

# July 2017 Special Issue Introduction

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The focus of this special issue of *Integral Review* is centered on two principle themes. The first theme is integral education, the educational framework that was first developed by Sri Aurobindo and Mother Mirra Alfassa (a.k.a. The Mother) as part of their integral world view. Sri Aurobindo, who was sent to England at age seven to receive a Western education, returned to India in 1893 and dedicated his early work to the cause of liberation of India from the colonial British rule. His ideas on education had significant implications for the educational system of India, which was dominated by the British at the time. A few decades later, as more and more followers and their families joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram community in Pondicherry, India, The Mother became directly involved with educating the Ashram children and started a school in 1943, which is known today as the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

In *The Modern Knowledge Academy, Vedantic Education and Integral Education*, Debashish Banerji explores how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's vision of integral education integrated aspects of ancient Vedantic principles with modern knowledge academy. Banerji starts with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century discussions on education that took place among key intellectual figures of India about the national system of education and the challenge of reconciliation of traditional epistemologies with Western educational values. Among topics discussed were giving priority to native languages, equal valuation of the sciences and humanities, and intellectual understanding versus inner and intuitive sources of wisdom.

Banerji characterizes the modern knowledge academy, which is rooted in scientific and empirical methodology, as being objective and universal in its outlook, thus deemphasizing subjectivity and the role of individual knowledge. At the same time, he maintains, the universal humanism that emerged was important to individual liberation and equality both in the West and for colonized people in contrast to native pedagogy, since indigenous education in India was often based on a patriarchal and authoritarian model. As Banerji puts it "... the critique of national education cuts both ways – finding principles in the modern knowledge academy to correct biases and prejudices of the past, while also contesting the definitions of epistemology and pedagogy based on indigenous knowledge systems." Banerji argues that in the Vedantic approach to knowledge ontology and epistemology are not separate and that Vedantic epistemology aims at overcoming the subject-object split through intuitive approaches and direct non-dual experiences of the Self. He concludes with a discussion on how Sri Aurobindo reconciles epistemologies of modern knowledge and nativist approaches to knowledge and how it can be implemented in a post-secular global society.

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In the next article, *A Complete Integral Education: Five Principal Aspects*, Jeremie Zulaski reviews the five principal aspects of a “complete integral education” envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother using several of their key writings in this area. After a brief critique of the current educational models, the author provides an outline of integral education and concludes that “a complete integral education contributes a potentially corrective alternative to outmoded orthodox methods that privilege intellectual proficiency over the holistic knowledge potentially present, given authentic engagement of learning communities.” Integral education is often referred to as education for the whole person which is typically defined as engaging the mind, body and spirit in recent literature and by certain educational establishments, including CIIS. However, in integral education based on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s teachings the whole person is defined in terms of five major constituents: the physical/somatic, the vital/affective, mental/cognitive as well as the psychic and the spiritual dimensions. Using the available teachings by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the author examines each of these areas in some detail.

The next article by Heidi Fraser Hagerman is an empirical study involving the alumni of the East-West Psychology (EWP) Program at CIIS. This program started in the mid-1970s and has gone through a series of changes in its curriculum. In the 1970s it bridged Asian psychologies such as yoga psychology and Buddhist psychology with the emerging Western schools such as Jungian, existential, humanistic, and transpersonal psychologies. Over time, the East-West dimension was expanded to embrace a more global vision by including indigenous and sacred psychologies, contemplative psychology, and more recently areas such as ecopsychology and consciousness studies. Today the educational vision of the EWP program explicitly aspires towards an integral education that honors intellectual excellence as well as the wisdom of the somatic, vital, emotional, imaginal, and spiritual dimensions of the person in order to foster transformative inquiry and learning and to facilitate psychospiritual development.

The article titled *The Value of an Integral Education: A Mixed-Method Study with Alumni of the East-West Psychology Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies* is a unique and original study to engage graduates of the program to explore the relationship between their integral educational experience and their personal and professional development. According to the author, “The findings revealed that their experience and understanding of integral education in EWP is mostly in alignment with the ideals of CIIS; namely, honoring multiple perspectives, the multidimensionality of being, and multiple ways of knowing ...” The study also uncovers areas that need further development such as more focus on practical and professional development, further support for students’ psychospiritual development, and communication skills to convey the value of an integral education effectively with communities outside of CIIS.

The remaining articles in this issue explore a key aspect of integral education and world view; namely, women’s spirituality and integral feminist pedagogies. Alka Arora’s article titled *Women’s Spirituality at CIIS: Uniting Integral and Feminist Pedagogies* sets the foundations for an educational framework termed integral feminist pedagogy, which is an attempt at uniting the principles and practices of both the integral and feminist traditions. Arora critiques a particular narrow view of integralism that “divorces individuals from their social and political context” and argues for a framework that not only takes into account the unification of mind, body, and spirit, but in addition integrates the social and political context which is the focus of Feminist pedagogy.

This position is in fact resonant with CIIS founders' vision of integration of the personal and psychological dimensions of spiritual practice with social, cultural, and political awareness and transformative action.

The next article by Arisika Razak entitled *The Divine Feminist: A Diversity of Perspectives That Honor Our Mothers' Gardens by Integrating Spirituality and Social Justice* further builds on the theme of integration of spirituality and social justice. Citing a number of key figures in the women's spirituality and related movements, Razak argues that while spirituality has often been separated from feminism, a number of prominent scholars in diverse fields such as Africana and Chicana studies, Indigenous studies, Islamic studies, queer studies and women's spirituality "have all linked empowered roles for women and other oppressed groups to contemporary and historic liberatory spiritual frameworks and culturally specific Indigenous roles for women and other oppressed genders."

Razak defines the contemporary *divine feminist* as "one who walks the contested borderlands between secular feminisms, philosophy and religious studies, and ethnic/indigenous studies" by integrating "diverse spiritual frameworks elaborated by people of color, liberatory theory and praxis supporting the empowerment of women and other oppressed genders with Euro-American academic perspectives, and contemporary disability and embodiment studies" to develop new forms of activism, scholarship and alliance building.

Monica Mody's article, *The Borderlands Feminine: A Feminist, Decolonial Framework for Remembering Motherlines in South Asia/Transnational Culture* is an excellent example of the kind of scholarship embraced in the previous two articles. Mody engages Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderlands framework", an alternative new consciousness and "a profoundly relational, integrative onto-epistemological praxis", to empower the marginalized sacred feminine in the context of South Asian motherlines by offering a radical synthesis of spiritual healing with anti-oppression work. She writes:

[c]reating self-affirming, complex images of female identity, and making revisionist myths—while engaging the self in relation to culture—constitutes a decolonial practice. It enables South Asian women—as the Others of colonial modernity and brahmanical patriarchy—to renew their relation to an episteme of the sacred that liberates their voices, vitality, and authority.

Earlier Banerji argued that the Western "universal humanism ... was important to individual liberation and equality both in the West and for colonized people in contrast to native pedagogy since indigenous education in India was often based on a patriarchal and authoritarian model." Mody argues that neither the patriarchal system in India nor the universal humanism of the West would provide the right solutions and offers a post-secular decolonized recovery at the edges of the postcolonial feminist subjectivity through the borderlines framework that "forefronts the grandmothers, the foremothers, and the experiences of women of color on their own terms."

In the final article, Karabi Sen introduces *Chinmoyee* and *Mrinmoyee*, two different ways of looking at divinity in the feminine form in traditional Indian context. *Chinmoyee* and *Mrinmoyee* refer to the divine female principle in the context of Hindu philosophy and religion which have

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often been interpreted by philosophers and common people alike as opposites, much in the same sense that mind and matter have been held as opposite in dualistic philosophies. In the spirit of non-dual philosophy, Sen proposes that the two aspects of the divine feminine, the transcendent and the embodied, are essentially two aspects of the same unified consciousness. Through various philosophical arguments as well as references to some of the current growing-edge work in science, and Sri Aurobindo's views on the stages evolution of life, Sen creates a platform where "the scientist, the philosopher and the saint join hands" to address the questions about our relationships to the whole, our course of actions and our choices behind our actions if we choose a "*conscious foundation* for our vision of harmony with the whole universe upon the discovered unity and link between our body and the rest of the bodies, our life and the rest of the lives, our values and those of the others."

The essays selected for this special issue of *Integral Review* represent a small cross-section of current integral scholarship at the California Institute of Integral Studies. We are grateful to *Integral Review* for providing another opportunity to share these ideas with the larger community of integral scholars.

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