

= Ramprasad Sen =

Sadhak R?mpras?d Sen (Bengali : ????? ? ????? ??? ; c . 1718 or c . 1723 ? c . 1775) was a Shakta poet and saint of eighteenth century Bengal . His bhakti poems , known as Ramprasadi , are still popular in Bengal ? they are usually addressed to the Hindu goddess Kali and written in Bengali . Stories of Ramprasad 's life typically include legends and myths mixed with biographical details .

It is said that , Ramprasad was born into a Tantric family , and showed an inclination towards poetry from an early age . He became a disciple of Krishnananda Agamavagisha , a Tantric scholar and yogi . Ramprasad became well known for his devotional songs , eventually becoming the court poet of Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia . His life has been the subject of many stories depicting his devotion to , and relationship with , Kali . Ramprasad 's literary works include Vidyasundar , Kali @-@ kirtana , Krishna @-@ kirtana and Shaktigiti .

Ramprasad is credited with creating a new compositional form that combined the Bengali folk style of Baul music with classical melodies and kirtan . The new style took root in Bengali culture with many poet @-@ composers combining folk and raga @-@ based melodies , mixing every common style of music from classical to semi @-@ classical and folk . His songs are sung today , with a popular collection ? Ramprasadi Sangit (" Songs of Ramprasad ") ? sold at Shakta temples and pithas in Bengal .

= = Biography = =

Biographies of Ramprasad are a mixture of biography , metaphor , and legend .

= = = Early life = = =

Ramprasad was born in Halisahar , a village on the banks of the Ganges about thirty @-@ five miles north of Kolkata , into a Tantric Vaidya family . Due to the absence of birth records , his actual birth date is not known , but it is believed to be around 1718 or 1723 . His father , Ramram Sen , was an Ayurvedic doctor and Sanskrit scholar . Ramprasad 's mother Siddheswari was Ramram 's second wife . Ramprasad was sent to a Sanskrit tol (school) where he learned Sanskrit grammar , literature , Persian , and Hindi . As a youth , he had a talent for poetry and learning new languages .

Ramram hoped his son would follow in his profession , but Ramprasad showed no interest in practical pursuits . As he grew up , his spiritual inclinations caused a great deal of anxiety to his parents . Believing that marriage would make Ramprasad more responsible , his parents married him to a girl named Sarvani when he was twenty @-@ two years old . In keeping with the family custom , the newly wed couple was initiated by the family 's spiritual teacher , Madhavacharya . According to traditional accounts , during initiation when the guru whispered the mantra to him , Ramprasad became consumed by intense longing for the goddess Kali . One year after the initiation he lost his guru . Ramprasad later became the disciple of Krishnananda Agamavagisha , a Tantric yogi and scholar . Agamavagisha was a well known devotee of Kali and the author of the Bengali book Tantrasara . Agamavagisha instructed Ramprasad in Tantric sadhanas (spiritual disciplines) and worship of Kali .

= = = Employment = = =

Instead of following his parents wishes and looking for a job , it is said that Ramprasad devoted most of his time to sadhana . Ramram died before he could make provisions to support the family . Forced finally by poverty , Ramprasad moved to Kolkata and worked as an accountant in the household of Durga Charan Mitra for a monthly salary of thirty rupees . According to traditional accounts , during his employment Ramprasad would write devotional songs to Kali . His fellow employees were appalled to see Ramprasad write poems in his account book , and reported him to their employer . Durga Charan Mitra , upon reading Ramprasad 's work , was moved by his piety and literary skill . Instead of dismissing Ramprasad from work , he asked him to return to his village

and compose songs to Kali , while continuing to pay his salary .

= = = Sadhana and poetry = = =

After returning to his village , Ramprasad spent most of his time in sadhana , meditation , and prayer . Traditional accounts tell of several esoteric sadhanas that he performed , including standing neck @-@ deep in the river Ganges , singing songs to Kali . Ramprasad would regularly practice his sadhana in a panchavati : a grove with five trees ? banyan , bael , amalaki , ashoka , and peepul ? all regarded as holy in Tantric tradition . He would reportedly spend hours meditating on a panchamundi asana (an altar inside which are interred five skulls ? that of a snake , frog , rabbit , fox , and man) . According to popular stories he had a vision of Kali in her form of Adyashakti Mahamaya .

The Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia , a landlord under Nawab Sirajuddaula of Bengal , heard Ramprasad 's hymns . Being an ardent devotee of Kali , he appointed Ramprasad as his court poet . Ramprasad rarely attended the Maharaja 's court and would spend his time in sadhana and worship of Kali instead . Krishna Chandra became Ramprasad 's benefactor , giving him 100 acres (0 @.@ 40 km² ; 0 @.@ 16 sq mi) of tax free land . Ramprasad , in return , dedicated his book Vidyasundar (" Beautiful Knowledge ") to the Maharaja . Krishna Chandra also gave Ramprasad the title Kaviranjana (" Entertainer of poets ") . During the Maharaja 's last years , Ramprasad stayed beside him , singing hymns to Kali . Ramprasad 's mysticism was recognized by sufis and Nawab Sirajuddaula . Ramprasad is said to have visited the court of the Nawab at the Nawab 's fervent request .

= = = Death = = =

During Ramprasad 's old age , he was looked after by his son Ramdulal and daughter @-@ in @-@ law Bhagavati . A folk story is told of Ramprasad 's death . Ramprasad was very fond of taking part in Kali puja on the night of Diwali , the festival of lights . On one Kali puja night , he performed the puja and sang throughout the night . In the morning , Ramprasad carried the jar of Divine Mother 's sanctified water on his head to the Ganges . He was followed by the devotees , who carried the clay image of Kali to be immersed in the Ganges after the night of worship . Ramprasad waded into the holy river , until the water was neck deep , all the while singing for Kali . As Kali 's image was immersed , Ramprasad died ? this was believed to be around 1775 .

However , recent documentary evidence , a Kabulatipatra dated April 1794 bearing the sign of Ramprasad Sen as a witness , clearly proves the fact that Ramprasad Sen was alive in 1794 . The said Kabulatipatra has been preserved and displayed at Sabarna Sangrahashala in Barisha .

= = Stories and legends = =

In Bengal , popular stories and legends are told of Ramprasad . One of the most well known stories is about a " radiant girl " who helped him one day . Ramprasad was repairing a fence with the assistance of his daughter , who left shortly thereafter . Soon a " radiant girl " , whom he didn 't recognize , came to help him . After finishing the task , she vanished . According to the story , Ramprasad then realized that she was a manifestation of Kali .

Another popular story is told of Ramprasad 's vision of goddess Annapurna of Varanasi . Ramprasad was on his way to the river for his daily ritual bath when a beautiful young woman stopped him , asking if she could hear him sing a devotional song to the Divine Mother . Ramprasad requested her to wait , since it was getting late for his noon worship . When he returned , he couldn 't find her , and began to think that it may have been the " play of Divine Mother . " Sitting down to meditate , he was surrounded by a radiant light and heard a female voice saying , " I am Annapurna (?) I came all the way from Varanasi to hear your songs but , alas , I had to leave disappointed . " Ramprasad was angry with himself and immediately left for Varanasi to find Mother Annapurna and sing for her . After walking many miles , he reached Triveni , where he took rest under a tree on the

bank of the Ganges . Here he reportedly received another vision , saw the same mystical light , and heard the Mother 's voice saying , " Stay here and sing for me . (?) Varanasi is not the only place where I live ; I pervade the whole universe . "

= = Poetry and influence = =

Ramprasad Sen is regarded as one of the notable figures of the bhakti movement in Bengal during the eighteenth century . He is credited with popularizing the bhakti Shakta tradition and Shyama Sangeet ? devotional songs to the goddess Kali . Ramprasad was the first Shakta poet to address Kali with such intimate devotion , and to sing of her as a tender loving mother or even as a little girl . After him , a school of Shakta poets continued the Kali @-@ bhakti tradition .

Ramprasad created a new compositional form that combined the Bengali folk style of Baul music with classical melodies and kirtan . This new form took root in Bengali culture for the next hundred and fifty years , with hundreds of poet @-@ composers combining folk and raga @-@ based melodies , and bringing together styles of music that included classical , semi @-@ classical , and folk . His poetic style has been described as " sweet , familiar and unsophisticated " , though his lyrics were sung in classical style rather than a folk style . Two of his notable successors as composers in the same style were Kamalakanta Bhattacharya and Mahendranath Bhattacharya .

Ramprasad 's songs are known as Ramprasadi . The devotion to Kali often included as a background the events in Bengal during his time , such as the Bengal famine of 1770 , economic hardships , and the deterioration of rural culture . His poems were very popular during his lifetime .

Ramprasad 's literary works include Vidyasundar (or Kalikaman @-@ gala) (ca. sixth or seventh decade of the 18th century) , Kali @-@ kirtana , the fragmentary Krishna @-@ kirtana , and Shaktigiti . Kali @-@ kirtana is a collection of lyric and narrative poetry describing the early life of Uma . Krishna @-@ kirtana is an incomplete book of poems and songs to Krishna ? the complete collection is yet to be discovered . Vidyasundara Kavya is written in a narrative style that was already popular in Bengali literature , telling the traditional love story of Vidya and Sundara ? children of kings who are aided by Kali in meeting , falling in love , and marrying . Shaktigiti is Ramprasad 's well known and respected work , in which he expresses his deepest feelings and love for Kali . In Shaktigiti , he shares the most intimate relationship with Kali ? a child who can both love and quarrel with his mother over the inequities of human birth .

Ramakrishna Paramahansa , a mystic of nineteenth century Bengal , often sang his songs and regarded Ramprasad as his beloved poet . Many of these songs are recorded in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna , which at one point mentions , " ? he (Ramakrishna) would spend hours singing the devotional songs of great devotees of the Mother , such as Kamalakanta and Ramprasad . Those rhapsodic songs describing direct vision of God ? " Paramhansa Yogananda also was an admirer of Ramprasad and his devotional songs , frequently singing them . Sister Nivedita compared Ramprasad with the English poet William Blake .

One of Ramprasad 's hymns to the Goddess is as follows :

Another of his popular poems describes the human attempt to understand the Goddess :

Ramprasad 's songs are still popular in Bengal and recited regularly in the worship of Kali . Scholar Shuma Chakrovarty notes that his songs are " broadcast over the radio and sung on the streets and in the homes and temples of Calcutta by a cross @-@ section of people ? children , the elderly , housewives , businessmen , scholars , the illiterate , monks , householders , and the youth of all classes " . Many of his songs were sung by popular Shyama Sangeet singers like Dhananjay Bhattacharya , Pannalal Bhattacharya , and Anup Ghosal . Still his master literature combination of simple words in the songs melts one 's hearts and floods the eye with tears . An [*anekanta*] vadin reading of Ramprasad 's texts is also found .