

Classic Poetry Series

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

- poems -

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Kamalakanta Bhattacharya(1769 - 1821)

Sadhaka Kamalakanta (Bengali: কামলাকান্ত শ্যেখর গোস্বামী, usually known simply as Kamalakanta sometime known as Shadhak Kamalakanta, was a poet of India of the late 18th century. He is often considered to have followed the example of Ramprasad, both in his poetry and in his lifestyle.

 Early Life

Kamalakanta was born in Bardhaman, India. His father was a Brahmin priest who died when Kamalakanta was still a boy. His mother struggled financially to provide for the family with the meager income from the small amount of land left to them, but she managed to send Kamalakanta to higher education.

Kamalakanta was a bright student, studying Sanskrit and showing an early talent for poetry and music. It is said that "his heart opened to the love of God" when he received the sacred thread and was initiated into spiritual practice by Chandra Shekhar Goswami. From an early age he expressed an interest in spirituality and later in life Kamalakanta received initiation into Tantric Yoga from a Tantric yogi named Kenaram Bhattacharya.

 Career

In order to support his family, Kamalakanta started a small school in addition to his work as a Brahmin priest. But Kamalakanta struggled to make ends meet. His songs made him famous during his lifetime. Because of his fame as a singer poet, the Maharaja of Bardhaman, Tej Chandra, asked Kamalakanta to be his Guru and appointed him as a court advisor. Throughout his life Kamalakanta was a great devotee of Kali and composed many impassioned and devotional love poems to the Mother.

It is said that the Divine Mother in her aspect of Mahakali wishes her sincere devotees to make the fastest progress. Kali is often depicted as the great destroyer of ignorance and hostile forces. The poetry of Kamalakanta displays this heroic attitude, imploring Kali to destroy limitations and bondage. The poetry of Kamalakanta also displays a profound faith in his all-powerful Kali.

The earth quakes under Your leaps and bounds.
You are frightful with that sword in Your hand.

Whilst Kali is often depicted as a black and terrifying form, this is just one aspect

of hers as a destroyer of ignorance. Kamalakanta also alludes to the other aspect of Kali as he states in his poem - "Is my Mother Really Black?"

If She's black,
how can She light up the world?
Sometimes my Mother is white,
sometimes yellow, blue, and red.
I cannot fathom Her.
My whole life has passed trying. [trans. Rachel Fell McDermott]

The poems of Kamalakanta and Ramprasad were later sung by mystic Sri Ramakrishna, who himself was a great devotee of the Divine Mother. These devotional songs would often send Sri Ramakrishna into an ecstatic state as he became absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. 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..."

Can Everyone Have The Vision Of Shyama?

Can everyone have the vision of Shyama?
Is Kali's treasure for everyone?
Oh, what a pity my foolish mind
will not see what is true!
Even with all His penances,
rarely does Shiva Himself behold
The mind-bewitching sight
of Mother Shyama's crimson feet.

To him who meditates on Her,
the riches of heaven are poor indeed;
If Shyama casts Her glance on him,
he swims in Eternal Bliss.
The prince of yogis, the king of the Gods,
meditate on Her feet in vain;
Yet worthless Kamalakanta
yearns for the Mother's blessed feet!

[Translated from 'Kali: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar' by Elizabeth U. Harding]

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

Ever-Blissful Kali

Ever-blissful Kali,
Bewitcher of the Destructive Lord,
Mother -
for Your own amusement
You dance,
clapping Your hands.

You with the moon on Your forehead,
really You are primordial, eternal, void.
When there was no world, Mother,
where did You get that garland of skulls?

You alone are the operator,
we Your instruments, moving as You direct.
Where You place us, we stand;
the words You give us, we speak.

Restless Kamalakanta says, rebukingly:
You grabbed Your sword, All-Destroyer,
and now You've cut down evil and good.

[Translated from 'Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal'
by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

Is My Mother Really Black

Is my black Mother Syama really black?
People say Kali is black,
but my heart doesn't agree.
If She's black,
how can She light up the world?
Sometimes my Mother is white,
sometimes yellow, blue, and red.
I cannot fathom Her.
My whole life has passed trying.

She is Matter,
then Spirit,
then complete Void.

It's easy to see
how Kamalakanta
thinking these things
went crazy.

[Translated from 'Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal'
by Rachel Fell McDermott]

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

Mother

Mother,
You're always finding ways to amuse Yourself.

Syama, You stream of nectar,
through Your deluding power
You forge a horrible face
and adorn Yourself with a necklace of skulls.
The earth quakes under Your leaps and bounds.
You are frightful
 with that sword in Your hand.

At other times
You take a flirtatious pose,
and then, Mother,
even the God of Love is undone!

Your form is inconceivable and undecaying.
Narayani, Tripura, Tara -
You are beyond the three qualities
 yet composed of them.
You are terrifying,
You are black,
You are beautiful.

Thus assuming various forms,
You fulfill wishes of Your worshipers.
Sometimes You even dance
 Brahman, Eternal One
in the lotus heart of Kamalakanta.

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

O Kali

O Kali! I am going to devour You this time...

Therefore, I ask You, O Kali...

O ever blissful Kali, the enchantress of the heart of almighty Mahakala.

You dance alone. And You sing alone, clapping Your hands.

O Mother, You are the first Cause,
the Eternal One, in the form of the Void
and wearing the moon on Your forehead.

When the universe did not exist,
where did You find Your string of severed human heads?

You alone are the Mover in everybody;
we are but instruments in Your hands.

We move as You make us move;
we speak as You make us speak.

But the restless Kamalakanta gently chides You, saying,
'Mother, the Destroyer of all, holding Your sword,
now You have devoured both my virtue and vice!'
If I die uttering, 'Victory to Kali, victory to Kali!'
I shall assuredly attain Shivahood.
Then what is the use of going to Benares?

Infinite are my Mother Kali's forms.
Who can find the end of Kali?
Knowing a little of Her greatness,
Shiva lies prostrate at Her red-hued feet.

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

O Kali, Mother Full Of Bliss

O Kali, my Mother full of Bliss!
Enchantress of the almighty Siva!
In Thy delirious joy Thou dancest,
clapping Thy hands together!
Eternal One! Thou great First Cause,
clothed in the form of the Void!
Thou wearest the moon upon Thy brow.

Where didst Thou find
Thy garland of heads before the universe was made?

Thou art the Mover of all that move, and we are but Thy helpless toys;
We move alone as Thou movest us and speak as through us Thou speakest.
But worthless Kamalakanta says, fondly berating Thee:
Confoundress! With Thy flashing sword
Thoughtlessly Thou has put to death my virtue and my sin alike!

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya

The Black Bee Of My Mind Is Drawn In Sheer Delight

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet,
The blue flower of the feet of Kali, Shiva's Consort;
Tasteless, to the bee, are the blossoms of desire.
My Mother's feet are black, and black, too, is the bee;
Black is made one with black! This much of the mystery
My mortal eyes behold, then hastily retreat.
But Kamalakanta's hopes are answered in the end;
He swims in the Sea of Bliss, unmoved by joy or pain.

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya