

THE PATCHWORK MANDALA TRILOGY: BOOK TWO

# The Rainbow Bridge

Prophetic Encounters with  
the Mother's Path of Unity

Alakananda Devi



ALAKANANDA & SADANANDA

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the Mother's Path of Unity**

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*"I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be  
a sign of the covenant between Me and the  
earth."*

—Torah

## Introduction

**T**he rainbow! In every culture it has some deep significance—as the bow of Indra the Storm-God, as the union of emptiness and appearance, as the sign of the cosmic covenant, token that the waters of the flood will never again engulf all flesh. The shimmering rainbow, refracting the One Light into many colours, witnesses that consciousness will continue to evolve and differentiate, that He who is one will let His glory be seen in many and various species of living beings. Joining Father Sky and Mother Earth, the rainbow unites transcendence and immanence, masculine and feminine, above and below, conscious and unconscious, this world and the next.

In these pages, we will explore the rainbow bridge through journeys, dreams and transfigurations. In travels that span East and West, we will encounter yogis, Tibetan lamas, medicine men, Christian saints, divine mothers, and a California-born Sufi teacher. In prophetic dream, we will glimpse the shimmering form of the future, reflected in the mirror of the present, and hear the voice of the awakening feminine as she guides us into the new millennium. And in a story of hidden holiness, we will see the light of paradise in the face of a contemporary American saint.

All my life, I have been a prophet, a dreamer, a traveller between two worlds, a dancer on the rainbow bridge. Now the paradigm of the last two thousand years is falling away as we enter a new time. The age of the wounded healer gives place to that of the Mother of Compassion. No longer finding God in cathedral, temple or mosque, we must find Her now in the human heart. The Rainbow Bridge invites us to journey into the new time, cherishing the mystical traditions of the past, yet allowing the new to manifest. Each one of us who senses this shift is invited to dance on the rainbow bridge. To inspire you on

the journey, to strengthen you when your footsteps tire or when dark clouds seem to engulf the path ahead, I offer this book.

*Heyoka Lodge, 1985*

*Deep in the womb of earth,  
Darkness impenetrable,  
Fragrance of cedar and sage,  
Sweat trickling down my back.  
Drumming, music of Lakota  
As spirits rattle gourds,  
Blow whistle, shake the bucket handle,  
Touching sweet medicine water.*

*Upon the earth mound, world axis  
Rock of Himalaya sparkles  
In a ring of red tobacco ties,  
Gift of the glacier, token  
Of Alakananda, snow maiden,  
Little stone person broken  
From the body of the blue-throated Shiva, He  
Drinker of the poison sea.  
We are here, my brothers, my sisters,  
From the Four Directions,  
We the wounded people,  
Body of broken bones  
We are here in our paralysis  
One half of our being blotted out  
One side of our body withered,  
Here to pray for healing.*

*Mitaquiase! All our relations!  
The door is opened,  
Light of the setting sun  
Streams into the contrary lodge.  
I sit, face to the Pacific,  
Unknown water, great frontier.  
Back to Himavat, the Golden Swan,  
And the land of radiant sunrise.  
Darkness, sound of water, hiss of steam.*

*Tankashila, Great-Grandfather  
Be present here.  
Great Person shining like the sun  
Beyond the darkness  
Only by knowing You  
One passes beyond death,  
Each one of us a little stone  
Broken from your body,  
And here together  
Within the hoop  
Within the ring of red tobacco ties.*

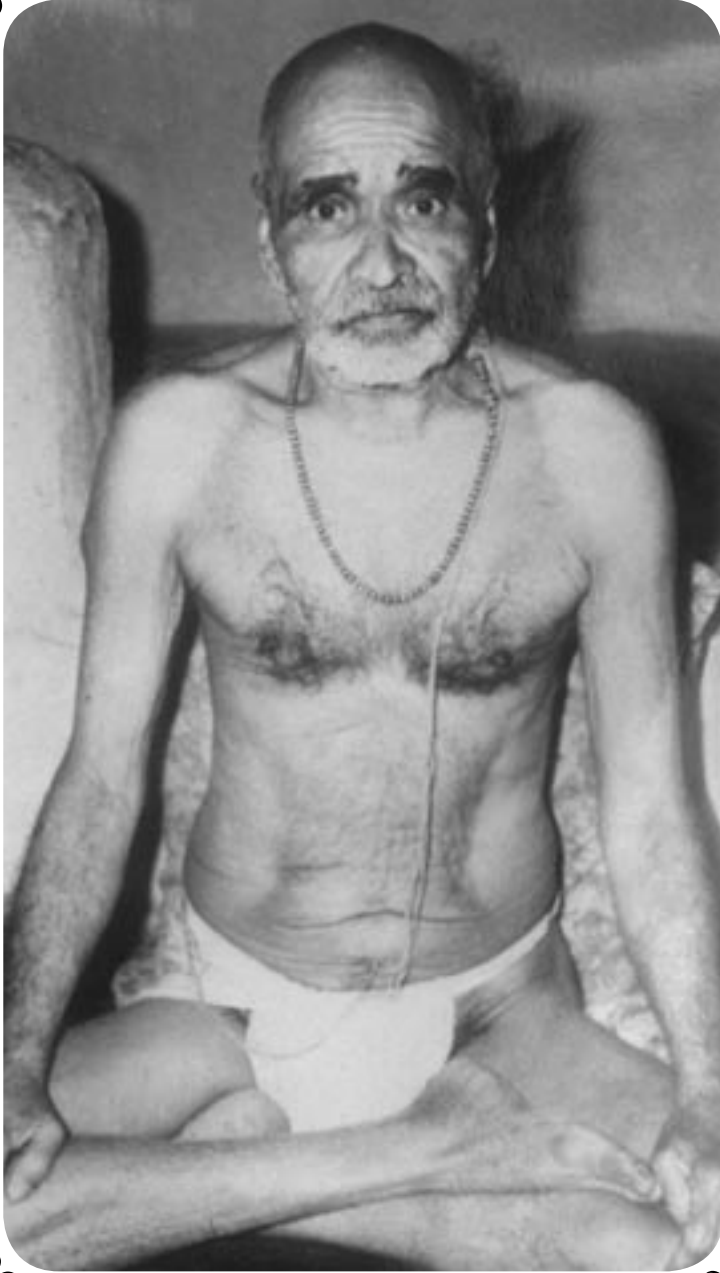
*Like a lightning bolt  
The Eagle swoops  
Upon the offering, the sacred flesh.  
The Pipe of Peace is lit.  
I feel it, smooth and heavy in my hands,  
Its smoke enters my lungs,  
A sword pierces my heart,  
The pain of contrariness.  
Tears gush from my wounded soul.  
Truly my brothers, Red People of the West  
Truly I am pierced  
Hung on the Forked Tree.  
Truly I have danced for you  
A contrary Sun Dance.  
And I the half-breed  
Not of West nor East,  
Wounded healer, tear-stained peacemaker  
Must drink the poisoned cup  
Born of the churning of opposites  
Here on the turtle's back  
Island of the Red Man.  
Tankashila, Great Spirit  
Shiva, radiant Swan.  
O hear my prayer,  
Prayer of the broken heart,  
Of lips stained with the bitter poison sea  
For the warrior people of the Sacred Eagle  
And for the herdsmen of the soft-eyed Cow.*

*O You who glow in the moon's cool rays  
White cow spirit of India, Gay Ma,  
Pour forth your medicine milk to heal  
This Turtle Island, this America,  
The woman whose left side is blotted out.  
And you, great Sun Bird,  
Eagle Spirit of the West  
Empower the men of the East  
For peaceful warriorship.  
From the golden sunrise over the Himalayas  
To the deep blackness of the Sacred Lodge  
May the circle be completed  
May the journey be fulfilled  
May the Two Halves unite.*

**Part 1**

***Journeys:  
Bridging East  
and West***





**BRAHMACHARI RAGHUDAS MAHARAJ**

PHOTO COURTESY OF KAMALABAI

*Within truth is only I  
within I only truth...  
Where is east, where is west?  
Where is path, where is goal?  
An-al-Haq, I am truth.*

—Nur al Jerrahi

## One The Ice Cave

Noonday sun poured into the steep-sided valley, warming my body, still chilled from a dip in icy Himalayan waters. Wrapped in a goat-hair blanket, I sat on a flat, cool rock, eyes half closed, listening to the roar of my pristine namesake, the Alakananda, pure source of the Ganges. Spray wetted my face as the river foamed and rushed past me. Nearby, a column of steam rose into the air, where the scalding waters of Tapt Kund, the hot spring, flowed into the snowmelt stream. In my nostrils was a fragrance of wildflowers and the pungent sweetness of holy basil plants.

A long journey of purification and mystic illumination had brought me here, to the source of Ganga Ma, the soul of India—and to the source of my own being. More than four years earlier, I had arrived in India, wearing a tidy, nunnish blue dress with a belt and buttoned collar, a middle-class, introverted English Catholic doctor and nun, laden with unnecessary mental baggage. Almost at the start of my journey, I had met Sadananda, the ex-hippie, Buddhist-trained *sadhu* who had been my faithful guide, mentor, teacher, and friend as I shed, little by little, all physical, mental and emotional encumbrances. Now, my soul-mate and companion sat beside me on the rock, immobile, deep in meditation. In a small pilgrimage town near Poona, I had met a unique guru, a man of perfect simplicity, completely free of all the trappings of guruhood. And in years of pilgrimage, I had encountered the feminine Divine—the Mother—in all her faces, both dark and light, both beautiful and terrible.

The journey was over. My old life, as a seeker of the Source, was likewise over. I had come to Badrinath to take a new birth,

into the path of return. The river tumbled over rocks, feeling her way downstream. As she descended, other streams would enter her, until she lost her limited identity as Alakananda, and became simply Ganga Ma, the River of Heaven. Growing broader and calmer as she flowed, she would increase in usefulness the greater she grew. Soon she would supply cities with water, and carry boats, barges, and finally ships in her stream. This too would be my process on the way of return—a gradual descent, a receiving of new wisdom streams, a broadening and calming, an increasing usefulness to the whole.

The journey of the Alakananda River, from Badrinath to Calcutta, was well mapped, but for the way that lay ahead of me, no maps or guides existed. The literature of every mystic tradition offered complex and precise guidelines to the steps and stages of the journey to the source. Yet they said nothing about the journey of return to the secular cities of the late twentieth century. I would be left to find my own way, painstakingly recording in my journal each twist of the road, in the hope of helping others who might tread a similar path.

Meanwhile, I still had some days to spend in Badrinath until the full moon festival of Gura Purnima, the holiest day in the Himalayan pilgrimage calendar. So next day, we climbed up beside a roaring cascade towards the great glacier from which the Rishi Ganga flowed. The power of nature was so alive in Badrinath that from the corner of my eye I could almost see the foam fairies at play above the river and elves dancing in the flower-strewn meadow, the cloud spirits touching snowcapped peaks, and the mighty *devas* that presided over the mountains.

In the fragrant meadow below the glacier, we found a little hut. Shyly, we tapped on the door of the hermitage.

“*Namaste*, welcome, welcome!” beamed an ochre-robed renunciant as he opened the door. “Please come in to my humble *kutir*. We do not receive many visitors here, few pilgrims take the steep climb up to the glacier. My disciple will brew you some herbal tea, made from the purest of water. That is our blessing here—pure water, pure air, silence and solitude and the power of the Himalayas. Because of this, I come here every year, even though, each spring, when I return from Laxman Jula, I find my hut practically destroyed by the glacier. The labour and expense of constantly rebuilding the hermitage is worthwhile, for this set-

ting is so conducive to spiritual practice. Before you leave, please take the opportunity of meditating in our little garden. You will find the experience uplifting.”

The meditation was so uplifting that, despite a chilly breeze, we decided to bathe in the icy waters of the Rishi Ganga, freshly sprung from the glacier. To avoid polluting the stream, we poured potfuls of water over each other at a respectful distance from the bank, shivering and gasping meanwhile.

“I feel so pure, so invigorated,” I sighed.

Fittingly enough for one named Alakananda, I had come to find that a bath in nature was, for me, one of the most healing forms of *sadhana*—devotional practice. In the simple act of immersing myself in the waters of some rushing river or clear stream, I felt a dissolving of the sense of separateness, and a renewed harmony with the elements. It was as if, bath after bath, the *ahamkara* or ego-illusion, was slowly being washed away, layer by layer, until at last I would find myself one with the eternally dancing, singing, flowing River of Heaven, my name.

A few hundred feet more of climbing, and we were walking on the glacier, gazing up at the *linga*-like peak of Neelkanth, adorned with a single fluffy cloud. Mount Neelkanth was revered as the guru of Badrinath, and as the very form of Lord Shiva in his aspect as the one who drank a deadly poison which would otherwise have irrevocably polluted the ocean and the entire world. Never having experienced a glacier before, I was walking slowly and cautiously, lagging behind Sadananda, who was in his element. In the exact centre of the glacier, I stopped, my eyes attracted by a fallen rose petal which had somehow blown there. Beside the petal lay a glistening white stone. “*Take it,*” a voice told me, “*and keep it carefully. It is a Gift for your Father.*”

At the entrance to an ice cave I found Sadananda impatiently waiting for me.

“Let’s go. We can climb into the cave.” In the cold, mysterious cavern of ice beneath the glacier, I felt a special closeness to the earth, as if I were listening to the beating of her heart and feeling my own heart beat in synchrony with that ancient pulse. The dripping, glassy walls vibrated a ceaseless *Aum*. Damp and chilled to the marrow of my bones, I still felt the warmth of Earth’s unfailing love for her children. A nature mystic from the day in early childhood when I first became consciously aware of

the fresh scent of the earth and the sparkle of hedgerows after a spring shower, I had never felt so one with the creation as I did in that frozen cavern, at the source of the Rishi Ganga.

When my fingers became too stiff to move, I turned and slowly made my way back, emerging into the brilliant mountain sunlight and glare of the ice, as one who could never again feel separate from the entire web of life. From the womb of the glacier, I was reborn as a cell of Earth's body, a particle of the galactic consciousness. And in my new-found awareness, I could hear in my heart the great *devas* of the Himalaya, the presiding powers of the Northern Hemisphere. I trembled, and not just with cold. These great beings were angry, profoundly indignant, at the devastation and desertification which humanity was inflicting on the earth. In losing my separate identity, I had entered the totality of earth's love—and also of her sorrow.

At last, Sadananda emerged, holding his own glistening white stone. "For our altar. I found it in the very heart of the ice cave. It was wonderful in there...I could hear the *Aum* so clearly."

That night, before sleeping, we walked to the confluence of the Alakananda and Rishi Ganga, and gazed at the magnificent form of Mount Neelkanth.

"What is that light on the mountain?" asked Sadananda. "Is there some kind of government observatory or something up there?"

"No," I replied, "the mountain is completely deserted. Bright as that light looks, it is not an electric light at all, it's a subtle energy. I have been watching it all day. Remember that single cloud that danced around the peak? That was a sideshow, a distraction. The real action was happening with that energy right there. My feeling is, it's an Indra, a storm spirit. Neelkanth is planning some weather."

Sure enough, we awoke next morning to find Neelkanth completely swathed in mists and threatening clouds. Late that night, we took a moonlight walk. Silver sparkles glittered on the Alakananda, and we stood on the footbridge to watch the river dance with her new jewels. The whole valley was alive with her song, whilst the flanks of Nar and Narayan, the two mountains that formed the sides of the gorge, gleamed in the full moon.

"Look! Mount Neelkanth!"

We were both awestruck. The veil of clouds was gone, and

the guru of Badarik Ashram stood out clearly against the night sky, glowing in a pristine robe of fresh-fallen snow. Having received the *puja* of cloud and storm, Neelkanth—he who drank the poison sea and transmuted it to nectar—had emerged in a new splendour, to grant his *darshan* on this Guru Purnima.

Thus blessed by Shiva, the blue-throated one, we had completed our Badrinath pilgrimage. There was no time to linger, for Sadananda's visa expired in a couple of days. And Nepal—or at least the western border—was very close. Reborn of the ice cave and the glacier-chilled waters of the Alakananda River, we set off cross country, by a series of local buses, towards the little border town of Tanakpur.