals. Then, as now, Durga puja in autumn was widely prevalent. Siva and Vishnu were still regularly worshipped in one form or other. At least in one shrine the Sun god continued to be worshipped as Chakraditya. But the majority of the shrines were dedicated to female deities of Tantric origin,—some being the various forms of Siva's consort,—and a large number of local godlings, some of whom had secured recognition even in the orthodox Smritis.

Of the deities of purely Sakta origin who had shrines dedicated to them, mention may be made of Bhavani, Bhagavati, Mahamaya, Kali, Nilamata or Tara, Varahi and Sarada. But more numerous were the goddesses of Tantric origin who had
assumed special forms in the various localities or were perhaps
the joint products of Tantric and local religious beliefs. Appar-
ently the most popular among these goddesses was Chandi, the
forest deity mounted on lizard, who became identified with the
great consort of Siva. Sarvamangala, Jayachandi, Rankini,
Yogadya, Vargabhima, Visalakshi, Uttaravahini, Vansuli, Chand-
ramukhi and the like also belonged to this category. What
specific features distinguished the conception or worship of these
deities, one from the other, is for the most part a mystery to-
day. Our sources throw only an occasional and inadequate
light on the problem. Thus Sarvamangala was described as a
goddess who wore a wreath of heads of demons (asuras) slain
by her. Rankini was a deity whose face was besmeared with
the blood she had sucked. Chandramukhi of Kamalpur mani-
fested herself in the form of a slow-burning fire amidst a pool.
Many of these numerous deities have fallen out of popular
favour. Those who are still worshipped,—Yogadya of Kshira-
grama for instance,—have in many cases assumed a vague and
non-descript form. The Vaishnava shrines and deities constitu-
ted another important element in the popular Hinduism of
this period. By now Chaitanya definitely held a high pedestal
among the gods most deeply venerated by the common man,
and a section was devoted exclusively to his praise in many of
the poetical works. Worship of Gauranga was early introduced
by Advaita, Narahari Sarkar and Gauridas of Ambuya-Kalna.
Gopala or the child Krishna (chhaoyal Kanai) was another
object of veneration. Ruparama Chakravarti also mentioned
in his long list shrines dedicated to Krishnaraya (at Krishna-
nagara), Balarama, Svarupanarayana and Sobhachandra. He
also referred with deep respect to (the shrine of?) Abhirama
Gosain at Vindhak, “never for a moment separated from Radha
and Krishna”. With reference to the shrine of Ramgopala at
Goruti, he mentioned the interesting fact that young maidens
danced there three times every day.

The numerous local deities were perhaps the most charac-
teristic feature of mediaeval Bengali folk-religion. Among them
Dharma occupied the place of honour. In the sections on
‘Digvandana’ in the poetical works of our period Dharma almost
invariably was first mentioned. Whatever the origin of the cult
might have been, the conception of this god in our period bore
traces of varied influences. He was described as ‘invisible Dharma’ (Dharma nairākara) and also,—almost in the same breath,—as a white-complexioned deity on a white seat. His identification with Vishnu is suggested by a line in Ruparama’s work, wherein Vaikuntha is mentioned as his abode. The same work described Dharma as the Primeval Being (Brahma sanatana) from whom originated Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. He also appeared under different names, such as Bankura Ray and Yatrasiddhi (the god of successful journeys). As worshipped in W. Bengal in the twentieth century, the god is conceived as the Sun or Yama and often represented by a stone under a tree daubed with vermilion. The exact nature of this deity has been the subject of prolonged controversy Dharma was once considered a relic of crypto-Buddhism. But the composite nature of the cult has now been proved quite conclusively.

Among the lesser deities, mention may be made first of Manasa or the snake-goddess, associated often with the Sij plant (Euphorbia nivulica), whose worship is nearly as popular to-day as it was then. Next, there were such other female deities as Jayachandi, Melaichandi, Betaichandi, Kamar Budi and Jati Thakurani associated with various localities. Shashthi, or Shashthibudi, the goddess of offsprings, also appears in the Dharmaman-gala of Ruparama. In that varied pantheon of domestic and local deities, Panchananda or Panchu Thakur, the god of children’s diseases, Ghantu or Ghantakarna, dressed in a shirt and sitting astride a pony, the god of skin diseases, Pir Kaluray, the crocodile god, all occupied positions of importance. Godlings of a somewhat non-descript character such as Jhakrai, Nalu of Neod, Guma of Paithan etc. also had their special niches.

The Smriti of Raghunandana, written in the earlier half of the 16th century, which regulates the life of the orthodox Bengali Hindu to-day and is generally supposed to have embo-
died the contemporary practices approved by orthodoxy, pres-
cribes in its chapter on rituals (krityatattvam) the worship of 
some of these local deities. Manasa, who resided in the Sij 
tree, Ghantakarna, worshipped for the prevention of boils, 
Sitala, the small-pox goddess, Mangalachandika, the two-handed 
fair-complexioned deity, who prevented diseases and other evils 
and Sutikashashthi, the goddess presiding over births and resid-
ing in the labour-room,—all had particular days in the year assigned for their worship. Nothing could prove more conclusively the complete acceptance of such deities by orthodox Hinduism.

Almost throughout the mediaeval period, many Muslim saints were venerated by the Hindus in Bengal. A large number of shrines was dedicated to such saints or ‘pirs’, as they were called. The shrines of Subhi Khan at Pandua, Dafar Khan Ghazi at Tribeni, Bada Khan Ghazi at Risibati and Pir Ismail at Mandaran were holy to both Hindus and Muslims.

To the daily and periodical worship of numerous deities were added various rites, some performed with particular ends in view. Of these, many are still current, but some have become comparatively obsolete. In the month of Jaishthya, for instance, was performed the Savitri Vrata for the prevention of widowhood. On specified days in Ashadha would commence the Chaturmasya Vrata lasting four months. Nagapanchami, the fifth day of the bright fortnight in Bhadra, was an occasion on which images of snakes were worshipped. In the same month, ‘arghya’ (spiritual offerings) was offered to Agastya, apparently in commemoration of his great departure to the south. On the morning following the night of Diwali (Dyutapratipada) dice and other indoor games were played,—the name suggests gambling,—and the results were supposed to indicate the player’s fortune during the year to follow. Still very current in Upper India, the custom is less so in Bengal. On the fifth day of the bright fortnight in Magha, Lakshmi and Saraswati together (and not the latter alone, as is the practice now) would be worshipped. The worship of Madana in the Damanaka tree’, ‘salagrama’ or water with songs and music on the days of Madanatrayodasi and Madanachaturdasi, is another festival which has now become obsolete. This list of comparatively obsolete rites could be lengthened considerably. Some of these still appear in the Bengali almanac but these have nearly all fallen out of popular favour.

The religion and daily life of the common people, including even the educated, were dominated by superstition and fear of the supernatural. Magic and occultism were accepted as common facts of daily life. The poets of our period bowed respectfully to Dakinis, Yoginis and Mukhdushis,—supernatural spirits, not particularly benevolent, who might grace the pandal at the
time of the recital of the 'panchalis'. Kshemananda went a little further and wrote a few verses in honour of Rakshasas long dead, such as Ravana, Indrajit, Trisira etc., apparently in the belief that it was better to placate all and sundry. Measures were taken to save the new-born babe from the influence of Dakinis and Sakinis: still would the 'evil eye' often cast its baneful shadow on the young child. According to the most authoritative Smriti work of Bengal, a wide variety of 'unnatural happenings' (adbhuta), and the entrance of a crow or a wild fowl into one's house belonged to that dangerous category, necessitated expiatory rites, death and loss of property being the only alternatives. The same work discussed in detail the necessity for abstaining from particular items of food on particular days. Raghunandana learnedly quoted from ancient texts to prove that a man who did not take molasses during Chaturmasya Vrata acquired a honeyed voice, while abstention from mustard oil during the same period led to destruction of enemies.

Black magic, it appears, was widely practised, and even those who did not make use of it, had a faith in its efficacy. Thus, for instance, the Vaishnava biographical work Rasikamangala naively told the story of a Kali-worshipper who with the aid of supernatural powers (siddhavidya) dug a tunnel for the rescue of a captive from a Mughal prison. Vasikarana,—i.e. rites meant to captivate hearts, recalcitrant or restive,—appears to have been very popular. The loving mother collected various charms,—which included such unusual articles as ropes tied through a buffalo's nose, entrails of snakes and biles of fish,—to ensure the marital happiness of her daughter. An ageing woman in her unequal competition with a young co-wife also sought the aid of such charms. Supernatural agencies were invoked for less innocuous purposes as well and, if we are to believe the evidence of Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, often with dire consequences. The ryots of Khuntaghat in Kamrup, the traditional land of sorcery,—we are told,—managed to get oppressive officers 'killed through witchcraft'. Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi was thus bewitched 'so that for two or three days he used to produce sounds of beasts' and soon died. In the Ahom system of augury, as described by Mirza Nathan, there was the same unmistakeable stamp of black rites.
VII. The state of Islam in Bengal.

Our knowledge of the state of Islam in mediaeval Bengal, particularly during the period under review, is comparatively meagre. Still, it is possible to form some idea regarding its main trends from a study of the contemporary sources.

Passages in the writings of the Muslim poets of Arakan belonging to the mid-17th century indicate that at least the educated Muslims had a clear conception regarding the basic tenets of Islam, free from all its later accretions. The story of creation as told in the Islamic scriptures, familiar legends connected with the Prophet’s life, accounts of the Islamic heaven and hell,—all these characteristic features of the original Muslim faith appear in the prologues of these romantic poems. The writings of Alaol begin with the praise of God and many passages in these introductory sections read very much like paraphrases of the Muslim confession of faith.

But even in the works of such learned Muslims well-versed in Islamic scriptures, influence of Hindu thought and belief is clearly noticeable. Alaol referred to idols as the gods of fools, to fire as the god of Brahmans, to holy men as gods of Yogis and to the Supreme Being (‘prabhu niranjana’) of the Islamic faith, as the God of all gods. By admitting the plurality of lesser deities the poet obviously departed from the strict path of Islam and accepted a common belief of the Hindus. The same poet also gave evidence of his belief in a commonly accepted Hindu dogma regarding the nature of idols: a passage in his Padmavati described idols as being the mere shadows of God and implicitly identified Siva or Mahadeva of the Hindus with the true God of the Muslims. His works reveal throughout an intimate knowledge of Hindu mythology and scriptures and in describing a non-Muslim King of Yemen, he painted the picture of a Hindu court.

But Hindu influence evidently detracted little from the faith in the superiority of Islam. The scholars in Nayman’s court,—in the story of Bahram’s conversion to Islam as told by Alaol,—understood not the nature of God, despite their knowledge of Agama, Yoga and Tantra. Naturally Bahram at the end of his long quest was convinced of the superiority of Islam. Elsewhere the worship of the formless God was described in emphatic language as the only way to salvation.
A notable trait of Muslim religious life of mediaeval Bengal was the influence of Sufi mysticism. Of the numerous Indian Sufi sects, at least seven are definitely known to have entered Bengal in different periods. These seven sects are the Suhrawardi, the Chishti, the Qalandariyah, the Madariyah, the Adhamiyah, the Naqshbandiyah and the Qadiriyah. Several of these sects had considerable influence during our period. Ashraf Khan, the ‘laskar wazir’ of king Sri Sudharma of Arakan and the patron of poet Daulat Kazi, was a follower of the Chishti sect. The Qalandars or Qalandariyahs were apparently the most numerous. Of the several Muslim mendicant orders, the Qalandars alone were mentioned by name in the Chandimangala of Mukundarama. The author of Baharistan with his followers temporarily entered the fold of this particular sect at Dacca in order to defy the governor. The first protagonist of the Qadiriyah sect in Bengal was Shah Qamis of Baghdad, who died in 1584. Initiation of many followers is attributed to him and he is said to have had numerous Khalifas or representatives in different parts of Bengal. He was succeeded by Abdur Razzaq as the spiritual leader of the sect, but its subsequent history is very obscure. In the middle of the 17th century poet Alaol is known to have entered this order. The Naqshbandi sect was established in Bengal by Shaykh Hamid Danishmand, a disciple of the famous reformer Shaykh Ahmad Sarhindi, in or shortly after our period. The Adhamiyah or the Khizriyah sect was also perhaps not unknown in Bengal at this time. For, according to tradition, the observance of the annual festival of floating rafters (‘beda bhasan’) associated with this sect had to be permitted by governor Muqarram Khan against his wishes.

The Bauls who during the 18th and 19th centuries became very numerous in Bengal are generally believed to have been partly a by-product of the Sufi movement. It is difficult to accurately ascertain the period when this sect first came into existence. But tradition usually traces it back to the 16th century and points to Nadiya as the place of its origin. The thoughts and ideas of this sect in the later stages of its development are familiar to-day, thanks to the numerous songs of nameless poets. But even when Baul mysticism assumed a coherent shape, the sect itself did not become anything like an
organised brotherhood, the name being applied indiscriminately to vagrant mystics of all denominations who sang of and yearned for the ‘man of the heart’ (maner manush) and were slave to no laws of religion or society. One wonders whether the ‘faqirs indifferent to the world’ mentioned in Chandimangala and those whom Abdul Latif saw at Ghoraghat belonged to this particular sect. But any definite conclusion on this point is not authorised by the available data.

Holy men and religious preachers were an influence in Bengali Muslim society then as always. In our period or perhaps a little later, Maulana Hamid Danishmand and Haji Bahram Sakka came to Bengal and settled in the Burdwan district. Bahram Sakka, to whom Akbar granted the village of Faqirpur, is credited with the conversion of a powerful Hindu ascetic, Jaypal. Hamid Danishmand established a madrasah at Mangalkot, the ruins of which may still be seen. Besides such more famous men of God, there must have been many lesser ones. The traveller Abdul Latif mentions one such,—Hawadha Mian of Bagha in the Rajshahi district who with his students and dependents set up a simple college. There they devoted themselves to study and religion having ‘no concern with other people.’

A significant feature of Islam in Bengal was the growth of the ‘cult of the preceptor’ (guru-vada) among Muslims, perhaps due to Sufi influence. The example of the Hindus also might have contributed to this particular development. Such statements as ‘darkness turns to light through the guru’s grace’, occurring in Alaol’s works, sound very much like the Hindu adage describing the ‘guru’ as the person who opens the eyes of the disciple, blinded by abysmal ignorance. But elsewhere in a typically Sufi spirit Alaol begged of the ‘guru’ the cup filled with the wine of love. For such wine led to oblivion of one’s self and union with the Eternal Friend.

Islam in Bengal in its popular form was something very different from the simple austere faith which emanated from Arabia. It was replete with elements which an orthodox Muslim might well consider un-Islamic or even idolatrous. Tombs of holy men who had served the cause of the faith at one time or other had acquired the status of shrines. People sought the intercession of the deceased saints to secure special
favours from heaven. Mirza Nathan, for instance, took a vow to visit the shrine of Nur Qutb Alam at Pandua when his father fell seriously ill. On the latter’s recovery, the son carried out the promise and held a great feast. At Kantaduar in the Rangpur district was the tomb of Shah Ismail Ghazi, the tales of whose exploits in holy wars inspired the heart of the faithful. Besides, there were the shrines of the numerous ‘pirs’ venerated by the Hindus and Muslims alike and mentioned with great respect in the introductory sections of the mediaeval ‘panchalis’. In the evening the Muslims lighted candles at these shrines and prepared ‘sirni’ which was to be offered there. Un-Islamic superstition was in fact carried much further. In the second half of the 17th century Thevenot, the French traveller, saw a faqir going from Bengal to Kabul measuring the road with his body in the company of a number of disciples.

The purity of Islam in Bengal was also sullied in this period by conversions to the idolatrous faith. Vaishnavas who took the lead in thus converting Muslims achieved some success. Conversions of a different type were also not entirely unknown. Mirza Nathan informs us that during the Kuch campaign, “one of the expert musketeers . . . ., being lured by the Kuches, turned his face against the blessings of Islam. He entered into the fold of the infidels. . . . .”

Still, the average Muslim, as portrayed in contemporary literature, was both pious and orthodox. He offered five prayers a day, read the Quran and (making due allowance for poetic exaggeration) observed the Ramjan fast ‘even if it cost him his life’. Thus orthodoxy tempered by popular practices and Hindu and Sufi thought seems to have been the key-note of Muslim religious life during our period.

VIII. The social and cultural milieu.

Besides religion, another facet of Bengali life which deeply influenced the culture of Mughal Bengal was the social and cultural milieu of the epoch. During the later days of the Sultanate period, Bengali culture found ready patrons in the Muslim kings and their officers. With the Mughal conquest, those happy days were practically at an end. Officers who now came to sojourn, not to stay, turned for recreation to such upper Indian and outlandish music, dance, poetry and story-
telling as they had long been familiar with. The poets who accompanied them were no translators of Sanskrit epics, but composers of flamboyant ‘Jangnamas’ in Persian, celebrating their patrons’ triumphs. So the creative artist and scholar in his quest for patronage could no longer count on officers or viceroys. The zamindars and chieftains as also the kings of the frontier states still offered material encouragement to native talent. The light which had died out at the provincial capital was rekindled in the kingdoms of Kamta-Kamrup, Tippera, Darang-Kachhad, Roshang, Mallabhum and the courts of some bhuiyas. At the court of Musa Khan lived Sanskrit scholars like Mathuresa. The officers of the Arakan King kept salons where literature was studied and produced. Mukundarama lived and sang at the court of a Hindu zamindar. But, to be sure, the encouragement offered by petty zamindars and chieftains was poor compensation for the loss of the Sultans’ patronage. A large section of the public however now came forward as the patron of poets and scholars. This was not an entirely new development, but the changed circumstances must have contributed to it to a considerable extent. The growing society of Vaishnava neophytes was now the audience to whom the Vaishnava poet and biographer addressed themselves. Authors of ‘panchalis’ did not confine their literary activities to the courts of the chiefs alone, but went about singing and reciting their compositions in public gatherings. Navadvipa by now had developed into a great centre of Sanskritic learning. There, as also in less famous places, scholars lived and taught students often in affluent circumstances. Occasional land or cash gifts from the rich and presents from departing students were apparently their means of subsistence. Appointment as private tutors was another source of income.

The state of higher education was an important element in the cultural milieu of the period. The tols were centres of secondary and higher Sanskritic studies. There the average student began with the study of grammar and lexicon. A course of classical literature followed, the education being finally rounded off with at least a smattering of Navyanyaya. Philosophical studies in which Samkhya, Mimamsa and Vaiseshika featured prominently, constituted a higher discipline through which at least some did go. But the study of Navyanyaya was
the rage of the day and students from all over Bengal and even distant parts of India flocked to Navadvipa for this purpose. Places like Santipura and Jaugrama flourished as lesser centres of Nyaya studies.

The Muslim poets and officers at the court of Roshang represented a wider culture. In the court of Ashraf Khan,—an officer of the Magh king who patronized Daulat Kazi,—were regularly read and discussed Arabic and Persian religious and literary works as also the products of such Indian dialects as Gujarati and Gohari. Alaol, perhaps the most versatile of the mediaeval Bengali poets, was a polyglot who knew Sanskrit, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and Hindi and was well-versed in Yoga-sastra, sexual science, music etc. Qureshi Magan, Alaol’s patron, knew Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Burmese and Sanskrit and, like his protégé, also had a knowledge of music, drama, poetry and rhetoric. Viewed in this context, the fact that Roshang alone succeeded in throwing up a new and powerful art-form in the 17th century becomes easily understandable.

IX. Some significant trends in literature.

Literature, the most important product of Bengali culture during our period, was marked by a number of socially significant trends. Nearly the whole of it, as already mentioned, was religious in character. And as Vaishnavism was the most creative religious movement of the period, Vaishnava literature became, almost as a matter of course, its most significant cultural product. ‘Padas’ or lyrical verses in Bengali and Vrajabhasha and ‘kirtanas’ embodying the love-lores of Krishna and Radha were popular in Bengal even before the days of Chaitanya and had reached their perfection in the writings of Chandidasa and Vidyapati. Lesser men who often reached great heights carried on the tradition. To ‘padas’ which expressed ecstatic language devotion to Krishna and Radha, had been added a new type of lyric which sought to immortalise the devotee’s veneration for Chaitanya. ‘Padas’ in honour of Krishna and Chaitanya and ‘kavyas’ telling the legends of the cowherd-god continued to be written in our period. The long list of ‘pada’ writers who flourished during the latter part of the 16th and the early days of the 17th century includes the name of at least one considerable poet,—Govindadasa. But the great
days of Vaishnava lyrics were definitely over. For even Govindadasa was a pigmy compared with Vidyapati and Chandidas; and he did not shine in comparison with lesser poets like Jnanadasa either.

It was in the field of Vaishnava biographical literature that our period saw the climax of a long process of growth. This particular literary tradition had a humble beginning in the nebulous lyrics of Chaitanya's immediate followers and first assumed an enduring shape in the writings of Prabodhananda, Kavikarnapura and Vrindavanadasa. It reached its climax towards the close of the 16th century. Chaitanyakarita of Krishnadasa Kaviraja, the greatest product of Vaishnava biographical literature, was written in our period. The stock of Vaishnava biographers was enriched by a new theme in the first quarter of the 17th century: the life-stories of the great Vaishnava missionaries,—Srinivasa, Narottama and Syamananda,—now engaged their attention. Of the Vaishnava histories dealing with their lives, at least one,—Premavilasa,—was almost definitely produced in our period. Though these works are very valuable as source-material for contemporary history, their worth as literary products is less above question. A period of decline had definitely set in so far as literary merit was concerned.

With the rapid crystallization of Bengal Vaishnavism into a sect under the leadership of the missionaries from Vrindavana, the need for popular renderings of the higher philosophy and basic tenets of the system was evidently felt. Long passages in the Chaitanyakarita had first attended to this need. In the early days of the 17th century Yadunandanadasa, Yadunatha Dasa and others translated into Bengali the Sanskrit works of the Vrindavana gosvamins, while some wrote short tracts on Vaishnava philosophy and Rasa-sastra on the basis of Bhaktirasamritasindhu and Ujjvalanilamani. These works constituted a practically new type and their literary quality is also reckoned high.

Associated with, but only partly a by-product of the Vaishnava movement, were the Sahajiya tracts which first appeared towards the close of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. Except in rare passages, this type of literature never reached any high quality, but those produced
during our period had at least a certain amount of decency and cleanliness of thought to their credit. The same cannot be said of the Sahajiya writings of a later epoch which became almost pornographic in character.

It was during our period and the one immediately following it, that some of the best specimens of another type of literature were produced. This type is generally known as ‘mangalakavya’ or ‘panchali’. Poetical works embodying the popular legends connected with the local deities were first written in Bengali at least as early as the 15th century. From the last quarter of the 16th century onwards, production of such works increased considerably in volume. Of these numerous works those which can definitely be attributed to our period are all connected with the legends of Chandi or Ganga. Mukundarama, the greatest of the ‘panchali’ poets, lived and produced his masterpiece during the troubled years following the Mughal conquest. The number and variety of the ‘mangalakavyas’ increased during the latter half of the 17th century. But nothing was produced to surpass or even equal the work of Mukundarama in literary excellence. Here again the 17th century compares unfavourably with the 16th. Here too production did not reach any dead end; it even increased in volume. Works bearing the stamp of mediocre talent were written from time to time. But that genius which inspired the poetry of Mukundarama was conspicuous by its absence.

During the period which saw the consolidation and establishment of Mughal rule in Bengal on a firm basis, the work of translating the epics,—mostly in abeyance during the preceding years of trouble,—was once more resumed and brought to a fitting climax. The Mahabharata of Kasirama Dasa, perhaps the noblest work of translation in the Bengali language, was written in the first decade of the 17th century. Partial translations of the epics were also undertaken in this period under the patronage of the Kuch Bihar kings.

A development very different in character took place at Roshang in Arakan under the direct patronage of the courtiers of the Magh king. There the cosmopolitan culture of the officers’ salons led to the growth of a secular romantic literature. The earliest work of this type was produced in the days of Nusrat Shah of Gaur and had for its theme the
love-story of Vidya and Sundara. A very long period of inactivity in this sphere appears to have followed, until at Roshang the secular tradition in Bengali literature was revived in a fresh and attractive form. In the third or fourth decade of the 17th century, Daulat Kazi wrote his *Lor-Chandran* or *Sati Mayna*,—a romantic love-story in verse,—on the basis of the original work of that name in Thet Hindi. Thenceforward there followed in Bengal a stream of secular romantic poetry which reached its high water-mark in the *Vidya-Sundara* of Bharatachandra.

**X. Navyanyaya.**

It was not her literature which gave Bengal a position of pre-eminence in India’s intellectual life during the later medieval period. According to tradition, Vasudeva Sarvabhauma (cir. 1450-1520) brought from Mithila to Bengal Gangesa’s *Tattvachintamani* towards the close of the 15th century and established ‘the first great academy of logic in Nadia’. But the real founder of the Gaudiya school of Navyanyaya was Raghunatha Tarkika Siromani whose *Tattvachintamani-didhiti*, a commentary on Gangesa’s work containing also a running criticism on the various topics of Nyaya, and *Padartha-tattva-nirupanam*, a highly controversial criticism of the categories given in Vaiseshika, proved to be the great starting point of studies in neo-logic in Bengal. Raghunatha flourished in the first half of the 16th century. From his time to that of Gadadhara Bhattacharya towards the close of the 17th century, Navyanyaya in Bengal had a continuous history of unchallenged supremacy. The dates of the great *naiyaikas* who flourished during this century and a half cannot be accurately ascertained. But several of them are known, more or less definitely, to have flourished in the last quarter of the 16th and the first quarter of the 17th century. It was during this period that Ramabhadra Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya wrote his commentaries on Vaiseshika philosophy and on the works of Gautama and Raghunatha. Jagadisa Tarkalankara wrote, besides a number of commentaries, a work dealing with the doctrine of causality known as *Nyayadarsa, Sodasakti-prakasika*, a grammatico-philosophical treatise and *Tarkamrita*, an original work on elementary principles. Bhavananda Siddhantavagisa
is credited with a work on the philosophy of grammar, only a part of which has survived. The most outstanding Nyaya scholar of this period was Mathuranatha Tarkavagisa who was one of the ‘big three’ (the other two being Raghunatha and Gadadhara) in the realm of Navyanyaya in Bengal. Said to have been a pupil of Raghunatha, Mathuranatha achieved distinction through his commentaries on his master’s Tattvachintamani-didhiti. The ‘Mathuri’ commentaries, however, ‘are not much appreciated by the scholars of Nadia’ because they are ‘very lucid and easy’.

During the first half-century of Mughal rule, the history of Navyanyaya in Bengal was one of continuous growth, marked not merely by the works of great scholars but by a multiplication of the centres of study as well. It was in fact towards the close of the 16th century that Bengal’s position of pre-eminence as a centre of Nyaya culture was firmly established. But did this growth signify any upward movement,—vertical or even spiral? Few indeed are in a position to answer that question, and none at least has yet faced it squarely. One may only note with surprise that the bulk of the product of Navyanyaya in Bengal consisted of commentaries, sub-commentaries and sub-sub-commentaries. Bengal did produce “a large number of original and independent treatises on different sections and topics of Navyanyaya. It is curious that the fame of Bengal rests not so much on these as on the commentaries. . . . Neither are the former, with the exception of a few, quite so popular as the latter.” The bulk of the manuscripts of Navyanyaya so far discovered are copies of commentaries, not of original works. This is as much true of the period under review as of those that followed or preceded it. It would be impertinent of any one but a specialist to comment on the worth of Navyanyaya as an intellectual product. But the opinion of Father Pons of Carical, a Jesuit missionary of the 18th century who studied the subject with interest and respect, is well worth quoting. Speaking of Navyanyaya in 1740 he said that it was ‘stuffed with an endless number of questions, a great deal more subtle than useful’. “It is a chaos of minutae”, Father Pons proceeded, “as Logic was in Europe about two centuries ago. The students spend several years in studying a thousand varieties of subtleties on the members of the syllogism, the causes, the
negations, the genera, the species etc. They dispute stubbornly on such-like trifles and go away without having acquired any other knowledge". If this was the true state of higher education in Bengal under the guidance of the Naiyayikas, then the layman must agree with Father Pons's opinion that Navyanyaya as a subject of study was 'a great deal more subtle than useful'.

XI. Sanskrit literature in Bengal.

Bengal's contribution to Sanskrit literature in our period in branches other than Nyaya, was less voluminous and significant than in the preceding epoch. The creative period of Bengali Vaishnava philosophy, theology, Rasasastra etc. which produced such a spate of works in the Sanskrit language, was already over. By the third quarter of the 16th century the Smriti writers of Bengal had also laid down their pen. The more famous of the Tantric compilations and treatises, which no doubt continued to be a formative influence, belonged to the same period. Nevertheless, a few Sanskrit works on a number of subjects are known to have been written during our period. Rudra Nyaya-Vachaspati composed three poetical works,—Bhavavilasa, Bhramaradutam and Vrindavana-vinoda Kavya,—one of which was an eulogy praising Bhava Singh, son of Man Singh. Visvanatha Siddhantapanchanana wrote a work on metres. But the total volume of such works was not considerable. Nor were these works in any way significant. They appear to be mere products of an old habit which still persisted, but had lost its innate vitality.

XII. Architecture, painting and music.

During our period, Bengal produced little that was either impressive or enduring in the field of arts other than the purely literary. Architecture has practically no history so far as the first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal is concerned. Religious edifices of the Hindus and Muslims and castles or palaces of kings and governors were the forms in which the architectural talent of mediaeval Bengal usually expressed itself. No mosque or castle which can be ascribed to our period with any amount of definiteness has survived. The forts and bungalows described by Mirza Nathan at times in an appreciative language were often, like some fairy tale castle, built in a
day, though only with mud and bamboo. Even in the second half of the 17th century, the governor's residence at Dacca, as Tavernier found it, was nothing more than an enclosure of high walls in the middle of which was 'a poor house merely built of wood'. In the district of Dacca, however, there are three small Mughal water-forts of an unknown date which may have been built in or near about our period. One of these is at Idakpur or Munshiganj on the right bank of the Dhaleswari, the two others are close to Narayanganj on either bank of the Sitalaksha and known as the forts of Sonakanda and Khizrpur respectively. Built apparently for the purpose of keeping the Portuguese and Arakan pirates in check, these small forts had nothing specially attractive or architecturally significant about them. Their purpose was purely utilitarian, not decorative, and they were of the type 'so common along the creeks of Bassein and Salsette in the Bombay Presidency'.

The record of Bengali temple architecture during our period is also very poor. Following the organisation of Bengal Vaishnavism into a well-ordered sect and the simultaneous consolidation of Mughal rule, a large number of temples were built during the comparatively peaceful and prosperous years of the later 17th century. But the first half-century of Mughal rule saw very little activity in this direction. The building of a temple of the multi-towered type at Damrail in the Khulna district, now in a dilapidated condition, is ascribed to Pratapaditya's father. The temple of Malleswara in Vishnupur is dated 1618. Hardly of the Bengali style, this peculiar temple had a straight base for the roof, a plinth and a cubical shape like Orissan temples and a quarterfoil arch over the door-way. The Chaitanya temple at Guptipara, Hugli was also built in the days of Akbar or a little later and was of the Jor Bangla type (with doubled triangular roofs) of the simplest variety, having only one spire. The Palpara temple at Chakdaha, Nadia, also ascribed to our period, "is typical of the style prevalent in Lower Bengal, where . . . . the houses of the gods are closely modelled on those of their worshippers and show the same simplicity of ground plan and the same curved roof". This beautiful specimen is also marked by an economy and refinement of decoration, in which mythological scenes feature prominently. Besides such brick-built temples, there must
have been others of wood like the one which Nathan saw at Jessore, remarkable for ‘the height of its pillars, the beauty of its thatching and its nice workmanship’. The only conclusion which one may perhaps draw from such meagre data is that architectural activity during our period, though not vigorous, was not without a certain variety and the tendency towards baroque which characterised the temples of a later epoch was not yet markedly evident.

Our knowledge of Bengali painting in the period under review is even more meagre. Dineshchandra Sen published the reproductions of a number of paintings ascribed to the 17th and even 16th centuries. But it is difficult to ascertain how far these dates are correct. There are references in Chandimangala to painting and embroidery work having the ten incarnations, Puranic legends, flora and fauna for their themes. But unfortunately no specimens of such works have survived. In fact, nearly the entire history of mediaeval Bengali painting is shrouded in darkness. One may hazard some conclusions on the basis of a few specimens that have survived; but such conclusions are very likely to be mistaken. An illustrated Bengal manuscript of Kalachakratantra, dated 1445 A.D. (1503 V.S.) show a decadent imitation of earlier hieratic paintings, the figure-drawings being characterised by angular lines and representation of both the eyes in profile faces. The next definite landmark is provided by an illustrated Harivamsa MS. dated 1479 A.D. (1401 S.E.) in the possession of the Asiatic Society. The paintings on the wooden cover of this MS. represent the ten incarnations, various Puranic deities and scenes from Krishna’s ‘Vrindavana-lila’. Though hieratic in character, these paintings with their greater technical imperfections and deeper emotional vitality represent a closer approximation to folk-art. A dark period follows until we again come across an illustrated Bhagavata MS. dated 1689 A.D. (1611 S.E.) found at Bhatpara. The numerous paintings contained in this MS. mainly illustrate the Bhagavata legends dealing with the life-story of Krishna. In many ways these are very similar to the ‘Pat’ paintings of a later epoch, being characterised by conventionalised figure-drawings and heightened emotionalism at the same time. While the drawing in these illustrations show greater imperfection than before, there
is a marked naturalism and spontaneity in the representation of animated scenes and animal life, so characteristic of Bengal's folk-art. If the three specimens noted above may be taken to represent the development of Bengali painting over a period of some two centuries and a half, then it would seem that there was a continuous progress from the hieratic tradition towards that of folk-art, and that our period saw one of the numerous stages in the history of this development. But such a conclusion, as already noted, can be nothing more than a probable conjecture in the present state of our knowledge.

An important development in the field of music took place in our period. The tradition of kirtana which received a great impetus from the great Vaishnava Master was developed and elaborated towards the close of the 16th and the earlier days of the 17th century. Of the four modes of kirtana developed in four different regions and known by the names of their places of origin as Gadanhati, Reniti, Manoharsahi and Mandarani the first at least dates back to the early years of the 17th century. The invention of this particular mode is attributed to Narottama Datta, one of the three great missionaries from Vrindavana. According to tradition, Srinivasa was the originator of the Manoharsahi and Reniti modes. Kirtana was not the only form of music which developed during this period. A considerable part of the 'panchalis' was meant to be sung and the appropriate 'raginis' for each such section were indicated. While most of the tunes thus mentioned are classical, there are also references to the popular tunes, e.g., Bhatiyali, in Alaol's Sapta Paykar written in the second half of the 17th century.

XIII. Conclusions.

Seen from the viewpoint of cultural history, the first half-century of Mughal rule was but the continuation of the preceding epoch. Except for the beginning of a secular romantic literature towards the close of this period or perhaps a little later (the exact date of Daulat Kazi's Sati Mayna is not known), it saw the emergence of no new art-form. In religion, it witnessed the organisation of the Vaishnava sect and the origin of the Vaishnava Sahajiya. But the culturally creative epoch of Bengal Vaishnavism was practically at an end by the close of the 16th century. The Vaishnava authors continued to be
prolific, but they no longer produced works in any way comparable to the writings of Vrindavanadasa or Krishnadasa. The post-Chaitanya Sahajiyas failed to produce even a mediocre talent. During the earlier half of the 16th century the religious and intellectual life of Bengal had throbbed with the intense activity of men of unusual stature. In that memorable epoch Chaitanya revitalised the cult of Bhakti, Raghunatha Siromani founded the system of Gaudiya Navyanyaya, Raghunandana re-wrote the Smriti and brought it up-to-date and Krishnananda Agamanagisa compiled his Tantrasara, still reckoned as the most authoritative work of its kind. By the time we cross the threshold of our period this forest-fire is reduced to a mild blaze. The works of Mukundarama, Kasidasa and Krishnadasa appear as the last three flashes illuminating that world of mediocrity. Even these works were not the products of any fresh renaissance. They only marked the final culmination of a long process of growth. Only in the field of Navyanyaya the Bengali intellect showed no sign of decline, but further developed the tradition bequeathed by an earlier age till it reached its climax towards the close of the 17th century. With this exception, the first quarter of the 17th century saw the beginning of an intellectual decline in Bengal. This decline, to be sure, ended in no catastrophic collapse. But, as surely, Bengali culture of the 17th century was only a poor show compared to that of the 16th.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Section III. For the Vaishnava conception of Bhakti and their faith in its superiority, see Chaitanyakaritamrita, adi lila, I and VI, madhya lila, VIII and IX; Premavilasa, 88. For their adoration of Krishna's name, see Chaitanyakaritamrita, adi lila, III and VII, madhya lila, XX and antya lila III; Premavilasa, 48 and 148. For faith in the divinity of Chaitanya and his followers, see Premavilasa, 37, 168, 172, 200, 203, 212; Chaitanyakaritamrita, adi lila, I, III, and VI; Chaitanya Bhagavata, adi lila, II; Srikhande prachina Vaishnava, 8. For 'Gauraparamyavada', and 'Nagaribhava', see Chaitanya chariter upadana, 42-43 52-53; Srikhande prachina Vaishnava; Lochanadasa, 87, 89, 102-103, 118 and his 'padas' in the Appendix, 222 ff. and 263-80. For belief in miracles, see Chaitanyakaritamrita, 107-8, 118-19, 121, 193, 194, 306; Lochanadasa, 44-46, 49 etc.; Premavilasa, 181, 199. For belief in the universal right to salvation, see Chaitanyakaritamrita, 72, 244, 288; Premavilasa, 116, 171; Rasikamangala, 2, 22, 151 etc. For modification of caste ideas, see Chaitanyakaritamrita, 238; Rasikamangala, 58, 151; Premavilasa, IX, 44, 58, 116, 151, 171, 199. For the asocial character of Benga
Vaishnavism see De, 119-20 and his section on “Ethics of Bengal Vaishnavism”; Premavilasa (Berhampore edition), 122-25. For the identification of Vaishnava saints and leaders with Radha’s female companions, see Premavilasa, 168, 172 and 203. For Vaishnava emotionalism, see Chaitanya-charitamrita, 192, 195, 197, 287, 467, 539 etc.; Premavilasa (Berhampore edition), 113, 188 etc. For the Vaishnava ideal of character, see Chaitanya-charitamrita, 62, 119, 386, 586; Premavilasa, 148. For instances of their intolerance, see Chaitanyacharitamrita, 68, 80, 99, 120, 125, 139, 183, 219, 225-26, 257, 273, 292, 309, 392, 416, 480, 586, etc.; Premavilasa, 107-108, 147, 148, 156, 196-97; Rasikamangala, 92, 97, 102, 136. For the element of toleration in Vaishnava religious beliefs, see Chaitanyacharitamrita, 72, 392, 473, 474, 484. For the Vaishnava faith in the superiority of ‘madhurya’, ibid., 224, 280, 378; Premavilasa, 126, 148. For conventional interpretation of the milkmaids’ love for Krishna, see Chaitanyacharitamrita, 223-24.

Section IV. For an account of the early Sahajiya works, see Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult, 202-203. For the Sahajiyas’ belief in the Vaishnava origin of their system and their respect for Vaishnava saints see Sahajiya Sahitya, 118-24, 148, 154, 156-57; Rasakadamba, 3, 83, 85. For exposition of ‘prakritibhajana’ in Vaishnava works, see Chaitanyacharitamrita, 213; Premavilasa, 123 ff; Obscure Religious Cults, 145-46. For the exposition of the same idea in Rasakadamba, see 49-54. For Sahajiya cult in its final form, see Obscure Religious Cults, 144-70. For their ideas in the early stage, see Sahajiya Sahitya, 96-8, 107, 108, 136 ff, 146-51, 155, 158-60, 179, 186, 190. For interpretation of ‘visuddha-satvta’ and ‘suddha-satvta’, see Obscure Religious Cults, 166. For ‘svakiya’ ideal in Sahajiya texts, see Sahajiya Sahitya, 118. For Sahajiya injunctions regarding the secrecy of their practices, see Sahajiya Sahitya, 153, 156-57, 189, 190. For their use of veiled language, see ibid., 126, 159, 164 etc. For Yogic-Tantric influence, see ibid., 96, 154, 164. For Sahajiya attitude to orthodox Vaishnavas, see ibid., 127, 154.

Section V. Many of the standard works and compilations relating to Tantric ideas and practices are ascribed to the earlier half of the 16th century or to the decades immediately preceding the Mughal conquest of Bengal. Among these some of the more important are Krishnananda’s Tantrasara, Brahmananda’s Saktananda-tarangini and Tara-rohasya, Puranandanda’s Saktakrama, Sarvananda’s Sarvollahatantra (ascribed to the 15th century) etc. As ideas and practices of Bengal Tantricism are known to have remained more or less the same throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the account given in the present work is based on the Tantric writings mentioned above as also on those produced during the period under review.

For an account of mediaeval Bengali Tantric works, see C. Chakravarti, Introduction to the catalogue of Sanskrit Mss., VII (Tantra) in the collection of R.A.S.B.; also article on ‘Sakti worship and Sakti saints of Bengal’ in the Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. II. For the philosophy of mediaeval Bengali Tantricism, see Saktananda-tarangini, 1st and 3rd ullasa, Tara-rohasya, 2; Sritattvachintamani, I., 62, 70-71, 84, XVI, 106-13; Introduction to Sarvollahatantra. See ibid. for exposition of the fundamentals of Kulachara. For the eclecticism of Pasvachara texts, see Saktananda-tarangini,
73-4; Sritattvachintamani, V, 1-10; Tantrasara, 309-93: For the importance
of the ‘guru’ and account of the external rituals, see Saktananda-tarangini,
35, 58-64; Sritattvachintamani, II, 5, 36; Tantrasara, 22-4, 30-56, 57-108,
111-55. For Tantric ‘inner worship’, see Sritattvachintamani, VI; Saktan-
anda-tarangini, IV, 82-100; Tantrasara, 156 ff., 545-60. For the typical
practices of Kulachara, see Tararahasya, 4-5, 14-16 and Syamarahasya, IV,
VIII, IX. For the spread of these practices in the 18th century see Diksha-
nachandrika, f. 103b quoted in Introduction to Sarvollasatantra, 23. For
Kulachara influence on Pasvachara texts, see Saktananda-tarangini, 30-32,
81, 90, 122; Sritattvachintamani XVI, 53, 93; Tantrasara, 666, 678, 713, 719,
1053-55. For reference to Sakta-Tantric practices in Vaishnava literature,
see Chaitanya Bhagavata, 12; Chaitanyakaritamrita, 119. For ‘abhicharas’
and Tantric occultism, see Tantrasara, 756-59, 766-83, 847, 855 ff., 1009 ff.,
1045-47 etc. For Sakta-Tantric attitude to caste, see Tararahasya, 12, 34;
Saktananda-tarangini, 34-8, 286; Syamarahasya, 87-8, 92; Sarvollasatantra,
XXI. For Sakta-Tantric attitude to Vaishnavas, see Saktananda-tarangini,
286-88, 298; Premavilasa, 10; Rasikamangala, 13, 72, 74.

Section VI. The account of Hindu folk-religion is based mainly on
Chandimangala, 1-6, 9-10; Dharmamangala, 1-10, 12-17; Manasamangala,
6-9, 11-12; also see Madhyayuge Vangla o Vangali, 37-43. For Durga-puja,
see, Chandimangala, 1-6; Manrique, 1, 73, Raghunandana, Kiritatatva, 504.
For Dharmamangala worship in present times and analysis of the nature of the
cult, see Burdwan District Gazetteer, 57; Howrah District Gazetteer, 42;
Vangla Sahityer Itihasa, 492-94; Obscure Religious Cults, 297-307 and
introduction to Dharmamangala. For admission of local godlings into the
orthodox pantheon, see Raghunandana, krityatattvam, 502, 510, 511, 513.
For the ‘rratras’ etc., see ibid., 499, 501, 503, 507-509 etc. For the influence
of superstition, see, besides the ‘panchalis’, Rasikamangala 24; Chaitanya-
charitamrita, 105; Raghunandana, 501, 517. For popularity of black magic,
see Rasikamangala, 166; Chandimangala, 151, 167-68; Baharistan, 146b,
222b, tr., I, 273-74, II, 486.

Section VII. For the state of Islam in this period, see Vange Sufi
Prabhav and Purva Pakistane Islam. For the different aspects of Muslim
attitude, see Padnavati, 1-4, 150-51, Saptay Paykar, 1, 3-4, 14-15, 18-19, 31.
For references to Sufi orders and Bauls see Chandimangala, 103, 195; Arakan
Rajasabhay Vangala Sahitya, 118-19; Baharistan, 60a; tr., I, 150; Stewart,
264; Abdul Latif’s Travels in Bengal: Past and Present, 1928. For veneration
of ‘pirs’ and Muslim superstitions, see Baharistan, 15a-15b; tr., I, 42-3;
Risalat-us-Shuhada, J.A.S.B., 1874; Chandimangala, 102; Travels of
Thevenot and Careri, 94-5. For conversions to Hinduism, see Baharistan,
112a-112b; tr., I; 235. For the average Muslim’s orthodoxy, see Chandi-
mangala, 102.

Section VIII. For Persian ‘Jang-namas’ written in Bengal, see
Baharistan, 23b, 55a, 106b, 173a, etc; tr., I, 70, 138, 224, 348 etc. For
patronage of Bengali literature in frontier Kingdoms and the bhuiyas’
courts, see Vangla Sahityer Itihasa 309-13; Madhyayuge Vangla o Vangali,
20-21. For recital of ‘panchalis’ in public gatherings by the poets, see
Dharmamangala, 21. For centres of learning, courses of study and the
scholars' income, see Chaitanya Bhagavata, Madhyakhanda, VII; Rasikamangala, 33, 37-8; Dharmamangala, 18-19. For the culture of the Arakan court see S. Sen's article in Visvabharati Patrika, VII, 137 (extract from Daulat Kazi's Sati Mayna); Padmavati, introduction, VIII; Arakan Raja-sabhay Vangala Sahitya, 34.

Section IX. The analysis of the main trends in Bengali literature is based on the standard works of Dr. D. C. Sen and Dr. S. Sen, and a study of the major literary productions of the period. Some of the conclusions are my own.

Section X. The account of Navyanyaya is based on History of Indian Logic, 461-89; M. Chakravarti, 'History of Navyanyaya in Bengal and Mithila', J.A.S.B., 1915; C. Chakravarti 'Bengal's contribution to Philosophical Literature in Sanskrit', Indian Antiquary, 1929; D. C. Bhattacharya, Vanglar Sarasvata Avadana.

Section XI. For Bengal's contribution to Sanskrit literature in this period, see M. Chakravarti's article, J.A.S.B., 1915, 286-87.

Section XII. For mud-forts, see Baharistan, 55a, 114b, 148a etc.; tr., I, 138, 242, 278 etc. For the viceroy's residence, see Tavernier, I, 128. For the water-forts, see Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1924-25, 93-94 and plate XXXI (b and c). For mediaeval Bengali temples, see M. Chakravarti's article in J.A.S.B., 1909, 141-62; Cunningham's Report, VIII, 150; Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1920-21 and plates VI and VII (a); Baharistan, 56a; tr., I, 138-39. For paintings, see plates in Vrihat Vanga, II, 637 ff.; Chandimangala, 74-6. The MS. of Kalachakratantra mentioned in the text is in Cambridge (Addl. MS. 1364); photostat copies of some of the illustrations are in the possession of the Asiatic Society. The Bhagavata MS. dated 1689 is in the possession of Sri S. K. Saraswati of the Asiatic Society. For the music of the period, see Vangla Sahityer Itihasa; Vanglay Sangiter Itihasa and K. N. Mitra's Kirtana.