Opinions may differ as to the exact date when Mymensingh Gitika and Purvavanger Gitika were composed. But probably none would deny that the floating mass of materials was being accumulated by way of oral transmission and that the process began earlier than the eighteenth century.

In a ritualistic and agrarian set-up like that of ours, it was particularly the written literatures which, before the advent of printing, suffered most. The scribes had enough opportunity for interpolations while pretending to remain true to tradition. Oral literature, on the other hand, went on along two main streams. The former is Kathakata (narration of the mythological stories), which chiefly depended upon the 'Matter of the Sanskrit' (or ancient Hindu) world. Dr. Dines Chandra Sen, while describing the characteristic process adopted by the Kathakas (the story-teller concerned with the above-mentioned matter) observes: "There are formulae which every Kathaka has to get by heart, — set passages describing not only Śiva, Lakṣaṁ, Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, and other deities, but also describing a city, a battlefield, morning, noon and night, and many other subjects which incidentally occur in the course of
the narration of a story. ² The process obviously points to the extremely rigid and retentive social pattern which abhorred change and liked to keep its values intact. And that again reminds us of its complementary current which found expression in Gitikā-literature. In these narrative songs there is no such tendency towards mechanical regular- tion or regimentation of thought. To quote Dīnēś Chandra Sen, "they smell of fresh grass and fieldflowers that grow plentifully by country-side and in them are embodied lessons of the highest renunciation and sacrifice". Regarding the form of these songs, the term 'Ballad' has been used by our scholars and this can be substantiated by the following arguments.

Schlegel, while making a study of the old ballads, observed that "these were composed, in a manner of speaking, by the folk itself as a whole". The gitikās concerned give a similar impression. Considering that these are no rudimen- tary products of primitive society, it is strange enough that they have sprung forth from a homogeneous community.² Apart from the consideration of anonymous gitikās such as Maluā, Rūpavatī, Dewānā Madinā, it should not be lost sight of that gitikās like Kaṅka O Līlā and Mahuā are not individual compositions. Kaṅka O Līlā, we are told, was composed by four bards; the other too was the work of more than one
But the overall impression is, that these gitikas indicate collective possession and not individual authorship. One gitika differs from the other only regarding the story-element and there is no such impress of distinct authorship as is found in the Mangala-kavyas of Mukundarama and Bhāratachandra. Secondly, remembering that "it is in the ballad literature that the deeper notes of tragedy are struck, which one misses in the aristocratic narrative", one may safely identify these gitikas as ballads as opposed to the Manasāmāṅgala-cycle which definitely is, notwithstanding its pathos, artistically directed to higher ends. The popular appeal of the latter does not conceal its tendency to delocalised, or strive towards cultural unity, which is absent in the gitikas. Again, recognising the close connection of dance and song in a ballad, it is also to be admitted that the purpose of the song is not, like dance-music, simply to order the steps, but also to arouse by its meaning and content certain feelings in a deeper way. One can notice by the demeanour of the dancers that they are not indifferent to the import and spirit of the song. That this demeanour referred to is more or less present in the gitikas is to be accepted from their dramatic sequence, from their 'diśās' (another name for refrain, the word meaning indication) or 'dhuās' and the juxtaposition of the exciting rhythm of nursery rhymes with the regular scheme of payar. Also the Gīta-kathās like Kājalrekhā and Chaudhunā Laṇāi do not fall beyond the scope and category of Gitikās. They are tales interspersed with songs. They resemble
the type mentioned by Dr. Boas as 'poetic prose', where the tale is chanted in a kind of recitative.

Both Abanindranath Tagore and Dakshinaranjan Mitra Mazumdar, the master narrators of fairy-tales in our time, have carried the possibilities of Gitakathas further to an artistic finish.

The word rāga is often rendered as melody in English. But practically speaking, there is a kind of melody, sung with full-throated ease and sweetness, which should not be termed as raga. The Gitakathas are melodious, but not concerned with classical Indian Music. That is another reason for the looseness of their musical form which identifies them as lyrical ballads in the broad connotation of the term, and not lyrics. The Mangala-kāvyas are not ballads in that many of them have a string of rāgas about them. Bereft of any definite literary bias and musical basis, these Gitakathas at least have an air of artlessness. "Folk", says Harder, "that does not mean the rabble of the streets". These Gitakathas belong to the folk tradition. They bring us in contact with the essentially free undercurrent of our tradition. In this sense they are traditional and timeless. For on account of their wealth of details, they offer a knowledge that is indispensable to the student of literature as well as to the student of the growth of human society. That the mixed style of these Gitakathas does
not give any clue whatsoever as to the turning-point of our cultural history in which they have been composed, do not take away from them their virtue of spontaneity. They may be employed to substantiate Gummere's view: "poetry little by little its own dialects".

The eighteenth century revival of the Ballad in the English literature was largely due, as some have discerned, to revolt against the orthodox literary atmosphere. The Mymensingh Gitikas and Purvavanger Gitikas are unorthodox, but they do not suggest any signs of literary revivalism.

Sākta Songs

The Sākta Songs came to be composed in the eighteenth century. And there was a Zeitgeist behind them. First, because the Vaisnava lyrics had reached a decadent stage; Secondly, a disintegration in society set in in Seventeenth Century Bengal. The disintegrated individual in the eighteenth century looked for his theme in society, but perforce with an individualistic slant. His changed views of life and the universe, of death and devotion, recreated the Sākta myth while he could not neglect the form of lyric song which alone could make his viewpoint persuasive enough. It is a pertinent question whether the term lyric applies to these songs. These
songs, it is true, are imbued with personal moods and are completely free from the collective touch. So far as the choice of theme is concerned, the makers of these songs were free to choose subjects from their own visionary experiences. Truly speaking, they chose themselves for subjects and concentrated predominantly upon their own points of view. But that does not suffice to make a lyric. A lyric must have a well-knit word-order and an inherent beauty of form. While set to tune, it acquires an added charm. But the essential lyric value of a poem is not to be decided by its adaptability to a tune overdressed. Reminding ourselves of this basic difference existing between the pure lyric and the lyric song, we have to admit that while the Vaisnava Padas fall into the former category, the Sakta verses fall into the latter. A Vaisnava pada, like a Tagore song, stands by its totality in the sense which is absent in a Sakta composition. Therefore the term Padavali should not be applied to the Sakta songs. "The criterion of poetic achievement, as the moderns would admit, lies in the excellence of technique and in the validity of inspiration; in some poets this essential combination has given to their ... urge the final veracity of Art". Rāmaprasāda's poetry is replete with inspired utterances and in this respect it is akin to a Bāul-song where one does not find the technical
excellence of Vaiśnava padas. Thus, in Sākta and Bāul Songs the age-old dispute between Mysticism and Art remains unsolved. All these considerations do not, however, deprive Rāmaprasāda (1718-75) of his credit for completing the religious strain which had originated with Chārya-songs, culminated in the Vaiśnava lyrics and then nearly exhausted itself on several occasions from ennui. Rāmaprasāda's songs form an emotional interlude between old and modern Bengali poetry — an interlude marked by a singular intensity. We had to wait until Rāmanidhi Gupta (1741-1839), the leading poet among the younger contemporaries, appeared on the scene to give a new turn to Bengali poetry.
NOTES

1 A term used by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji in History of Bengal, vol. I, p. 392.

2 Dr. Dines Chandra Sen, History of Bengali Language and Literature, Calcutta University, 1911, pp. 585-88.

3 Dr. Dines Chandra Sen, Folk Literature of Bengal, Calcutta University, 1920, p.261.

4 Cf. F. B. Gummere, Old English Ballads, Boston, 1894, p.134.

5 William Witherle Lawrence, The Middle Ages, Lectures on Literature, Columbia, University Lectures, 1909-10, p.144.

6 Cf. Dr. Asutosh Bhattaçārya's view in this connection have been expressed in the introductory notes to Bāīś Kavir Manasāmāṅgala or Bāīś, Calcutta University, 1954. Dr. Bhattaçārya, however, rashly brands the Manasāmāṅgala-cycle with the epic of growth(primitive epic). Individual authorship is the identifying feature here that contradicts Dr. Bhattaçārya's analogy.

7 Cf. F. Sidgwick's view: "The root of the word 'Ballad' implies 'dancing' and the earliest forms of it, in Latin, Provençal, and early French, mean 'a song intended as the accompaniment to dance' (The Ballad, p.20)."


10 Dr. Amiya Chakravartī, Modern Tendencies in English Literature, Greater India Series no. 5, Calcutta, Introductory note, IX.