

From My Heart to Yours'

*From My Heart
to Yours'*



the spontaneous devotional poetry of

Alakananda Devi

also known as

"Alka the Ragged Princess"

PREMA PRESS ♡ BOULDER

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For Sadananda

Soulmate, friend and inspiration

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Foreword

MYSTICAL POETRY is a genre which we associate with ancient, traditional cultures, totally immersed in the sacred. We may doubt whether such songs of ultimate mystery can be sung in modern, secular society. Poetry has become for us an expression of individual genius rather than a humble tilling of ancient spiritual soil. Traditional farming methods are being forgotten, both in earth agriculture and the cultivation of the spirit.

But a new wave of traditional farmers, craftspersons, spiritual poets and contemplatives is rising up spontaneously. The earth is producing an ecological sensibility, just when it is needed; so the Sacred is calling forth a spiritual sensibility in the heart of modern humanity. The ancient forests are being preserved; so are the perennial spiritual traditions. Alakananda Devi calls us to ecstatic wisdom in the ancient keys of Hinduism, mystical Christianity, Hasidism and Sufism. May the fragrance of these adept and realized poems bring tears to the eyes and daring aspirations to the hearts of this and future generations!

Lex Hixon

April 26, 1993

Introduction

THE POET-SAINTS of India, my spiritual ancestors, spontaneously sang their poetry, which was written down by companions. The poems in this book are spontaneous outpourings of devotional feeling. On the principle of “First word, best word,” they have been kept in their original state. Each fresh wave of mystical experience inspires me, as it inspired those medieval mystics, to attempt to express, in the words of my native language, the utterly inexpressible.

Both the Sufi tradition of Jelalludin Rumi and Nureddin Jerrahi and the *bhakti* tradition of Saints like Tukaram, Mirabai and Ramprasad have influenced my journey of unfoldment, as has the Christianity I received from my mother. God is neither male nor female and is beyond all attributes; yet to the mystic, God is mother, father, sister, friend, husband, lover and master. According to the different devotional moods which inspired them, these poems address that inconceivable reality sometimes as He and sometimes as She. It is indeed the indelible experience of intimate relation with the incomprehensible One without a second that drives the poet-mystic to proclaim, in verse or song, her or his realization.

My Guru, Brahmachari Raghudas Maharaj, lived in the village of Alandi, not far from Poona. Alandi is the main pilgrimage center for Sant Jnaneshvar, one of the greatest of India's poet-saints. Although Sant Jnaneshvar completed his earthly ministry in the

closing decade of the thirteenth century, the faithful of Maharashtra believe that he is alive to this day, having been entombed in a state of *jivan samadhi*—unbroken meditative immersion in the state of divine union. To Raghudas Maharaj, Jnaneshvar was a living Master with whom he could freely converse on subtle planes. I am thus a spiritual grandchild of a thirteenth century master. Whatever in these pages is inspiring, uplifting or enlightening, derives its power from that great unbroken tradition of seven centuries of devotion. For whatever is faulty, “Alka” seeks your forgiveness.

Alakananda Devi

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Dedication and Invocation

*O Raghudas, Servant of Ram
Humble devotee and radiant Master
Your body, speech and mind
Are the form of absolute Love.*

*Embodiment of steadfast devotion
Like a deep-rooted Tulasi plant,
You are always dwelling
In the cave of meditation.
You read our hearts
And know our secret thoughts,
Our intimate communion
Has no need of words.
You teach us through laughter,
Wrath and childlike innocence,
Gently reminding us,
“Let it be, as it is.”*

*For sixty years
On the banks of the Indrayani
You served your Guru
The Lord of Wisdom.
Hundreds of thousands
Who flocked for His blessing
Little guessed that you
Poured the milk of His love.*

*Indifferent to name and fame,
Not desirous of followers,
You live a humble, hidden life
Devoid of worldly importance.*

*Scarcely a loincloth covers your nakedness.
Shame and modesty are not your concern,
Who are the Self of all selves.*

*Eternally free from lust and greed
You honor both men and women alike.
For you, there is no distinction of caste or creed,
No difference between Guru and disciple.*

*The perfect Vaishnava with Tulasi beads and tilak
Ever repeating the name of Ram,
You are completely beyond limited religion.
You are Sai Baba, the True Fakir,
Nirmanakaya, the visible Buddha,
Word made flesh, the living Gospel.*

*You are Hanuman, the perfect devotee,
You are Vitthale, Friend of the Poor,
You are Jnaneshvar, greatest of Gurus,
Whatever our Chosen Ideal
You are That.*

*Ever established in sahaja samadhi,
You are spontaneous and effortless
in speech and action.
Abiding beyond samsara and nirvana,
You ceaselessly meditate on us, your devotees.
May we whose lives are fruitful in your darshan
Never forget you, Qutub of simplicity.
Through your kindly grace, O Sadguru,
Make us like you, the True Person,
Hari Aum Tat Sat.*

All Saints Day, 1st November, 1992

Dark Mother



and other poems
1981-89

Dark Mother

*I did not expect
To find you here
Dark Lady, Kali Ma,
Far from your home
In the green jungle,
Claw and fang
And secret tribal rites.
Thought I had left you
Half a world away
And is this too your land
Forbidden Goddess?*

*Mistress of Terror,
Queen of the Nightmare Kingdom,
Girt with billboards,
Neon lights asparkle,
Beefburgers dangling from your ears,
Garlanded with heads of media men
Filmstars, TV personalities,
Brandishing in your eight arms
Nuclear warheads, ballistic missiles
Nerve gas, napalm, neutron bombs,
You and your ghoulish army
Of Mohawked punk rockers
Dance madly, crazily
Rocking, reeling, shaking
Earth to its foundations
Mistress of Terrors
Queen of Rocky Flats.*

*Whenever I turn
I see your face
Black Mother, Dark Madonna
Lady of Czestochowa
Queen of Poland
Woman Disfigured
She of the scarred face,
Merciful Mother of Rachel's children.
Have the flames of Auschwitz
Burnt your face so black?
Did you blush in shame and anger
At the shadow of Hiroshima
The fires of Dresden, Hamburg, Coventry...
They would have us forget
The Old Men, the Politicians
(Wise are they, experienced)
They would have us forget
And paint your icon anew
An innocent girl
With roses in your cheeks
Fair of face
And blond, of course—
But no! My Mother is brown, Mestizo,
Spanish and Aztec
Christian and Cosmic
Jewish and gentile
White and Black
The scars on her face are two
The pain of the Hated
The pain of the Hater*



*Our agony, Hers, yours, mine
To know such twinness.
With these stripes are we healed.
And the roses,
The roses are real
Sharp-toothed and fragrant
Token of her Darshan.**

*Mother, borne aloft
On bloodied sacrificial knives
Your ways are not
Those of the wise, the Old Men.
Lovely Tara, teenage girl
Goddess of Death and Compassion
Mistress of Possibilities, Queen of Chaos
Your ways are not
The Old Men's ways.
You do not forget your origins
In the green jungle
Fang and claw,
Warm human blood
On altar stone.
You wear your scars with dignity
Disfigured Healer of fragmented hearts.*

*And, I, my Mother
Stranger, exile, pilgrim,
Scapegoat too, at times,
I, the hater and the hated
Pierced through by your sword,
Never shall I forget
Never shall I let*

* The Lady of Guadalupe gave roses to the peasant Juan Diego as proof of her appearance.



Rachel's sisters die in vain.
What shall we forge, My Mother
In this memorial flame,
Yad Vashem on the altar of my heart?
What shall we forge
Here in the secret place
Where the warm blood flows
To rekindle life and light?*

*Guadalupe, Queen of America
Lady of the night black robe,
The glittering stars,
I am your child,
Your supplicant and servant.
That the salt of our tears
May turn the bitter waters sweet,
The flame of our indignation
Light the truth of peace and justice,
The blood from our wounded hearts become
New wine for the banquet of life,
Our flesh offerings the bread
That feeds one body, one humanity,
Hater and Hated
Twin forks of one tree—
Queen of the Night, Morning Star,
Mother of America, the New World,
Draw us all
From the Twelve Directions
To your Sun Dance.
Teach us to pluck
With bleeding hands*

* The five sisters of my great-grandmother Rachel, who were killed in Auschwitz, with their children and grandchildren.



*Your fragrant roses
Here in the land of spiny cacti
Computerized wasteland,
Jungle of concrete and steel.
Teach us to remember
To continue burning, sacrificing
Our heads, our leaden hearts,
To the agony, the alchemy
Of your Love.*



When the Mind Cracks

*When the mind cracks
Spins and reels
When consciousness quails before
The products of its thought
The gods and demons,
Astral lights and hell realms,
When the well-ordered I
We thought we were disintegrates
Into a dance of energies and forces,
When the mind cracks open,
Then a ray of light shines darkly through—
That flame of universal consciousness
Against whose searching beam
The shutters of the waking mind are closed.*

*When the mind breaks
The cosmic egg cracks open,
Open, open, setting free
Whom? Who am I
Who shed the body
And pass on,
I who am not
The spinning, reeling, splitting, cracking mind
Who am I?
Something enters through the chinks of madness
A ray of light
An echo of the aum
A faint suggestion
(dare I call it more?)
Of that which the barred doors*

*Of so-called consciousness
The strong, intact, unbroken ego state
Has never known
A glimmer, only that
Of the Awakening
Into the unbecome, unborn, unmade, unformed
The unconditioned Real
The Light of Lights
Hidden in the hearts of all.*

*In terror and in agony
The cosmic egg cracks open
The mind breaks,
Death of the one I took myself to be.
The earth cracks open
At my feet,
I stand on nothing, nothing, nothing
That firm ground
Of whom I thought I was
Has cracked. Where do I stand?
Where can I find security?
The mind has cracked, can crack again
And I, I, I... who am I?
Who am I who stands secure on nothingness
Secure beyond both sanity and madness
Reborn through terror and through anguish
Brought to life in death of all
I took myself to be
Am I not That
The unbecome, unborn, unmade, unformed?
Am I not That
The Dweller in the Heart?*

*Chinks of light
Spill through the shutters of the conscious mind
Blown open, just a little
By the gusts of madness
And I the Phoenix
Rising from the flames
Stretch my wings and soar,
Leaving far behind the egg
Which terror cracked
To set me free,
Leaving alike the reeling, splitting mind
And the close-shuttered ego consciousness.
Beyond both sanity and madness
I will be free
No more the one I took myself to be
But That which is the sole I Am
The Dweller in the Heart.*

*I stretch forth wings of gratitude
For agony and terror,
Gratitude for the disintegration
Of what I took myself to be
Gratitude for the Light that blinds and heals
Gratitude for all that cracks the egg
And sets me free.
Affirming and transcending
Both sanity and madness
Knowing that I am not the mind
I will be free
In the limitless spaces of the heart
The home of the indweller.*

Ram





Stray Lamb

*The sheep are wise.
They always listen
For their master's voice.
As for me, I'm just a silly lamb
Straying off on my own.
For hours on end, I forget you
And get lost in the thickets of the world
And then, coming to my senses
I helplessly cry your name.
How can I find the way back
Once I stray from your remembrance?
Alka says, "While I bleat
My Lord comes searching for me."*



The Arrow

*There is only one medicine, friend
That can cure my sickness
The remedy of self-abandonment
Complete surrender to my Lord.
He has loosed his arrow
And pierced me through the heart
And each step I take is agony
When I walk away from him.
There is no doctor, friend,
Who can pluck out the arrow of Ram.
Lord! I am too weak
To leap into this chasm myself.
Alka says, "Only your grace
Can unite me with you forever."*

The Journey

*I journeyed far to find
 That which is nearer
 Than the marrow of my bones.
 Fought hard to attain the One
 Who pervades every cell of my being.
 O foolish one, seeking desperately
 For the light in your own eyes!
 Before the journey started
 I was already at the goal.
 Now there is no more striving,
 Nothing remains for me to do.
 Having seen the face of the True Guru
 What else need be attained?
 The labor of my days
 Goes up in smoke,
 A sunset sacrifice.
 Alka is the child of the sadguru,
 Every breath she breathes is His.*

Good Friday: Hanuman Jayanti

*It is good Friday.
 The Son of Man dies on the cross.
 The Son of the Wind is born,
 Darkening the Sun
 In his eager flight
 To grasp the golden fruit.*

*With dispassion stronger than diamond
 I break the glittering baubles,
 Fame, wealth, power, prestige,
 Houses, cattle, cars and land.
 What use are these trinkets to me
 Without the Name of Ram?
 What good is even my life to me
 If 'Rama' is not written on every rib?
 In the anguish of longing for Him
 My chest is torn open
 My heart plucked out.
 Hē Ram, Hē Ram
 Why have you forsaken me?*

*Hungry for the fruit of liberation
 I hurl myself towards the sun
 And fall again,
 Lifeless and cold
 To the earth.
 Come, Son of the Wind,
 Revive me with fragrant herbs
 From the Garden of Gethsemane.
 The Child of Eve is dying,*



*Let the Child of the Wind be born.
Carry me home
To the city without conflict
May my heart be the heart of Hanuman
Where Ram and Sita dwell.*

Marifat



Love Alone

*I have no duty now but Love,
 No path but Love,
 No goal but Love,
 Nothing to lose,
 Nothing to gain,
 The Breath of Love
 Is breathing me.
 And though the night is dark,
 The body is weak,
 The mind dull and forgetful,
 That Breath breathes.
 Alka says, "Truly I have died!
 Love alone, Love itself, lives in me."*

A New Longing

*For how many years
 How many births
 O my Beloved
 Have I longed for you,
 Weeping and crying your name
 Like a bird caught in a snare,
 Wondering how the ecstasy of your love
 Could bring so many tears,
 So much pain to leave the limited
 For limitless bliss.*

*The one I took myself to be
 Is shattered into fragments.
 My heart burns like camphor
 Leaving no residue.
 No more Lover, no more Beloved
 Only Thou, Thou, Thou!
 Now a new longing fills my heart,
 My face turns back
 Towards the manifest.
 These arms which are only yours
 Open to embrace your children
 I taste the ecstasy of your tears
 O sole Beloved.
 Alka says, "After countless births
 I have come home to the flame of Love."*

Ma





In the Mother

O Mother
There is only One Heart
And it is Yours,
Only one Love, Yours.
Your heart alone
Beats in this chest,
Your heart,
Full of love and longing
For all your children.
Mother, I am not
Your child, your servant, your daughter,
Not even your slave,
For I am not.
I have died into You
And You are all.
Your tears
Flowing from these eyes,
Your smile
Moving this face,
And with these hands
You feed your children
Who are Yourself,
Yourself,
For all is You.
Nothing
For Alka to say.
You are the singer, Mother,
And the song.



Doha

Mother, the more I see
Nothing exists but you,
The more I love
All that exists.

Gifts of the Return



AFTER THE search, the dawn of illumination and the experience of union comes the fourth step of the path, known to the Sufis as *marifat*, and to Buddhists as the way of the *bodhisattva*. This step is the descent of the mountain, the return of the seeker to the vast shanty town of the world.

The following cycle of poems consists of reflections upon the gifts received during a ritual celebrating this step of return.

A Pilgrim's Story

Through childhood, youth,
 Young womanhood
 I searched, I journeyed,
 Face turned to the East.
 Asking, 'Who am I?'
 I tore veil after veil.
 Beyond the last veil
 Only Light.
 Mask after mask
 Face after face, peeled off.
 I sought the original face.

 Humbled, stripped
 Of all I thought I was
 I raced to the edge of the globe.
 East becomes West
 And I return,
 New eyes in No-Face
 New grace in empty hands.
 Asking, 'Why am I?'
 I gather from the winds
 The fragments of my body
 And stitch a patchwork robe.
 Dear friends,
 I have trod your journey,
 Wept your tears,
 And now, returning,
 Wait your welcome.

The Crystal

"Is it gift time yet?" she asks
 As soon as I walk through the door.
 So eager to offer a sparkling crystal
 And he a shell that little fingers have wrapped
 How carefully
 A puzzle for my clumsy grown-up hands.

 Even more than the words you share
 Or the fragrance of sage
 Their smiles are your gift to me.
 As midwives, they welcome me
 Into the world
 Knowing, in their innocence
 That I am younger than they
 And all of us are older than the crystal.
 We have lain in the earth
 For millions of years
 And are being brought forth to the light.
 Their blue eyes assure me
 Of love and safety and warmth.
 For them, it is always gift time.

The Waterfall



Shivaratri Prayer

*Shiva! We gather tonight to worship your linga
 The infinite, immeasurable column of light
 The centreless centre
 Of which each mountain, each crag, each standing stone
 Each erect penis, each upright spine,
 Each human head
 Is symbol and expression.
 For how many early springs have we gathered in this way?
 Twenty thousand, sixty thousand, two hundred thousand
 A million—who can say?
 First, as Paleolithic hunters
 We worshipped you, O Pashupati, Lord of Beasts,
 With deer-horn crown,
 Begging you for success in the hunt.
 Later, when we had subdued to our will
 The beasts and grain-bearing grasses
 We bathed your lingam, Rider on the Bull
 For fertility of flock and field and family.
 And for uncounted millennia
 The wild ones, ochre-clad, with matted locks,
 Caring not for barns, or granaries, or sons,
 Supplicated you, Yogeshwar, Lord of Yoga,
 For mastery of the subtle Serpent Power.*

*More recently, perhaps three thousand springs ago
 We learnt that you dwell not just on Mount Kailash
 But in the Atmalinga of the heart.*

*Crying soham! hamsah!
 We offered you the sacrifice of knowledge.
 And for twelve centuries
 O Lord white as jasmine
 We have hymned you in the words of poet-saints
 With tears of penitence and longing love
 Made you the spouse and consort of our souls.*

*Tonight, on this day in the dawn of a millennium, an age
 We ask you not just for survival, fertility
 Mastery of the kundalini shakti
 Not just for knowledge or individual piety,
 Though all these things we need of you
 Tonight we bathe your lingam
 In tears of collective sorrow
 For our soiled and broken world
 For war, hate, violence, terror
 That separate one living, breathing Shiva from another.
 Lord of Beasts, Ancient among the Gods
 Return to us!
 Restore our lost links to ourselves, each other,
 The animals and the earth.
 Grant us a new dawn, a new spring, a new time
 Of unity and peace.
 Om namah shivayah!*

About the Author

ALAKANANDA DEVI has been writing poetry since the age of six. She is an initiate of the Bhakti lineage of Sant Jnaneshvar and the Ramakrishna Order. As the dervish Sultana, she is a member of the Helveti Jerrahi Order of Sufis. Before traveling to India in 1980, where she spent five years on pilgrimage, Alakananda made her novitiate in an enclosed Abbey of Cistercian nuns in England, her native country.

She and her husband Sadananda run Alandi Ashram in Boulder, Colorado, dedicated to the spirit and teachings of Sant Jnaneshvar. Other books by Alakananda include *Pilgrimage to the Mother: A Woman's Journey to the Source of the Ganges* (Prema Press, 1999) and *The Rainbow Bridge: Prophetic Encounters with the Mother's Path of Unity* (Prema Press, 2003).

