CHAPTER II

WHAT IS MYSTICISM?

Before initiating any discussion on the Assamese mystic poets, it would be pertinent to throw some light on the meaning and characteristics of mysticism.

It is gathered that throughout the evolution of human civilization, Mysticism has been defined in different ways by the seers and sages, religious thinkers and philosophers of the West and the East.

Mysticism is commonly understood to mean the idea and belief that knowledge of God and of real truth may be obtained through meditation or spiritual insight, independently of the mind and the senses.

The concept of mysticism is very ancient. The Greek philosophers developed the idea of mysticism. According to them, mysticism is associated with 'mystery' which is derived from the Greek root 'mous' meaning 'to close the lips, eyes and ears and to shut the doors of fleeting senses and passing passions'. In the present century, the same spirit has been upheld by Albert Einstein as follows:

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The most beautiful thing we can know is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed.¹

In the same vein, the great modern philosopher Bertrand Russel has stated:

But the greatest men who have been philosophers have felt the need of both science and mysticism; the attempt to harmonize the two was made in their life, and what always must for all its arduous uncertainty make philosophy, to some minds, a greater thing than either science or religion.²

In ancient Greece, a person who was 'initiated' into the mysteries of existence and the esoteric knowledge of the realities of life and death, was called 'mystes' i.e., 'mystic', the 'enlightened', the 'deified', the seer, the saint; the philosopher. K.P.S. Choudhury summarizes the true disposition of a philosopher as narrated in Plato's The Republic in the following manner: (a) an eager desire for knowledge of all real existence; (b) hatred of falsehood, and devoted love of truth; (c) contempt for the pleasure of the body; (d) indifference to money; (e) high-mindedness; (f) gentleness; (g) a quick apprehension; (h) a musical and harmonious disposition.³

The Greek thinkers believed that mysteries were closely and essentially concerned with the life and destiny of the individual. They also believed that the initiated one can enjoy the bliss of the sacred secret wisdom which is the ultimate aim to be attained by the mystics. That the door of secret wisdom is open only to the initiated one is stated to have been told by Jesus as follows:

Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without (i.e., uninitiated) all these things are done in parables.

The Vedic seers too acclaimed that without initiation none can attain wisdom. In the Svetasvatara Upanisad it is put as follows:

\[
\text{Tadvedaguhyaopanisatsu guraham tad brahman}
\]
\[
\text{vedate brahmayaonimann.}
\]

--- In the Upanisads which are the essence of the Vedas, it is stated that the very secret wisdom is enunciated to the initiated one.

The etymological meaning of the word Upanisads is the setting of the disciple at the feet of his master who only can communicate the mystery i.e., 'Aham Brahma' to one who has been

4. Ibid., p. 2.
Thus, initiation has been considered as a significant stage for proceeding to know the Supreme One. The physical birth is to be initiated to the enlightened one. Through initiation a mystic develops the power of intuition which leads him to a stage where he can establish direct contact or communication with God.

Defining the nature and characteristics of a mystic,

The Concise Oxford Dictionary states that a mystic is:

One who seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the 'Deity' or who believes in spiritual apprehension of truth, beyond the understanding.5

It is, therefore, clear that mysticism is the ineffable intuitive experience of or direct union with the Divine Reality, while a mystic is a person who has himself attained the incommunicable experience of mystic union in greater or lesser degree and not one who speculates and philosophizes about the Divine.

Emphasizing the importance of direct union with the Divine Reality as a 'sin qua non' for a mystic, Dogobert D. Runes states that mysticism is a type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine process.  

In recent times, it has been used to mean two characteristically different German words. The first one is 'MYSTIZISMUS', which stands for the cult of the supernatural. The second usage of the word is 'MYSTIN' which stands for an immediate experience of a divine and human relationship. The Greek root of the word is 'Mystiko' which means 'silence'. However, 'mysticism' has two connotations: one is the direct intercourse with God, while the other tries to prove the soul's possible union with the Absolute Reality. To sum up, the doctrine which explains the possibility of a direct communion with the Supreme Reality is called 'mysticism', while the experience derived from this process is called mystic experience.

The mystic experience:

The spiritual understanding of the Absolute or the Ultimate is a similar sort of experience to all mystics, whether of the East or of the West. Rudolph Otto, in his comparison of the Western and Oriental mysticism rightly observes, "In Mysticism, there are indeed strong primal impulses working the human soul which, as such, are completely unaffected by differences of climate, of geographical position or of race."

A mystic's experiences are personal and, at once, universal. In the observation of the mystics of every religion of the world, there is almost a similar tune. Originally, the religious preacher is a mystic who has a direct, and an intimate, intense and immediate kind of experience of God through contemplation and the power of intuition. In this connection, Ramaswami Sastri rightly observes, "Intuition is the inner eye of intellect, just as intellect is the inner eye of man."

The mystic, in his deep spiritual experiences, is at times, filled with an ecstasy of joy of cosmic grandeur. In this state

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of the human psyche, there is the Omnipresence of God, caused by the assimilation of the soul with the 'One'. This is the state of complete identification of the individual soul with the Supreme Being. This very unique state of identification of the individual soul with the Absolute One has been interpreted and described in various ways by the philosophers of all times and climes.

The stages and characteristics of Mystic Experiences:

This 'union with the Absolute' has to undergo four stages. The first stage is the 'purgation' of the bodily desires. At the second stage, it is the 'purification', i.e., of self by a 'profaneness of one's heart and will-power'. The third stage culminates in the 'illumination' of the 'Mind'. At the fourth stage, there is finally a union with the Absolute, i.e., the state of one's ecstasy of joy in being One with the Supreme Reality. It is the state of bliss in which the mystic's 'Self' and the power of 'Will' are merged into 'One', the Creator of the Universe.

Dwelling upon the essence of mysticism, Underhill, says that "mysticism, in its purest form, is the science of the
ultimate. Like him many thinkers like William James, W.R. Inge, Leuba, Zahnner, S. Radhakrishnan, S.N. Dasgupta, R.D. Ranade and others have given their interpretations in their own ways.

According to James, there are four salient characteristics of mystical experiences: (a) **Ineffability** which is the negative description of the mental experience in a direct manner, (b) **Noetic quality**, which means a state of insight into the depths of truth, (c) **Transiency**, which asserts the transient nature of mystical experience, (d) **Passivity**, in which the mystic feels a sense of loss of his own will and is grasped by a superior power.10

On the other hand, Underhill points out the following five characteristics which slightly differ from those of James: (a) True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical, but an active organ of life-process, (b) The aim is completely transcendental and spiritual, (c) The reality on which the mystic sets his mind and soul is always an object of exploration, (d) The whole mystic experience

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9. E. Underhill, : Mysticism. 1960, p. 72

culminates "in the living union with One." It is arrived at through a process of arduous psychological and spiritual discipline. (e) Mysticism is not a pursuit of supernatural joy. He calls it a highly specialized search for the Reality. The 'love and will of heart' dominates that of the head.  

Thus, it is clear that there are different approaches to explain mysticism, but the aim of all of them is to arrive at an ecstasy of supreme joy and bliss.

It may be noted that the mystics do differ in their approaches to the realization of the 'Transcendental Reality' of God. The commonest trait, however, is the realization of the self in complete union with the Lord. This is the true aim of the mystics of all ages, countries and religions. Thus, in a way, the mystics speak in a universal voice and tune.

Explaining the mystic realization, W.T. Stace points out that there are extrovertive and introvertive approaches. Besides, there are some mystics who cling to the highly emotional level while some of them stick to the intellectual and philosophical aspects of mysticism. While 'Extrovertive

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Mysticism means a unifying vision expressed in the formula of 'All in One', the 'Introvertive Mysticism' means a unifying vision of the Reality, expressed as 'One', 'Void' or 'Pure Consciousness'. The 'Extrovertive' type of mysticism is called 'Outward way' or 'extrospection', and the 'Introvertive' type is called 'introspection' or turning inward of the soul.

The Eastern School of mystics upholds 'Pantheism', 'Dualism', 'Absolutism' etc. as the main sub-structures of mysticism. 'Pantheism' means a belief that a common divine spirit pervades over all the objects of nature — animate and inanimate as well. In the Vedic literature as well as in the classical literature of India the theme of Pantheism is quite evident and clear. It may be noted that this theme of Pantheism is discernible in the romantic poetry of Wordsworth and others. 'Dualism' is a sort of faith which seeks for a unity in a duality of aspects which is supported by the 'Samkhya' school of Indian Philosophy which deals with 'Prakriti' and 'Purusha', the two independent as well as interdependent aspects of the Supreme Reality. This concept pervades the mind of Indian poets of the Past and Present.
There are the Absolutists like Acharya Sankara of India and Meister Eckhart of Germany. They are of the view that the relation between God and Soul is one of pure unity having no difference.

The mystical consciousness is not a matter of any particular branch of psychic life. But it also includes within it the 'affective,' 'cognitive' and 'conative' aspects of a man's personality. All these aspects of the mind are inseparably present, though not in an equal degree. Each faculty of a man's mind helps in his spiritual progress. All these three aspects, 'affective,' 'cognitive' and 'conative,' give rise to three types of mysticism, viz., 'emotional,' 'intellectual' and 'activiastic.' The above classification is made in accordance with the mental faculty found predominant with the mystics.

In the 'affective' kind of mysticism, 'intuitive emotion,' plays a dominant role in the growth of mystical consciousness. R.D. Ranade observed that emotional experience of mysticism is possible only in a 'plenitude of finer emotions, all turned to the experience of God.'\(^\text{13}\) In consonance with 'affective'

\[^{13}\text{R.D. Ranade, M} \text{ysticism in Maharatstra, 1982, p. 26}\]
type of mysticism, there is the kind of it known as the 'devotional' mysticism. The feeling of love plays a dominant role in such an experience, which, mainly, is the love of the Divine.

The 'cognitive' type of 'Mystical Consciousness' requires the thinking aspect of the mind. It is necessary for the mystic to have a thoughtful meditation. The intellectual aspect of thought and experience gives it a sort of universality of appeal to the mystic's personal experiences. Being universal, it is also communicable to others. K.P.S. Choudhury observes, "The speaker who has drunk deep in the divine mystery comes to possess a kind of unfathomable serenity; he neither weeps nor laughs but enjoys bliss coolly." Dr. Radhakrishnan states that Intellectual progress helps us to clear the mental atmosphere of chimeras and phantoms of errors and illusions.

The third kind of mysticism, i.e., the 'conative' aspect of mystical consciousness, is associated with 'Activistic Mysticism'. In a wider sense, this aspect of mystic experience consists of two levels, 'subjective', i.e., the 'inward'

15. S. Radhakrishnan, : Eastern Religious and Western Thoughts, 1940, p. 96
and the 'objective', i.e., the 'outward'. These two aspects 'inward' and 'outward' help each other in the process of spiritual experiences. At its 'subjective' level, it is the supreme mystical experience. And at its objective level, it is the expression of the inward spiritual experience through the outward acts of spiritual discipline, such as, 'sadhana', 'prayer', 'worship' etc. leading to the mystic goal of union with the Absolute.

Vary often it has been wrongly observed that mysticism is a way of escape from the active responsibilities of life to an emotional ecstasy of bliss, for a selfish enjoyment of an individual's joy of union with God. Refuting this, R.D. Ranade observes that mysticism teaches a 'full-fledged morality in the individual, and a life of absolute good to the society.'16 Briefly, it may be stated that the different psychological factors, i.e., 'affective', 'cognitive' and 'conative' do not exist in isolation. Because, a perfect mystical experience requires the mutual co-operation and interconnection among all these aspects, culminating in the blend of 'knowledge', 'feeling' and 'action' all together. It has rightly been

16. R.D. Ranade, 'Preface' Mysticism in Maharasthra Literature, 1962, p. 27
observed that at its best mystical consciousness includes all the highest exercises of reason, all the purest and deepest emotions and the highest and noblest action.\textsuperscript{17}

Following the observation made it may, therefore, be concluded that thought, feeling and will are not isolated faculties, but only distinguishable aspects of experience.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Historical Growth and Development of Mysticism: Eastern and Western:}

The Greek philosophers were the first to ventilate the idea of mystic consciousness. Socrates playfully used to call himself a mental midwife and helped to bring to birth the higher life to each of his listeners. His disciple Plato was a true mystic who discarded the mundane affairs of world as a shadow of the 'Real World' which is the 'World of Ideas'. He insisted on the divine origin and nature of the soul. His 'Symposium', for example, deals with the concept of spiritual Love and Beauty. Plato says, "For God mingles not with man, but through Love all the intercourse and converse of God with

\textsuperscript{17} K.P.S. Choudhury, \textit{Modern Indian Mysticism}, 1981, p.52
\textsuperscript{18} S. Radhakrishnan, \textit{The Heart of Hindusthan}, 1968, p.9
man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on."\(^{19}\)

Pythagoras, another ancient Greek philosopher propounded the doctrine of 'metempsychosis' (transmigration of the soul). He was followed by the 'master mystic' who gave a new shape to the Greek mysticism. He propagated in his 'Enneads' that God is the deepest reality in Nature and Man. His interpretation of Plato came to be known as neo-platonism that, later, inspired a number of poets.

In Judaism, too, many mystics called Rabbis had followed the path of devotion. The Jewish mysticism had its roots in the 'Old Testament'.

Mysticism reached its golden age in Christianity in the Middle Ages which was upheld by the great mystics like St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart John Tauler, Blessed Henry Suso, John Ruysbraeck and others. The German mystic Meister Eckhart's utterances are similar to the spirit of Indian mysticism. His concept of 'Asse' (to be) bears a similar connotation with the Sanskrit word 'Sat' (Being). The mysticism in English is largely Christian in origin, which also absorbed

neoplatonism during the Renaissance.

During the time of the Rig Veda, the sages and seers proceeded from Henotheism to Monotheism and their search for the Supreme One ultimately led them to the mystic realization. A mystical vein of thought has been present throughout the development of different schools of philosophy from the age of Upanishads. The main idea was 'renouncing the world of senses' and 'embracing the spiritual'. This mystic element is quite clear in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, wherein yajnavalkya, at the time of his retiring to the forest for living a monastic life in reply to the query of his wife, explains to Maitreyee that man can know everything through hearing, reflection, and meditation, he knows his own self. 20

The same mystic element is discernible in the dialogue between Uddalaka and his son Svetaketu in the Chandogya Upanishad wherein identification of human soul with the Supreme One is stated as follows: "sambani tat satyam 'sa atma tattvamasi svaetokete". 21

This means that the Brahan or all-pervasive soul is the Truth that Svetakeketu himself is.

Similarly, Ajatashatru's speech to Gargya, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, expresses the view about the Brahan. "Tasyopanishat satyasya satyasmiti prama vo satyam teshatesha satyaṃ", \(^{22}\) — The truth of truth is the secret of the Self. The Soul is the truth of all.

From the various discussions made in the Upanishads, it may be stated that the Upanishads set forth a monistic and 'Advaita' philosophical mysticism. It appears that the Upanishadic mysticism was very much concerned with the mysticism of men who lived in hermitages far away from the din and bustles of worldly life.

But in the Srimadbhagavatadamente, stress has been laid on the duty for duty's sake. Dealing with the mysticism of Srimadbhagavatadamente, R.D. Ranade sums up as follows:

The doctrine of immortality which it teaches in the second chapter, the way of equanimous Yogic endeavour which it inculcates in the fifth, the hope which it holds out for sinners as well as saints, for women as well as men, in the ninth, the superiority, which it declares of the devotion to the way of mere knowledge

\(^{22}\) Ibid, Brihadaranyaka. Ibid, p. 728
in the twelfth, and, finally, the universal immanence and omnipotence of God which it proclaims in the last chapter, supply merely side issues for the true principle of Moral Conduct, which finds its justification in Mystic Realization.

The Upanishadic concept later gave rise to the devotional mysticism in the gītā, which chiefly propounds the idea of salvation (moksha) through the path of action, bereft of any attachment ('niskama karma-yoga') and the path of renunciation of the world ('Sanyāsa Yoga') by living an ascetic life. This is clear from the dialogue between Arjuna and Lord Krishna. Arjuna put the following question to Lord Krishna — The devotees with their minds constantly fixed in You, as shown above, adore You as possessed of form and attributes, and those who adore only the Impersonal, formless Brahma, of those who are the best knowers of Yoga? Lord Krishna replied as follows:

Mayyāvāyahāṃ mano'yena mām nityayuktā upāsate
shraddhyayā pāryopetānte ma yuktātmanā mānān. 24

The literal meaning of this verse is that those are the best yogins who have the supreme faith in the Lord and worship Him with full concentration of their mind.

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23. R. D. Ranade, *Mysticism in Maharashtra* (Indian mysticism) 1902, p. 2

24. *gītā*, ed. S. C. Majumdar, Ch. XII, 2, 1988, p. 255
But it should be remembered that the Bhagavadgita has not left aside philosophical questioning, rather it has endeavored to make a reconciliation of all the philosophical issues through mystic approach. The mysticism of the Bhagavadgita may be summed up in the following words: 'The vision of God is the grace of God; but the grace of God is the reward of the love of man.'

The teaching of the Bhagavadgita has remained as a source of inspiration to the devotees, at least, for two thousand years. Lord Krishna, the Central figure of the Bhagavadgita, remains as the primal source of mysticism as propounded in the 'Santiparvan' of Mahabharata and various Puranas including Srimadbhagavatam. It may be noted that Vasudevism, Bhagavatism, Satvata or the Aikantika doctrine, the Panchatantra doctrine, and Tantrism—all these ultimately meet in the Central point— the Mystic Realization. It is needless to state that the Bhagavata is the storehouse of mysticism of ancient India. The Bhagavata, the Nanda Bhaktisutra and Sandilya Bhaktisutra—these three works represent the Mystic development of thought which runs side by side with the occult movement on the one hand and the philosophic movement on the other.
The Bhagavata is a repository of the accounts of the ancient mystics of India and this work later on influenced the whole course of mystic movement throughout the medieval age.

Ramanuja, Madhava and a host of others were greatly influenced by the Bhagavata, which gave rise to the 'Bhakti Movement', which is nothing but the pursuit of the Mystic Realization. This mysticism of the medieval age was a natural outcome of a heart full of piety and devotion, a consciousness of sin and misery and finally a desire to assimilate oneself practically to the Divine.

Thus, the 'Bhakti' Movement of the 'Middle Ages' in India belongs to the genre of devotional mysticism. Ramananda of the South is the precursor of this movement during the Islamic rule. He was instrumental in spreading Vaishnavism in North India. His followers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, prominently, Madhwa, Vallava, Chaitanya, Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai, Tukaram and others followed the creed. The Assamese Saint-poet Sankaradāva was a great exponent of this movement and founded the Vaishnava school in Assam in the sixteenth century, with an unshakable faith in
the love of and devotion to One Supreme Absolute God.

During this period, the galaxy of saints and mystics who sprang up in different parts of India, brought about the wisdom of the ancient sages to the common people. In their songs and poems they adopted the language of the common people. These preachers and poets came from all classes, castes and communities of the society. It may very well be observed that the rise of Islam and the royal patronage of some of Islamic rulers like Sikandar Lodhi in the fifteenth century caused the growth of Persian education in India. His liberal attitude towards the Hindus encouraged the translation of some of the Sanskrit scriptures into Persian. Later, the Mughal rule of Akbar, with his great liberal policies towards the Hindus, opened the doors for a further fusion of Hindu and Islamic Philosophers. As a result, 'Vaishnavism', simultaneously with 'Sufism', flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Several rulers patronized scholars and artists who helped the socio-cultural, moral and literary growth in society. The 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' saints found similarities in the Vedantic philosophy and the Islamic liberal views of
Sufism (which is elaborated in Ch. IV). Some of these saints sought to bring about a synthesis between the Hindu and the Islamic culture and Philosophy. They were predominantly mystics of love-devotional.

Because of the rigid caste-system prevalent in Hindu society, the liberal saints preached a religion of love for all, as freed from the bond of rigid casteism. A Raghavan observes in this regard, "with the fall of Hindu Kingdoms, the ideals and institutions of 'Dharma' and 'Bhakti' were in peril. The contemporary saints had to revitalize their faith, the 'Bhakti' and 'Shraddha' (respect) of all classes of people."25 Such a threat, too, was a cause for a synthesis of both faiths — Hinduism and Islam as well.

Akbar's reign saw a glorious period in the history of medieval India in respects of art and culture. As an eminent historian Iswari Prasad observes, "Akbar's reign was the golden age of Indo-Muslim art and literature. The Hindu and Muslim genius soared to the highest pitch, and produced works of which any country may feel proud."26 The Imperial patronage

    : Devotional Poets and Mystics.

26. I. Prasad, 1865, p. 681
    : History of Muslim Rule in India.
of Akbar freely extended to the efflorescence of both Hindi and Persian literature.

A number of Hindi saint-poets composed the poetry of love and devotion to one God in the monistic principle. R.D. Ranade, classifies the Hindi saint-poets into 'two groups'. The first group is represented by Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, and Mirabai. The second group is represented mainly by Ramanand, Nanak, Raidas and others.

Kabir was the son of a Hindu mother and a Mohammedan father. His 'Dohas' are full of the divine message of love. Tulsidas represented the 'Ram Bhakti' cult. His Ram Charit Manas is widely read like the Authorized Version of the English Bible. Surdas's poetry is remarkable for its lyrical grandeur. His Sursagar is a collection of several thousand verses. Mirabai describes the 'Dark Night' of the soul. Both Surdas and Mirabai represented the 'Krishna Bhakti' cult. They believed in Lord Krishna as the God incarnate. Mirabai who believed in Lord Rama as the Divine Being in

human form. However, Mirabai’s ‘bhajanas’ or songs of love for Lord Krishna are full of deep spiritual and devotional mystic fervour. As K.B. Jinal observes, “The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been regarded as the greatest Augustan Age of Hindi poetry.”

Ramananda in the fourteenth century was inspired by the teachings of Ramanuja of the South. He migrated to North India and by spreading the views of liberal Vaishnavism, he broke away from the caste barriers. He defied the religious rituals and admitted discipleship to all castes and communities. Raidas, a follower of Ramanand, described of a mystic relationship between this saint and God. Nanak of the sixteenth century, the founder of Sikhism, has left behind some devotional songs in his Granth Sahib, written in Gurmukhi script.

The songs about Lord Krishna and the universal mother in the form of Radha were composed in North India and Bengal. The word ‘Radha’ in Sanskrit means the one who performs ‘aradhana’ or services to the Lord. Hence, K.B. Jindal

AK observes, the name of Radha has been derived from the Sanskrit root 'Radh' which means to 'please' or 'conciliate'. Radha did all these in her previous birth and now she is Lord favourite.

She represents 'Prakriti' as a part of the 'Purusha'.

The idea of worship of Radha seems to have been organised at Brindavan about 1100 A.D. and then spread to Bengal and elsewhere. Like Madhavacharya who had exorted to his countrymen to worship Lord Krishna as an embodiment of the Divine power, Vishnu Swami, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D., had set up the fashion of the combined worship of the Radha-Krishna cult. Nimbark (the 12th century A.D.) too, was inspired by this new concept of mysticism.

Two hundred years later the poetry of Jaydeva's Gita Govinda and Chaitanya's "Sankirtana" dealt with the theme of mystical relation existing between Radha and Krishna. The 'Rasa' in the unfolding of the Cosmos and the union of Radha and Krishna symbolizes the intimate communion between human soul and God. The eighteenth and nineteenth century Bengal

29. Ibid, p. 39
saw a growth of poet-singers known as 'Bauls' who also composed their songs on the theme of Radha and Krishna. They used to sing their devotional songs in the streets and market places. Asit Kumar Bandopadhyay mentions about the singing and asking for alms as their major means of living. These poet-singers exist even now in some parts of Bengal in a decadent form.

Western India, particularly, the Maratha land produced a number of mystic poets. The earliest of the Maratha saints were Dyandev and Jnaneswar. The latter's Jnaneswari is a commentary on the Bhagavadgita. Namdev, of the fourteenth century, was a disciple of Dyandev. Another poet, Tukaram of the seventeenth century was a pious devotee of the Lord Vithoba. His devotional songs are popular in Western India. Eknath, too, a sixteenth century mystic poet, attained a high mystic rapture in his sweet and simple poems written in 'Ovi' metre. Among all the mystic poets of Maharashtra, B.P. Bahirat considers Jnaneswar the greatest, as he was the 'Source of inspiration to his contemporary saints.

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Namdeva, Chokhameta and others as well as to latter saints Eknath and Tukaram.\(^{31}\)

The greatest of the mystic hymns were composed in Tamil literature. The concepts of 'Prapathi', i.e., surrender to the will of God, and 'Kaikarya', i.e., service to God and God's children etc. were given a very high place in the path of spiritual union with God. Both Saivism and Vaishnavism grew simultaneously in the south, which were 'monism' or 'monotheism' in essence. The south Indian mysticism resembles much the Assamese devotional school of the mysticism that flourished under Sri Sri Sankaradeva's Vaishnavism. The most famous are the collections of mystic poems called Thevaram and Tirumurmozhi. The devotional poems of Appar, Sundarav and Jnana Sambandha make the Thevaram immortal. About Tirumoolar, observes S. Maharajan, "Tirumoolar is the greatest mystic and seer Tamil Nadu has ever produced."\(^{32}\) Some other mystics called Nayanmars were the devotees of Lord Siva. The word 'Nayanmars' means 'leaders' or chieftains. They

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were a group of devotees to Lord Siva, one of the Hindu Trinity. As V.A. Devasenapathi observes, "The Lord is not a metaphysical abstraction to the Nayanmars. They are aware of standing in an intimate personal relationship to Him." 33 The other poets were the 'Alwars' by which twelve vaisnava religious poets in Tamil are known.

The 'Alwars' in the ancient age came from different communities. Among them were Poigai, Bhutam and Pey who are ascribed miraculous birth. The work of 'Alwars' is known as *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* ('The Divine Four Thousand'). These hymns represent the high water-mark of the Hindu religious revival, which according to A.S. Raghavan, "Swept over Tamil Nadu during the days of the Pallavas of Kanchi." 34

Sankaradeva of Assam belonged to the medieval age. Born in 1449 A.D., at Bardoa, a village in the present district of Nagaon, Assam, was a pioneer of the Vaisnava movement in Assam. He propounded his famous "Ekasaran Nama Dharma" in order to uplift the socially down-trodden fellow

33. V.A. Devasenapati: "Nayanmars, Ibid, p. 20
brothers. His religious faith is based on a belief in one God-head. He composed a number of Anklyanats (a kind of One Act Plays), full-fledged plays, Bargits and others. However, the greatest of his works are the Kirtana (Hymns to God), and the translation of the tenth canto of the Srimad-bhagavatam, popularly known as Dasama.

Among Sankaradeva's disciples were Madhavadeva, Damodaradeva, and Ananta Kandali. Even his chief disciple Madhavadeva composed the Namghosha and a large number of Bargits. The Ghoshas or refrains, consist of rhyming couplets. The Bargits or sublime songs were meant to be sung in praise of the Lord, accompanied with music and melody.

Madhavadeva was a true devotee of Sankaradeva and sang in praise of the Supreme Lord.

Sankaradeva's religious views are essentially based on the Vedantic 'Advaita' mystic philosophy. But his mystic lyrics are of devotional theme of the 'bhakti' type. Dr. Maheswar Neog observes that there was 'a strong tendency in Sankaradeva's works towards a non-dualistic view.'

However, our historical survey of the mystic poetry in Indian literature remains incomplete without a brief reference to Buddhism in the literary context. The earliest specimens of Buddhist literature belong to the Charyapadas which were composed mainly by Buddhist Siddhas of the 'Sahijana' School. The 'Siddhacharyas' were the preceptors who had attained spiritual perfection. These poems were first discovered by MM. Harprasad Shastri from the Raj Durbar of Nepal and first published under the caption Carya-Carya-Vinischayah.

The theme of the Charya songs is directly spiritual. The songs underlie the mystic note of human soul's desire for salvation from the cycle of birth, death, diseases, pains and pleasures of life. There are also indications for realization of the ultimate Truth with the help of a preceptor. Some of these songs bear two different meanings: one is light, while the other is serious and full of mystical fervour. Dr. Sukumar Sen holds that such songs contain various words and similies which bear double meanings. At one level, it is meant for the general people, while at the inner
level, it is like a private code for the song composers.\textsuperscript{36}

The dominant mystic note of the 'Charya' songs and 'Dohas' is an idealistic view of life, associated with the various theories of illusion. The first song of 

\textit{Caryacarya Vinischaya} begins with an assertion that one's mind, 'Citta' is solely responsible for the illusion of the world: "Cancala cie paitho Kala, i.e., "In the unsteady mind enters Time".

The Buddhist Sahajiya Cult, along with the Vaisnava Sahajiya movement, left behind quite a vast treasure of literature on the religion of love.\textsuperscript{36} Vrada Chandidas of Bengal, is one of the greatest Vaisnava poets of the age. He is supposed to have flourished some time before Chaitanya. Chandidas is said to have been in a sort of Platonic love with a washerwoman, named Tara or Rami. His poetry consists of numerous songs dealing with the divine amours of Lord Krishna and Radha.

The greatest of the poets of his own generation was a great mystic of the Sahajiya Vaishnava

Vidyapati was born in about 1360 A.D. at Bishpi, a village near the Darbhanga district of Bihar in the ancient land of Mithila. The place was well-known as a centre of learning and culture. He was a distinguished Sanskrit scholar and writer and also a writer in vernacular languages. A critic of Vidyapati, Jayakanta Mishra observes that the "Influence exercised by Vidyapati was unprecedented, poet after poet imitated him."  

His fame lies for his hymns, devotional songs and also love songs. He composed the Padas (songs) on Lord Siva, Saitvesarwasvasara, Ganga, Ganga Vakyavali, Durga, Durga bhakti-tarangini. He composed verses on love affair between Radha and Krishna too. However, the most of Vidyapati's devotional songs reveal the mystic note of common man's longings and aspirations for union with the Lord.

The devotional Vaishnava poetry of the Bhakti movement was preceded by the mystic poetry of the Natha School, represented by Matsyenderanath, Gorakhnath, and others.

371 J.K. Mishra, "Vidyapati" Devotional Poets and Mystics Pt. I.V. Raghavan, 1978, p. 64
From the available sources it appears that Matsyendranath was the founder of this school. The Nathas gave importance to the mystic ideals. Gorakhnath was, perhaps, the most famous poet of the Natha School as the songs popularly known as *Gorakhvijaya* are prevalent in various parts of Northern and Eastern India. Gohini Nath and Jnaneshwar are said to have descended from him. R.D. Ranade considers Jnaneshwar as one of the greatest mystics of India and the world.\(^\text{38}\)

On the whole, the mystic elements in the Indian literary scene finds expression through the Vaishnava philosophy, Saivism, Buddhism and the Pauranic literature. The ancient Puranas composed in different places of India, were translated into several regional languages. The worship of 'Shakti-cult' gave rise to the concept of Radha-Krishna love affairs in which 'Prakriti' is considered as a part of the 'Purusha'.

But one must not forget that Sufism, too, flourished simultaneously under the liberal Islamic views. The Sufi poets composed symbolic love-poetry. In their very approach, man is always the lover and God is the beloved. The fourth

chapter of this thesis deals with the definition, growth and development of this school of poetry.

However, mystic devotional poetry of the 'Bhakti' type continued up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, although in a decadent form. The later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw several political turmoils and upheavals throughout the whole of India, which caused a great hurdle to the efflorescence of literary growth.

Mysticism under Western Influence:

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, India gradually came under the British Rule. The spread of the western education and science in the nineteenth century, in its gradual process, brought about enormous changes into the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the Indians.

The great 'Romantic Revival', as it is known in English literature, directly influenced the Indian poets of the nineteenth century. As regards the achievement of the European Romantic Thinking, the observation made by Frederick Meyer is noteworthy.
It drew the attention of the Scholars to the importance of art, it made technical thinking more colourful, and it extended the horizon of the west to the inexhaustible treasures of Oriental wisdom.39

Of course, here he speaks of the German scholars like Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher and Novalis who drew inspiration from the Indian Upanishads. In speaking of the Philosophical Romanticism of the nineteenth century Europe, he calls it a "reaction against a materialistic concept of life" and observes, "according to the Romanticists, truth can be found only when man uses the resources of his inner nature and becomes aware of intuition, through which he can approach reality."40

Almost all the Romantic poets believed that a poet's creation is not an 'airy nothing', but expresses the truth which is revealed to them by their imaginative power.

Imagination, for the romantics, is associated with intuition. Even William Blake, believed in the superiority of the transcendental spirit over material objects. Samuel Taylor Coleridge himself was a philosopher, poet and critic. His view emanated from his personal belief that 'Imagination' rather

40. Ibid, p. 349
than 'Reason' matters more as his poem *Kubla Khan* reflects that the act of creation is transcendental. *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* also express that poetry conveys the mystery of life. His treatment of the supernatural implies that human beings are ruled by some powers which cannot be fully understood.

William Wordsworth believes that it is only in those moments when the lower personality of man—physical, mental and emotional—is subdued that he can get in touch with reality of things. In such a state of union of individual's soul with the all-pervasive cosmic soul that there is an experience of perfect bliss, harmony, peace and serenity. To him, the creative power is ever associated with the power of intuitional imagination:

> Is but another name of Absolute power
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind
> And reason in her most exalted mood.

*(The Prelude, XIV, 190–92)*

Through such visions, Wordsworth sought an understanding of 'Oneness' in all things.
John Keats, too, in his experience of the joy of beauty felt so exalted that he found himself transported to another world. In this new world, he saw the vast issues. The more intensely beautiful object left its effects on him, the more convinced he felt himself in the presence of the Ultimate Reality. In Endymion, he says that happiness brings one in touch with the essence of things:

"Feel we these things? That moment we have stepped into a sort of oneness, and our state is like fleeting spirit's"

(Endymion, Book I, 795-797)

Almost all the romantic poets had experienced such moments of vision in which they had perceived the Supreme Reality. It was through the world of senses and sensuous objects of visible things that they reached the transcendental state of consciousness. The poetic vision is based on insight or intuition which transcends logic, that is, the inspired soul transcends the human world.

Even the eminent Victorian poets like Tennyson and Browning too possessed the mystical power to establish a communion between the individual soul and the Cosmic Soul.
Earlier, too, English poetry had seen mystic elements, particularly, in the seventeenth century Metaphysical School of Poetry, led by John Donne and followed by Andrew Marvel, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Traherne and Cowley, under the influences of the Renaissance scholasticism and neo­platonism. Even the twentieth century English Poetry of T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and others are full of mystic fervour. T.S. Eliot derived oriental inspiration for the regeneration of man from the modern wasteland. W.B. Yeats, the exponent of neo­romanticism, turned to the Celtic Revival in English poetry. Legouis and Cazamian observe about W.B. Yeats's poetry as "instinct with a lyrical and mystical idealism" and further maintain that his work is "more thoroughly steeped than any other in the imaginative mysticism which, we are told, is the essential attribute of celticism." 41

Even the American poets of the nineteenth century like Ralph Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman possessed mystic vision of high order. They received inspiration from Sanskrit literature. An eminent critic of American poetry, Malcolm Cowley

41. Legouis and Cazamian: History of English Literature, 1961, p. 1281
observes about Walt Whitman, "he seems such closer to the
Brahman of the 'Upanishads' the absolute, unchanging." 42

The spread of English education brought some of the
Indian poets, particularly, the Bengalee poets into fami-
liarity with the English Romantic Revival. Some of the
notable figures like Nabin Chandra Sen, Hemchandra Banerjee,
Biharilal Chakravorty, Dwijendralal Tagore, Akshey Chandra
Badal, wrote mystic poetry under the influence of the
western Romantic Revival. The very mystic tradition of the
school, established particularly by Biharilal, was saturated
with mystic elements of romantic sensibilities that found
its highest expression in the poetry of Rabindranath. Even
the great saint-poet Aurobindo composed mystic poetry of
high order under the influence of the western and oriental
mysticism.

However, it may be summed up that the 19th century
Indian social and literary scene saw a tremendous import
of the western ideas and their harmonious blend with the

42. M. Cowley ed., "Introduction", Walt Whitman; Leaves
of Grass, 1959, p. xiv.
Oriental. The educated and enlightened Indians who came under the impact of western romantic movement were instrumental in bringing about a synthesis of mysticism of the east and the west.