

Classic Poetry Series

Ramprasad Sen
- poems -

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Ramprasad Sen(1718 - 1775)

Ramprasad Sen was a Shakta poet 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 Agamavisha, a Tantric scholar and yogi. Ramprasad became well known for his devotional songs, eventually becoming the court poet for the king Krishna Chandra 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-Brahmin 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.

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 Battacarya and Mahendranath Battacarya.

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:

"You'll find Mother In any house.
Do I dare say it in public?
She is Bhairavi with Shiva,
Durga with Her children,
Sita with Lakshmana.
She's mother, daughter, wife, sister—
Every woman close to you.
What more can Ramprasad say?
You work the rest out from these hints."

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

"You think you understand the Goddess?
Even philosophers can not explain her.
The scriptures say that she, herself,
is the essence of us all. It is she, herself,
who brings life through her sweet will.
You think you understand her?
I can only smile, you think that you can
truly know her? I can only laugh!
But what our minds accept, our hearts do not.
Ants try to grasp the moon, we 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.

A Country Fair

Drive me out of my mind, O Mother!
What use is esoteric knowledge
 Or philosophical knowledge
Transport me totally with the burning wine
Of your all-embracing love.
Mother of mystery, who imbues with mystery
 The hearts of those who love you,
Immerse me irretrievably
In the stormy ocean without boundary,
Pure love, pure love, pure love.

Wherever your lovers reside
 Appears like a madhouse
To common perception.
Some are laughing with your freedom,
Others weep tears of your tenderness,
Still others dance, whirling with your bliss.
Even your devoted Gautama, Moses,
Krishna, Jesus, Nanak and Muhammad
 Are lost in the rapture of pure love.

This poet stammers,
Overcome with longing:
"When? When? When?
When will I be granted companionship
 With her intense lovers? "
Their holy company is heavenly
A country fair for those mad with love
Where every distinction
 Between master and disciple
Disappears

Their love of love sings:
"Mother! Mother! Mother!
Who can fathom your mystery,
Your eternal play of love with love?
You are divine madness, O goddess,
Your love the brilliant crown of madness,
Please make this poor poet madly wealthy

With the infinite treasure of your love.

[Translated from Gospel of Ramakrishan]

Ramprasad Sen

A Serious Grievance

I have a serious grievance to settle
with the Mother of the Universe.
Even while apparently awake,
with you as my all-protecting Mother,
the house of mind and body
is ransacked by robbers,
my countless egocentric impulses.
Every day I resolve to repeat your name
as the most powerful defense,
but forget my good intention
just as the intruders arrive.

I have caught on to the playfulness,
O Mother, by which you elude my willful grasp.
You bestow no power of inward prayer upon this child,
so you receive no consistent devotion from me.
I no longer regard this as my fault.
Only what you give me can I return to you
as the sweet offering of divine remembrance.
Fame and infamy, good and bad tastes of life,
all phenomena are your graceful play.
Yet as you dance in ecstasy,
we are thrown into quandary.
O Goddess, lead us on your wisdom way.

This poet dares to sing her secret:
'Mother Mahamaya places a twist in every mind,
making it perceive the ashes of egocentricity
as an abundance of candy,
which it tastes with constant disappointment
and shocked surprise.
Awaken now and be free.'

[Translated by Lex Hixon from 'Mother of the Universe']

Ramprasad Sen

Call Out Kali, Kali

Just think of it, Mind –
No one's anything to anyone.

You've come back to this world
For nothing.

And for the few days of your life
They all call you master.

But they'll drop that master soon enough
When the master of life and death shows up.

And will she who you worried yourself sick for,
Will she stick by you then?

The dear woman will sprinkly cow dung
To clear out the bad luck.

Shri Ramprasad says: When Death
Grabs you by the hair,
Call out: Kali, Kali –
Then what can He do?

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Come On Mind

Come on, Mind, let's go steal-
You and I together-
All Shiva owns- Mother's feet,
If we can carry them off.

But if they catch us
In that watchful house,
That would be the end of the body.
They'd tie us up in Kailasa.

Don't forget your guru's advice
If we get in; we'll wound Shiva
With an arrow of devotion,
Then grab those feet and run.

[Translated from 'Grace and Mercy in her Wild Hair' by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Come, Let Us Go For A Walk, O Mind

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind,
to Kali, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life.
Of your two wives, Dispassion and Worldliness,
Bring along Dispassion only, on your way to the Tree,
And ask her son Discrimination about the Truth.

When will you learn to lie, O mind,
in the abode of Blessedness,
With Cleanliness and Defilement on either side of you?
Only when you have found the way
To keep these wives contentedly under a single roof,
Will you behold the matchless form of Mother Shyama.

Ego and Ignorance, your parents,
instantly banish from your sight;
And should Delusion seek to drag you to its hole,
Manfully cling to the pillar of Patience.
Tie to the post of Unconcern the goats of Vice and Virtue,
Killing them with the sword of Knowledge if they rebel.

With the children of Worldliness, your first wife,
plead from a goodly distance
And, if they will not listen,
drown them in Wisdom's sea.
Says Ramprasad: If you do as I say,
You can submit a good account,
O mind, to the King of Death,
And I shall be well pleased with you
and call you my darling.

[Translated from Bengali by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

Conquer Death With The Drumbeat Ma! Ma! Ma!

Who is this unique warrior woman?

Her terrifying war cry

pervades the universal battleground.

Who is this incomparable feminine principle?

Contemplating her limitless nature,

the passion to possess and be gratified dissolves.

Who is this elusive wisdom woman?

Her smooth and fragrant body of intense awareness

is like the petal of a dark blue lotus.

A single eye of knowledge

shines from her noble forehead

like a moon so full its light engulfs the sun.

This mysterious Goddess, eternally sixteen,

is naked brilliance, transparent insight.

Cascades of black hair stream down her back

to touch her dancing feet.

Perfect in the art of wisdom warfare

she is the treasury of every excellence,

the reservoir of all that is good.

Her poet sings with unshakable assurance:

'Anyone who lives consciously in the presence

of this resplendent savior

can conquer Death with the drumbeat

Ma! Ma! Ma!'

[Translated by Lex Hixon]

Ramprasad Sen

Does Suffering Scare Me?

Does suffering scare me? O Mother,
Let me suffer in this world. Do I require more?
Suffering runs ahead of me and runs after me.
I carry it on my head and set up a stand
In the bazaar to peddle it.
I'm a poison worm, I thrive on poison.
I carry it wherever I go.

Prasad says: Mother, lift off my load.
I need a little rest. It's amazing!
Others brag about their happiness,
I brag about my suffering.

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

I Drink No Ordinary Wine

I drink no ordinary wine,
but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kali's name;
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!
First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine;
My longing is the ferment to transform it.
Knowledge, the maker of the Wine,
prepares it for me then;
And when it is done,
my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the mantra,
Taking the Mother's name to make it pure.
Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad,
and the four fruits of life are yours.

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

I Spent My Days In Fun

I spent my days in fun,
Now, Time's up and I'm out of a job.
I used to go here and there making money,
Had brothers, friends, wife, and children
Who listened when I spoke. Now they scream at me
Just because I'm poor. Death's
Field man is going to sit by my pillow
Waiting to grab my hair, and my friends
And relations will stack up the bier,
Fill the pitcher, ready my shroud and say
So long to the old boy
In his holy man's get-up.
They'll shout Hari a few times,
Dump me on the pile and walk off.
That's it for old Ramprasad.
They'll wipe off the tears
And dig in to their supper.

[Translated from 'Grace and Mercy in her Wild Hair' by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

I'M Sick Of Living Mother

I'm sick of living, Mother, sick.
Life and money have run out
But I go on crying "Tara, Tara,"
Hoping. You are the mother of all
And our nurse. You carry the Three Worlds
In Your belly.

So am I some orphan fallen out
Of the sky? And if You think I'm bad,
Remember, You're the cord connecting
Every good and evil
And I'm a tool tied to illusion.

Your name can blot out fear
Of Death – so Shiva said,
But, Terrible One, You forget all that,
Absorbed in Shiva, Death, and Time.

Prasad says: Your games, Mother,
Are mysteries. You make and break.
You've broken me in this life.

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Its Value Beyond Assessment By The Mind

Whom could I fear in the universe
 where my Mother is matriarch?
I live with perfect ease upon her estate,
indivisible awareness and bliss.
I am her direct tenant,
free from formality and hierarchy.

There is no payment of rent for this sanctuary,
this garden of nonduality,
its value beyond assessment by the mind.
Nor can my sacred abode be sold at auction,
for there are no owners and nothing to own.
The manager of Mother's holdings, Lord Shiva,
transcends every limited conception and transaction.
There is no disharmony or injustice here,
for there is no division, no separation.
Mother does not impose the heavy tax
 of religious obligation.
My only responsibility of stewardship
 is constant inward remembrance,
eternally breathing Kali, Kali, Kali.

This mad poet lover,
born directly from Divine Mother,
cherishes one consuming desire:
to purchase her diamond paradise of delight
 with the boundless treasure of pure love
and give it away freely to all beings.

[Translated by Lex Hixon]

Ramprasad Sen

Kulakundalini, Goddess Full Of Brahman, Tara

Kulakundalini, Goddess Full of Brahman, Tara -

You are inside me.

You are inside me, Ma

in the muladhara, the sahasrara,
and the wish-granting manipura.

The Ganges flows to the left, the Yamuna to the right;

in their midst streams the Sarasvati
where Siva and Sakti shine.

Meditating on You like this

a ruby-red snake sleeping
coiled around the Lord Self-Born

a man is blessed.

In each glorious lotus

Muladhara, svadhithana, manipura at the navel,
anahata, and visuddha

You incarnate as letters

v to s, be to l, d to ph, k to th,
sixteen vowels at the throat,
and h and ks between the eyebrows.

My teacher was firm with me;

he told me to think of You like this in my body.

Brahma and the four gods, and Dakini and her five saktis

inhabit the ascending lotuses, supported underneath

by an elephant, a crocodile, a ram, an antelope, and a second elephant.

If you hold your breath

you can know Her
and hear the buzzing hum

of a drunken bee.

Earth, water, fire, and air dissolve immediately

when you sound 'yam,' 'ram,' 'lam,' 'ham,' and 'haum.'

Then cast me

a compassionate glance -

I keep being reborn!

Your feet alone drip nectar.

You are Sakti, cosmic sound,
and Siva the dot in 'Om'

full of nectar like the moon.

Who can cleave the One Self?

Ritual worship, controversies over dualism and nondualism

these don't bother me,

for the Great Mistress of Time tramples Time.

Once sleep is broken

there's no more sleep, and the soul

will be turned into Siva. Could one like this

even if reborn

drown anew in the senses?

Liberation adores him like a daughter.

Pierce the agna cakra;

dispel the devotee's despair.

Traveling past lotuses

four, six, ten, twelve, sixteen, and two

to the thousand-petaled flower at the top of the head

the female swan unites with Her handsom amde

in the residence of the Lord.

Hearing Prasad's words,

the yogi floats in a sea of bliss.

[Translated by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Ramprasad Sen

Love Her, Mind;

Love Her, Mind;
She can ferry you across
the sea of birth and death.

Taxes must be paid in this worthless marketplace,
but it's stupid to trust in wealth and family.
Have you forgotten your past?
Where were you? Where have you come to?
Where are you going?

You wear nothing
but a costume in the world.
The Enchantress makes
illusion dance, so you dance.
And you sit on Her lap
in Her prison.

Egotism, hatred, love, attachment to pleasing things --
why did you share
your kingdom with these?
Tell me that!

What you've done can't be helped;
the day is almost over.
On a jeweled island
Siva sits in Siva's house.
Contemplate Her always.
Prasad says,
Durga's ambrosial name liberates.
Repeat it without ceasing;
drench your tongue in nectar.

[Translated from Bengali by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Ramprasad Sen

Ma, You'Re Inside Me;

Ma, You're inside me;
who says You keep Your distance, Syama?
You're a stony girl, terrible illusion,
dressing in many guises.
For different methods of prayer You put on
the five chief forms.
But once someone realizes
the five are one,
there'll be no escape for You!
Understanding the truth,
he won't encumber You with false worship
and You'll have to stop
as if You'd sneezed
to take his burdens.

Once he knows the value of gold
will he welcome glass
by mistake?

Prasad says, My heart is shaped like a flawless lotus.
I place You there, my mental Goddess:
Now dance!

[Translated from Bengali by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Ramprasad Sen

Meditate On Kali! Why Be Anxious?

Meditate on Kali! Why be anxious?

The night of delusion is over; it's almost dawn.

The sun is rising, dispelling

thick nets of darkness, and lotuses are blooming thanks to Siva
at the top of your head.

The Vedas throw dust in your eyes; blind too
the six philosophies. If even the planets
can't fathom Her

who will break up these fun and games?

There are no lessons between teacher and student
in a market of bliss.

Since She owns the actors, the stage, and the play itself
who can grasp the truth of the drama?

A valiant devotee who knows the essence -- he
enters that city.

Ramprasad says, My delusion is broken;
who can bundle up fire?

[Translated by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Ramprasad Sen

Mind Don'T Sleep

So I say : Mind, don't you sleep
Or Time is going to get in and steal from you.

You hold on to the sword of Kali's name.
The shield of Tara's name.

Can Death overwhelm you?
Sound Kali's name on a horn and sound it loud.

Chant "Durga, Durga,"
Until you bring the dawn around.

If She won't save you in this Dark Age-
But how many great sinners have been saved!

Is Ramprasad then
So unsalvageable a rogue?

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Mother, Am I Thine Eight-Months Child?

Mother, am I Thine eight-months child?
Thy red eyes cannot frighten me!
My riches are Thy Lotus Feet,
which Shiva holds upon His breast;
Yet, when I seek my heritage,
I meet with excuses and delays.
A deed of gift I hold in my heart,
attested by Thy Husband Shiva;
I shall sue Thee, if I must,
and with a single point shall win.

If Thou dost oppose me,
Thou wilt learn what sort of mother's son I am.
This bitterly contested suit between the Mother and Her son --
What sport it is! says Ramprasad.
I shall not cease tormenting Thee
Till Thou Thyself shalt yield the fight
and take me in Thine arms at last.

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

Mother, This Is The Grief That Sorely Grieves My Heart

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother,
and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house.
Many and many a time I vow to call on Thee,
Yet when the time for prayer comes round,
I have forgotten.
Now I see it is all Thy trick.

As Thou hast never given,
so Thou receivest naught;
Am I to blame for this, O Mother?
Hadst Thou but given,
Surely then Thou hadst received;
Out of Thine own gifts I should have given to Thee.
Glory and shame, bitter and sweet, are Thine alone;
This world is nothing but Thy play.
Then why, O Blissful One,
dost Thou cause a rift in it?

Says Ramprasad:
Thou hast bestowed on me this mind,
And with a knowing wink of Thine eyes
Bidden it, at the same time, to go and enjoy the world.
And so I wander here forlorn through Thy creation,
Blasted, as it were, by someone's evil glance,
Taking the bitter for the sweet,
Taking the unreal for the Real.

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

O Death! Get Away; Whatcanst Thou Do?

O Death! Get away; what canst thou do?
I have imprisoned Mother Kali.
I have bound Her feet with my mind
and imprisoned Her in my heart
I have unfolded my heart lotus
and fixed my mind at the sahasrara.
I have entrusted my heart to Kulakundalini.
Such contraption have I made that She can't escape!
Devotion guards Her always as a watchman;
my two eyes have I made gatekeepers.
I predicted: fateful fever would attack me;
So I have taken my Master's drug
- remedy for all diseases.
"Death! I have humbled thy pride,"
says Ramprasad,
"I am ready to start on my journey, uttering, Kali, Kali! '"

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

O Longing Mind

O longing mind,
consecrate your being to pure love.
Turn every thought to Goddess Tara.
She will bear you tenderly across the raging sea
of separation and individuality.

Be utterly dedicated to her reality.
Cry aloud Ma Kali, Ma Kali.
Know that she can clarify
the inconceivable maze of relativity.
To hope for assistance and guidance through this world
from wealth, relatives, and religious rites
provides no profound solution.
Have you forgotten that everyone is lost?

Where are you now? Why are you traveling?
This cosmos is the strange theater where souls act,
wearing various costumes and disguises.
This intricate play of transparent energy
is initiated, sustained, and dissolved by Kali,
who is the dream power of Absolute Reality.
At this very moment, you are resting
on the vast lap of Mother's cosmic dream
that you misperceive
as the narrow prison of suffering.
Why abandon the kingdom of awareness
to obsession with self and disdain for others,
to hollow passion and abject clinging?
You are creating a disease without a remedy.
The brief day of your earthly life is almost over.
Meditate now on beautiful Black Tara.
She is seated upon the jewel island of essence
in the transparent sea of ultimacy.

This poet sings drunkenly:
'Tara! Tara! Tara!
Your name is ambrosia.
May all beings enter the secret sanctuary
through this name,

tasting your unique sweetness,
self-luminous awareness.'

[Translated by Lex Hixon from 'Mother of the Universe']

Ramprasad Sen

O Mother, Who Really

O Mother, who really
Knows Your magic?

You're a crazy girl
Driving us all crazy with these tricks.

No one knows anyone else
In a world of Your illusions.

Kali's tricks are so deft,
We act on what we see.

And what suffering --
All because of a crazy girl!

Who knows
What She truly is?

Ramprasad says: If She decides
To be kind, this misery will pass.

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Of What Use Is My Going To Kasi Any More?

Of what use is my going to Kasi any more?
At Mother's feet lie Gaya, Ganga and Kasi.
I swim in the ocean of bliss
while I meditate on Her in my heart lotus.
O Kali's feet are red lotuses
wherein lie heaps of holy places.
All sins are destroyed by Kali's name
as heaps of cotton are burnt by fire.
How can a headless man have a headache?
People think, they will discharge their debts
to forefathers by offering them pinda at Gaya!
But, O! I laugh at him who meditates on Kali
and still goes to Gaya!
Shiva assures: Death at Kasi leads to salvation.
But devotion is the root of all;
O mind! Salvation is its maid.
Of what use is nirvana?
Water mingles in water.
O mind! becoming sugar is not desirable;
I am fond of eating sugar.

Bemused, Ramprasad says, 'By the strength of gracious
Mother, O! Meditation on Her, the wearer of disheveled
hair, puts four goods into the palm of our hands.

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

Once For All, This Time

Once for all, this time,
I have thoroughly understood;
From One who knows it well,
I have learnt the secret of bhava.
A man has come to me from a country
where there is no night,
And now I cannot distinguish
day from night any longer;
Rituals and devotions have all grown profitless for me.

My sleep is broken;
how can I slumber any more?
For now I am wide awake
in the sleeplessness of yoga.
O Divine Mother,
made one with Thee in yoga-sleep at last,
My slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.

I bow my head, says Prasad,
before desire and liberation;
Knowing the secret that Kali
is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all,
both righteousness and sin.

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

She's Playing In My Heart

She's playing in my heart.
Whatever I think, I think Her name.
I close my eyes and She's in there
Garlanded with human heads.

Common sense, know-how-gone,
So they say I'm crazy. Let them.
All I ask, my crazy Mother,
Is that You stay put.

Ramprasad cries out: Mother, don't
Reject this lotus heart You live in
Don't despise this human offering
At Your feet.

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

So I Say: Mind, Don'T You Sleep

So I say: Mind, don't you sleep
Or Time is going to get in and steal from you.

You hold on to the sword of Kali's name.
The shield of Tara's name.

Can Death overwhelm you?
Sound Kali's name on a horn and sound it loud.

Chant "Durga, Durga,"
Until you bring the dawn around.

If She won't save you in this Dark Age --.
But how many great sinners have been saved!

Is Ramprasad then
So unsalvageable a rogue?

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Tell Me, Brother, What Happens After Death?

Tell me, brother, what happens after death?
The whole world is arguing about it --
Some say you become a ghost,
Others that you go to heaven,
And some that you get close to God,
And the Vedas insist you're a bit of sky
Reflected in a jar fated to shatter.

When you look for sin and virtue in nothing,
You end up with nothing.
The elements live in the body together
But go their own ways at death.

Prasad says: you end, brother,
Where you began, a reflection
Rising in water, mixing with water,
Finally one with water.

[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

The Diamond Essence Of Awareness

Ma Tara, you are truly the exalted one,
the essence of awareness.
But are you aware of the foolish poet
who sings this song?
You are indeed the radiant truth,
the sun that dissolves like morning mist
the illusory suffering of conscious beings.
But what about my persistent misery?

Revelatory experience flows to devout practitioners
from the Mother of the Universe,
but consider what Mother bestows on me.
During morning meditation, I worry about livelihood.
At noon prayer, I think about delicious food.
While practicing contemplation in the evening,
my mind wanders at random among events of the day.

Goddess Tara, I ask you frankly,
will you ever allow this distracted consciousness
any sustained vision of your reality?
The only visionary gift granted me
is the viewpoint of arbitrary convention.
In this fascinating vision, I am constantly absorbed.

The deeper I plunge into thought,
the more I realize I cannot know you by thinking,
O blissful Mother, beyond speech and mind.

This desperate seeker of truth cries out:
'Ma! Ma! Ma!
Daughter of the mystic mountain!
You dance, holding the brilliant gem of realization.
But when I try to grasp
the diamond essence of awareness,
it appears to turn back into common stone.'

[Translated by Lex Hixon from 'Mother of the Universe']

This Time I Shall Devour Thee Utterly, Mother Kali!

This time I shall devour Thee utterly, Mother Kali!
For I was born under an evil star,
And one so born becomes, they say, the eater of his mother.
Thou must devour me first, or I myself shall eat Thee up;
One or the other it must be.

I shall besmear my hands with black
and with black my face;
With black I shall besmear the whole of my body.
And when Death seizes me,
with black I shall besmear his face.

O Mother, I shall eat Thee up
but not digest Thee;
I shall install Thee in my heart
And make Thee offerings with my mind.
You may say that by eating Kali
I shall embroil myself
with Kala, Her Husband,
but I am not afraid;
Braving His anger,
I shall chant my Mother's name.
Come what may, I shall eat Thee up —
Thee and Thy retinue —
Or lose my life attempting it.

[Translated by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Ramprasad Sen

Who In This World

Who in this world
can understand what
Mother Kali really is?
The six systems of philosophy
remain powerless to describe Her.
She is the inmost awareness
of the sage who realizes
that Consciousness alone exists.
She is the life blossoming within
the creatures of the universe.
Both macrocosm and microcosm
are lost within Mother's Womb.
Now can you sense
how indescribable She is?

The yogi meditates upon Her
in the six subtle nerve centers
as She sports with delight
through the lotus wilderness
of the pristine human body,
playing with Her Consort,
Shiva, the Great Swan.

When anyone attempts to know Her,
the singer of this song laughs.
Can you swim across
a shoreless ocean?
Yet the child in me still
reaches out to touch the moon.

[Translated by Lex Hixon]

Ramprasad Sen

Who Is That Syama Woman

Who is that Syama woman
standing on Bhava?
All Her modesty gone,
She plays with Him
overturning sexual custom
by being on top.
Choked up,
waves of bliss sweeping over Her,
She hangs Her head and smiles --
Love incarnate!
The Yamuna, the heavenly Ganges, and between them
the honorable Sarasvati --
bathing at their confluence
confers great merit.
Here the new moon devours the blue moon,
like wind extinguishing fire.

Poet Ramprasad says,
Brahman is merely the radiance of Brahmamayi.
Stare at Her
and all your sins and pains
will vanish.

[Translated by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Ramprasad Sen

Who Knows Your Magic

O Mother, who really
Knows Your magic?

You're a crazy girl
Driving us all crazy with these tricks.

No one knows anyone else
In a world of Your illusions.
Kali's tricks are so deft,
We act on what we see.

And what suffering-
All because of a crazy girl!

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Ramprasad says: If She decides
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[Translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely]

Ramprasad Sen

Why Disappear Into Formless Trance?

O wavering mind,
awaken your upward-flowing awareness.
Become the sublime warrior Goddess Kali,
who moves with graceful power
 through the vast landscape of the body.

Her divine form, like a black storm cloud
 illuminated by the sun,
she stands unveiled,
her long hair falling free like monsoon rain.
Be lost in awe of her, O mind,
for you will never comprehend her.

She dwells as the primal lotus of conscious energy
 and also as the thousand-petal blossom,
complete enlightenment.
She is none other than primordial bliss,
this great swan ever swimming
 through the lotus jungle of the subtle body.

Gaze intently into the blazing heart of joy
 and you will perceive my blissful Mother,
matrix of all phenomena.

The vision of Kali
 kindles the fire of unitive wisdom,
burning down conventional barriers,
pervading minds and worlds with light,
revealing her exalted beauty
 as universal flower garden
and universal cremation ground,
where lovers merge with Mother Reality,
experiencing the single taste of nonduality.

This ardent poet of the Goddess cries:
'Every lover longs only
 to gaze upon the unique Beloved.
Why close your eyes?
Why disappear into formless trance?'

[Translated by Lex Hixon]

Ramprasad Sen

Why Is Mother Kali So Radiantly Black?

Why is Mother Kali so radiantly black?
Because she is so powerful,
that even mentioning her name destroys delusion.
Because she is so beautiful,
Lord Shiva, Conquerer of death,
lies blissfully vanquished,
beneath the red soled feet.
There are subtle hues of blackness,
But her bright complexion
is the mystery that is utterly black,
overwhelmingly black, wonderfully black.
When she awakens in the lotus shrine
within the heart's secret cave,
her blackness becomes the mystic illumination
that causes the twelve petal blossom there
to glow more intensely than golden embers.
Her lovely form is the incomparable
Kali- black blacker than the King of Death.
Whoever gazes upon this radiant blackness falls eternally in love
and feels no attraction to any other,
discovering everywhere only her.
This poet sighs deeply,
'Where is this brilliant lady, this black light beyond luminosity?
Though I have never seen her, simply hearing her name,
the mind becomes absorbed completely in her astonishing reality.

Om Kali! Om Kali! Om Kali!

[Translated by Lex Hixon From Mother of the Universe]

Ramprasad Sen