

Kamalananda Bhattacharyya's 57th Death Anniversary



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January 4, 1951. Assam lost a great poet, composer-lyricist, playwright, actor and freedom fighter *Bauli Kavi* Kamalananda Bhattacharyya. On his 57th death [anniversary](#) he is remembered fondly by Assam's intelligentsia, artistes and music lovers.

Born in 1894 at Nagaon, Kamalananda Bhattacharyya did not have an easy life. Brought up in a musical ambience he lost his [father](#) at a tender age of 15 and being the eldest son the full burden of seven brothers and family fell on him. He could not complete his graduation at Kolkata and had to join a secondary school [as](#) a teacher. But even that was not for long. Sensitive and a patriot at heart, Kamalananda could not ignore the call of the non-cooperation movement and jumped in. He was the first person of Nagaon to resign from a government job. He served rigorous jail sentences including Sylhet jail. He never had fulltime employment again; instead he tried to make ends meet by doing the odd jobs. Even the bank at which he kept his little money closed down. In the process his health suffered and his span of life became restricted.

As Kamalananda struggled for the daily bread and existence his creative energy and activities never suffered, in fact, it soared to new and newer heights. From young age he had been translating English and Bengali plays into [Assamese](#) for Nagaon Natya Mandir stage. He then started to write original plays and many of his memorable songs were composed for these plays where he acted too both in male and female leads. In 1928 he published his legendary poem-song collection *Bauli* and by that time almost everyone in Nagaon was singing one or the other of his famous songs. But except for limited music circles this great poet-composer's creations never spread across Assam. The life and works of this great son of Assam would have remained in comparative oblivion but for the lifelong efforts of another great music maestro.

Maybe it was family legacy that Kamalananda Bhattacharyya too passed

away leaving the full burden of family on his young eldest son, Pundit Bibekananda Bhattacharyya. Young Bibekananda did not allow himself to be bogged down and [as](#) per his [father](#)'s wish went to Lucknow to do a course on tabla. And he took a vow of preserving and propagating Kamalananda's music and works which he kept on till his last moments (Bibekananda Bhattacharyya passed away too in September 28, 2007 after a brief illness}. Thanks to his efforts 'Kamalananda's Complete Works' was published, two audio albums of some of Kamalananda's famous songs were released and Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra took up the responsibility of organizing workshops on Kamalananda's music on a regular basis from 2006.

Kamalananda Bhattacharyya composed [over](#) 200 songs in pristine [Assamese](#) using such rare words that left intellectuals like Late Navakanta Barua awestruck. Some of his songs portrayed his romanticism graphically describing the beauty of both nature and its inhabitants. His strong patriotic spirit got reflected in some others. His broken health, untimely loss of dear ones and his eternal economic struggle left him sad—a heavy boundless sadness that was compared by him to the desolate vastness of the seas and the ocean. This 'sea sadness' was tellingly captured by some of his immortal songs like the one in which he empathizes with the lonely boatman who got lost in endless high seas with his dilapidated boat.

Mumbai based Hindustani Classical Vocalist Ragini Bhattacharyya Chakravarty, the grand-daughter of the poet whom she never met on this earth, has been singing his songs since her childhood days and conducting the music workshops since 2006 with devotion and determination. Ragini vows to carry on the rich musical tradition of her family far and wide not necessarily letting it remain confined in Assam only. She strongly feels that songs should be taught in the original forms pointing out that the legendary beauty '*Bilot Tirebirai*' was not correctly

recorded in the first audio album released and later in the workshops Ragini recorded the song in its true form and correct notations. In the absence of her [father](#) Pundit Bibekananda Bhattacharyya Ragini has also started to compose some of Kamalananda's songs and teaching these to her avid disciples in Assam. [One](#) of the beautiful forest songs of Kamalananda sung by Ragini in her audio album 'My Grandfather's Songs' got listed in Apple i-Tunes, the world's best digital music jukebox with free downloads.

Let the music of Kamalananda Bhattacharyya live on and get the attention and admiration it deserves. This is our cherished wish on the 57th death [anniversary](#) of the great poet.

Chinmay Chakravarty

BY CHINMAY CHAKRAVARTY

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