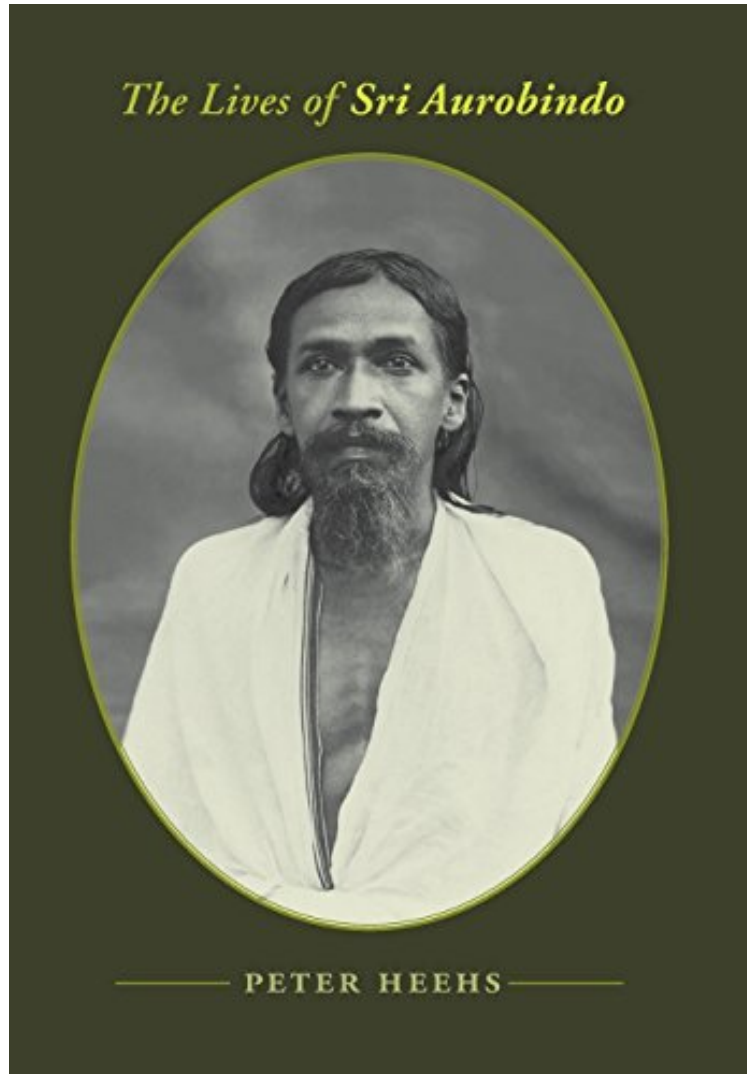


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The Lives of Sri Aurobindo

Peter Heehs

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Peter Heehs : The Lives of Sri Aurobindo before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lives of Sri Aurobindo:

9 of 13 people found the following review helpful. a marvelous gem !By August TimmermansThe Lives of Sri Aurobindo' looks at the different stages of Sri Aurobindo's life while he progressively develops into one of India's most groundbreaking spiritual leaders. Peter Heehs, who has been part of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives for nearly four decades, did extensive research on Sri Aurobindo which took him also to England and France. His straightforward style of writing is based on elaborate and detailed facts; it opens a marvelously surprising window on Sri Aurobindo, as well as on the historical and political landscape of India under British rule with the harsh challenges

for Indian opposition leaders trying to liberate the country. Whereas Sri Aurobindo was determined to fight for the freedom of India - an effort in which he eventually succeeded - his personal spiritual orientation and insights would in the end take him to address the roots of all humanity's un-freedom. To view this gradual shift from the political to the spiritual field, 'The Lives of Sri Aurobindo' is not only unique but a genuine treasure of information, giving factual details of Sri Aurobindo as a man in society dealing with the most mundane facts of life as well as progressively revealing his spiritual destiny to discover the supramental consciousness and establish the Integral Yoga. The book is a gem for many reasons. For its close view of India struggling with the British colonists until gaining full independence on August 15, 1947, the day when Sri Aurobindo celebrated his 75th birthday. For its comparative and critical analysis of the literature and poetry of that time period. And most of all, for the way the book looks at his different "Lives", in this manner revealing the outstanding character of Sri Aurobindo. Through all the stages of his life, from child to student, adult to scholar, married man to political leader, from being a prisoner to finally becoming a spiritual leader, his "goodness" stands out as a tall pillar in a wild sea. He does not show hatred against the British colonists, he just wants full independence. He does not hate his prison guards, prosecutors, and judges, he sympathizes with them. From childhood on he felt a genuine love for his country and his fellowmen and insisted that India becomes free. Once he had the insight that true change takes more than political change, he turned to yoga to find the force that transforms human nature. On discovering this unique transforming supramental consciousness he dedicated the rest of his life to make it accessible to all. And for doing so, a second person came to the front who aided him in exploring and developing not only the yoga but also the small community that had formed around Sri Aurobindo. When he withdrew and went into active retirement, as it is called in the book, Mirra Alfassa, a spiritual collaborator who had joined him in 1920 and who was introduced later as The Mother, began to take care of the personal guidance of each community member, eventually accepting also women and children to this rapidly growing yoga collective, while joining in Sri Aurobindo's efforts to manifest the supramental consciousness. How this further develops would take an additional book with an as fascinating story, as The Mother, after Sri Aurobindo's passing in 1950, continues with the exploration of the supramental consciousness as well as starts alternative yoga communities. What we see in The Lives of Sri Aurobindo is the life story of a being of intense determination, having deep compassion for the struggle of humanity and ... doing something about it. One note: although this is not a hagiography, the writer's admiration and love for the subject he writes about shines through every page of this remarkable book.

August Timmermans Bangkok, Thailand January 14, 2010

16 of 21 people found the following review helpful. The Progress of a Yogi By George Gordon

The Lives of Sri Aurobindo, by Peter Heehs, is a remarkable biography of a yogi who spent one-third of his life secluded in a room on a spiritual quest for a supramental consciousness. What Heehs has done is to show how this quest grew out of a bookish, solitary youth, an academic interlude in Baroda, followed by a short political life which galvanized the Indian independence movement, and then the realization that his true task was to hasten the evolution of humanity towards nothing less than a deathless flowering of spirit out of matter. Once he was able to silence his mind, Aurobindo surrendered to the voices and visions beyond it, even as he continued determinedly to speak in public, write volumes of philosophy and poetry while gradually turning ever more inward. Sri Aurobindo is usually portrayed to the public solely in terms of the latter third of his life: "Sri," the guru, ripe for sainthood, already receding into mythology. Heehs shows us, through an accumulation of material gleaned from many sources, the progression of an active life. He is particularly informative about his political years, about which he has previously written extensively. He has also unearthed a wealth of detail about Sri Aurobindo's years in Baroda, years that I have read little about. Heehs provides concise summaries of Sri Aurobindo's major works as well as that of the Record of Yoga, his remarkable spiritual journal. I came away from this biography with a new-found appreciation and reverence for the life and accomplishments of Sri Aurobindo, the most remarkable spiritual figure in 20th century India.

24 of 31 people found the following review helpful. The Lives of Sri Aurobindo By Jose Sad Osio

Death Doula Are there parallels for the United States and its past attempts at global stewardship to be found in The English Empire's dominance of India at the turn of the 1900's ? Not a subject one expects to encounter when reading about a spiritual teacher that is unless you read Gandhi. But clearly when reading The Lives Of Sri Aurobindo the complexity of such an issue is masterly explored in Peter Heeh's in-depth portrait of one of India's giants of the 20th century. In Heeh's meticulous research we find a revolutionary spirit that is played out as a formidable struggle using the Gita as Sri Aurobindo's inspiration to achieve for the Divine Mother India the grandeur of presence that it now just beginning to experience. The world has come to recognize Gandhi's achievements often mythologized to engender western approval - as the Guru of India's Nationalism- and his non-violence philosophy as a model for compassionate engagement. What is of major significance in The Lives is how Sri Aurobindo is that it isn't sanitized for the western reader but shows the level of intensity and daring that Sri Aurobindo invested in delivering India from the yoke of Britain through any means when necessary - violent or otherwise. Peter Heeh's is too good of a biographer to simply let Sri Aurobindo's vision for India be a nationalistic one; Heeh's draws on those years of the revolutionary Aurobindo to craft the sage Aurobindo and his belief that the human spirit is the enfoldment of the struggle that mankind undergoes and is the work of a conscious stewardship that planetary citizens now are finding as thee struggle in the 21st Century. Not unlike the Bhagavad-Gita's uncompromised message of karmic responsibility the Lives of Sri Aurobindo guides the reader through a rich

tapestry of engaged consciousness which in our own current struggles are beyond stewardship and are for healing - a vital reminder that it is the work of the spirit and the seeker that transforms one's being and possibly a nation. In threading the chapters of *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* Heeh's brings to the forefront of Aurobindo's life his extensive life's works into yogic philosophy and into his remaining chapters on Aurobindo the guide. A final treat for readers of *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* is its rich storehouse of references into Sri Aurobindo's extensive body of works as well as Heeh's (as the devotee / an insider) awareness in the mapping of Sri Aurobindo's progressive journey into a rich living tradition unbound by the constraints of isms and fully actualized by the Divine.

Since his death in 1950, Sri Aurobindo Ghose has been known primarily as a yogi and a philosopher of spiritual evolution who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in peace and literature. But the years Aurobindo spent in yogic retirement were preceded by nearly four decades of rich public and intellectual work. Biographers usually focus solely on Aurobindo's life as a politician or sage, but he was also a scholar, a revolutionary, a poet, a philosopher, a social and cultural theorist, and the inspiration for an experiment in communal living. Peter Heehs, one of the founders of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, is the first to relate all the aspects of Aurobindo's life in its entirety. Consulting rare primary sources, Heehs describes the leader's role in the freedom movement and in the framing of modern Indian spirituality. He examines the thinker's literary, cultural, and sociological writings and the Sanskrit, Bengali, English, and French literature that influenced them, and he finds the foundations of Aurobindo's yoga practice in his diaries and unpublished letters. Heehs's biography is a sensitive, honest portrait of a life that also provides surprising insights into twentieth-century Indian history.

All students and scholars of Sri Aurobindo will find this extraordinary book most rewarding... Essential. (CHOICE) A great biography... a doorway into [Sri Aurobindo's] extraordinary spiritual philosophy and vision. (EnlightenNext) It is engagingly written and supported by a bounty of historical materials. Students of India with little familiarity of Aurobindo will discover that Heehs offers a multisided portrait of a brilliant and enigmatic man whose lifetime spanned a momentous period in modern Indian history... (Hanna H. Kim H-Asia) The book's strength is Heehs' deep understanding of modern India, which gives him an edge in perceptively situating Aurobindo within the context of Indian national movement. (Vijendra Singh Contemporary South Asia)...meticulously reported and scrupulously footnoted... (Yoga Journal) Heehs has succeeded magnificently; *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* is quickly becoming the biography for academics. (AntiMatter) Heehs' work is an epic effort to encompass the outer and inner life of a personality, who seems to defy all definitions and boundaries, written with the intention of making him comprehensible to the scholarly mind of our times. I believe this book to be eminently successful (Debashish Banerji Sophia) A formidable piece of scholarship. (Antony Copley Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society) About the Author Peter Heehs was born and educated in the United States but has lived in India since 1971. One of the founders of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, he is currently a member of the editorial board of the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, and has published many books and articles.