



**Spiritual Masters: Sri Aurobindo  
by Promode Kumar Sen**

(Translation of the original Bengali *Sri Aurobindo: Jeebon O Jog* [1939] by Prasenjit Sen  
with translator's notes)

**Publisher: Indus Source Books ([www.indussource.com](http://www.indussource.com)) (email: [info@indussource.com](mailto:info@indussource.com))**

**ISBN: 978-81-88569-71-7 ; Paperback ; pp. 266 ; size: 5.5 in x 8.5 in ; Rs. 299/-**

**Available online on amazon.in ([http://www.amazon.in/Spiritual-Masters-Sri-Aurobindo/dp/8188569712/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1443073232&sr=8-1&keywords=spiritual+masters%3A+sri+aurobindo](http://www.amazon.in/Spiritual-Masters-Sri-Aurobindo/dp/8188569712/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1443073232&sr=8-1&keywords=spiritual+masters%3A+sri+aurobindo))**

**About the book**

***Sri Aurobindo: Jeebon O Jog* was the first complete biography of Sri Aurobindo, written in Bengali, and approved by the Master.**

Sri Aurobindo was a scholar, a literary critic, a philosopher, a revolutionary, a poet, and a yogi. Born on 15 August 1872 in Kolkata, he spent the initial part of his life, fighting for the basic rights of humanity (for his countrymen). In his later life the aim of his *sadhana* was for India and the entire mankind to gain the right to divinity.

Sri Aurobindo became a revolutionary leader of India's fight for independence. *Sri Aurobindo: Jeebon O Jog* was written at a time when any writing on Sri Aurobindo was frowned upon by the British government. The author has interestingly brought out in this book the rational aspect of the split in Surat Congress. His analysis has also brought out

how the Congress party later adopted as its main theme, Swaraj and Swadeshi, the mantra of the Nationalist Party of Sri Aurobindo and Lokmanya Tilak in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Leaving politics for spiritual work, Sri Aurobindo developed a method of spiritual practice that he called Integral Yoga. The central theme of his vision was the evolution of human life into a divine life.

### **About the Author**

Promode Kumar Sen (1899-1952) was a patriot, journalist and a self-realised personality. He had immersed himself in the confluence of these three streams of internal inspirations. His outstanding journalistic talent manifested through the columns of well-known newspapers of the day. *Forty Rupees and Patriotism* – this was the mantra of his devotion. His rich and lively writings on literature, original analysis on political affairs, and patriotic articles published in the *Liberty*, the *Advance*, the *Hindustan Standard* and the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* of Calcutta and Allahabad editions, had attracted the attention of the intellectual readership and won their appreciation. At the peak of his journalistic life he wrote *Sri Aurobindo: Jeebon O Jog* (Sri Aurobindo: Life and Yoga) in Bengali. The fulfillment of the spiritual aspects of his life took place in total submission at the lotus feet of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

### **About the Translator**

Prasenjit Sen considers himself to be blessed to receive the Grace of The Mother at the early age of 12, when accompanied by his father Promode Kumar he arrived at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. The Mother granted him permission to join the ‘Group’ in the playground of the Ashram. This was the beginning of six decades of a sheltered life under the Grace of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

Prasenjit completed his education in science and technology culminating in a Ph.D and in the service career attained the post of Director IT in Air India. He is young at 75, still active, and associated with Symbiosis Centre for Information Technology in teaching and research.

## **Extract**

### **Chapter 9**

## **Vision of God in Prison**

Sri Aurobindo was in prison for only a year, during which a total transformation happened, and as result of which Aurobindo Ghose, the political leader and patriot, turned into Sri Aurobindo, the lover of God and a *Mahayogi* (great yogi). To some, this transformation may seem sudden and strange, but Sri Aurobindo himself has hinted that from his very childhood he was, as though, a yogi in disguise. Just as his love for the country, his desire to have the knowledge of God too, was kindled in his heart

right from his boyhood days. He could not rest content with the common notion or the idea of God held by the people at large in those days, his foremost ideal of life was to establish an intimate contact with God and to realise Him even in the minute atoms of this universe. However, until now, he had not got the opportunity to attain this supreme realisation, but now, in the solitude of the prison cell, he got it to the fullest measure—in fact, he passed most of his time in prison in solitary confinement. It may be said that it was God who offered him this opportunity. Lord Sri Krishna, the divine incarnation, was born in a prison cell; in the prison cell itself Sri Aurobindo got the vision of Sri Krishna. Sri Aurobindo realised Him at heart and in his whole being integrally.<sup>48</sup>

Sri Aurobindo felt within, an inkling of this supreme possibility and so, he entered the prison cell with a tranquil heart. He has mentioned this in his book *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life). He says, I have spoken of a year's imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in a forest, in an *ashram* or hermitage. For long I had made great efforts for a direct vision (साक्षात्दर्शन) of the Lord in my heart, and had harboured immense hope of knowing the Preserver of the world, the Supreme Person (पुरुषोत्तम) as friend and master. But due to the pull of thousand worldly desires, attachment towards numerous activities, and in the deep darkness of ignorance I did not succeed in that effort. At last the most merciful, all-good Lord (Sri Hari) destroyed these enemies all in one stroke and helped me in my path, pointed to the *Yogashram*, Himself staying as guru and friend in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline. That ashram was the British prison. I have also watched this strange contradiction in my life that however much good my well intentioned friends might do for me, the antagonists did more benefits—whom shall I call an enemy? Enemy, I have none. They who tried to harm me, helped me instead. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God.<sup>49</sup>

This urge to see God had awakened in him long before. In Baroda, we have seen him as an austere seeker of knowledge, but even then he was following covertly the path of yoga. From the writings of Barindra Kumar we come to know that once he went to see a great yogi called Brahmananda who was living on the banks of River Narmada. It is rumoured that this yogi would never cast a glance at anyone; but when Sri Aurobindo stood before him, he opened his eyes and cast on him a smiling, fleeting look.

It is learnt that Sri Aurobindo, while in Baroda, got his initial guidance in the path of yoga from a Maharashtrian yogi called Lele Maharaj. He met Lele Maharaj when he was returning from the Surat Congress. It is at this time that we observe Sri Aurobindo's yogic state. The source of the speech he delivered in Bombay was from a higher plane. Swami Vivekananda had the same kind of experience when he was delivering a lecture at the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago (1893). In the book *Nirbasiter Atmakatha* (Memoirs of a Revolutionary in Exile) written by Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, we find a few interesting facts about Lele Maharaj. When Lele Maharaj had come to Calcutta, Barindra Kumar showed him the bomb-making factory at Maniktala. Lele Maharaj advised Barindra Kumar and his co-workers to desist from attempting an armed revolution and warned that this would cause them a world of troubles. But Barindra Kumar boldly disregarded this warning. A few days after Lele Maharaj's departure from Calcutta, the police raided the bomb-making factory. After

this incident, Lele Maharaj and Sri Aurobindo never again met each other. A few years later, Lele Maharaj left his mortal body.

After returning to Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo remained absorbed in his *sadhana* even in the vortex of political activities. He regarded Sri Ramakrishna as the fountainhead of national awakening. On his way back from Surat he remarked in the aforesaid speech in Bombay that the true work for India's struggle for freedom started when masses of educated people from all corners of the country—East, West, North and South—prostrated at the feet of that illiterate *sanyasi*. Sri Aurobindo did not dwell on national progress alone; he made special mention also of the *sadhana* of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda while discussing spiritual matters. His wife, Mrinalini Devi, kept at home some sacred earth from Dakshineswar temple. Sri Aurobindo has written in *Karakahini* about the following humorous account that took place with regard to this earth during the police search. He says, "Nothing remarkable transpired in the course of the search. But I recollect Mr. Clark looking long and suspiciously at the sacred earth from Dakshineswar that had been kept in a small cardboard box; he suspected it might be some new and terribly powerful explosive. In a sense Mr. Clark's suspicions were not unfounded. In the end the decision was reached that it was a piece of earth and it was unnecessary to send it to the chemical analyst."<sup>50</sup>

It has been said before that Sri Aurobindo had seen the manifestation of the divine power in the national awakening. Before he was imprisoned, he had been speaking about this with all sincerity in his speeches in various parts of India. His speech in Bombay (19 January 1908) as mentioned earlier, has woken up the unappreciated and weak Bengal because they believed his words: "Nationalism is not a political activity; nationalism is a divinely evolved religion. Nationalism can never be destroyed; it will survive with the divine power—whatever weapon be employed against it. Nationalism is immortal because it is not a humanly thing. God is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to the gaol." Thus, he had realised the glory of God through various situations and got immersed completely in the divine consciousness during his prison life.

After he was imprisoned, Sri Aurobindo's new *sadhana* commenced. His colleagues knew that Sri Aurobindo was by nature a very quiet person. He was unperturbed even in the face of great crisis. His patience became quite evident in the test of fire on this occasion. After three days in the police lock-up when he was brought to the court, he told one of his relatives, "Tell everyone at home, they should not fear, my innocence will be proved." Hereafter he wrote: "Since then I had the firm belief that this would definitely happen. At first in the solitary confinement, the mind becomes a bit disturbed, but after three days of prayer and meditation the life was again filled with steady calm and unshakeable faith."

Thus began his yogic *sadhana* in the prison cell. Though an undertrial prisoner, he was kept in solitary confinement like all others because in the eyes of the police, they were all dangerous people. We get a picture of his prison life from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and those of a few others. From the amusing account that he has given in *Karakahini* regarding his arrangements for stay, bathing, meals etc. in the prison, we can make out that in spite of the inhumane sufferings he endured in the prison, he never felt the least distressed. The reader may wonder how a person brought up in England's free atmosphere could remain so unruffled even in the midst of the most abominable conditions of life prevailing in the prison cells of those days. We have already learnt that while he was in Baroda he used to lead his life like a *sanyasi*. When he came to Bengal, there was no change in his lifestyle. He used to

earn a good amount of money in Baroda but here in Bengal he used to receive a paltry sum of money from the *Bande Mataram* office and he “survived on rice and spinach” so to say. He would say that in a country where half of the population lived without two square meals a day, one should eat only rice and spinach. At the time of his arrest, Cregan (the police officer), realising his frugal ways of living, was surprised and wondered how an educated man like him could live in such miserable conditions.

The people of the modern era will perhaps be horrified to read the description of the inhuman prison conditions of those days that forced the prisoners to lead a life more painful than that of a caged animal. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo chose to be humorous even in his description of these harrowing experiences. He says, “Attached bathrooms are, I know, oftentimes a part of Western culture, but to have in a small cell a bedroom, dining room and toilet rolled into one—that is what is called too much of a good thing! We Indians are full of regrettable customs, thus, it is painful for us to be so highly civilised in such a way.”<sup>51</sup>

The arrangements for the prisoners’ bathing were nominal. He says, “According to the British, the love of God and physical well-being are almost equal and rare virtues, whether the prison regulations were made in order to prove the point of such a proverb or to prevent the unwilling austerity of the convicts spoilt by excessive bathing facilities, it is not easy to decide.”

A few days later, there was to some extent a redressal of the problem of drinking water. On this he writes: “Before this, in course of my long battle with thirst I had achieved a thirst-free state.” About the two blankets provided for sleeping, he writes: “When the heat became unbearable, I would roll on the ground and enjoy it. Then did I know the joy of the cool touch of Mother Earth. But the floor’s contact in the prison was not always pleasing, it prevented the coming of sleep and so I had to take recourse to the blanket.”<sup>52</sup>

He continues: “This description of the Alipore Government hotel which I have given here, and will continue giving later, is not for the purpose of advertising my own hardship; it is only to show what strange arrangements are made for undertrial prisoners in the civilised British Raj to prolong agony for the innocent. The causes of the hardships that I have described were no doubt there, but since my faith in divine mercy was strong I had to suffer only for the first few days; thereafter—by what means I shall mention later—the mind had transcended these sufferings and grown incapable of feeling any hardship. That is why when I recollect my prison life instead of anger or sorrow I feel like laughing. When first of all I had to go into my cage dressed in strange prison uniform, and notice the arrangements for our stay, this is what I felt. And I laughed within myself. Having studied the history of the English people and their recent doings I had already found out their strange and mysterious character. So I was not at all astonished or unhappy at their behaviour towards me.”<sup>53</sup>

This is what is called the cycle of fate! He who would have sent many people into this prison cell had he accepted the civil service job, had to experience for a year its terrible condition. Mahadev Govind Ranade once told him to take up the work of prison reform. Indeed, if thousands of leaders and workers had not endured the pangs of prison life from the days of the *Swadeshi* Movement, who can say how many aeons it would have taken to rid the Indian prisons of their cruelty!