



Pierre Evald

And Another Thing ...

India's greatest bookman

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If there were a competition to decide who is the 20th century's a) most voracious reader; b) most prolific author; and c) assembler of the largest personal library, India would have a candidate. His name is Osho, a spiritual leader, who attained, before his death in 1990, a substantial following both in India and the West. India's esteem for Osho can be measured by the fact that he is one of only two authors whose entire works have been placed in the Library of India's National Parliament in New Delhi. The other is Mahatma Gandhi.

Born in 1931 in a small village in the state of Madhya Pradesh, in central India, Osho did not go to school until he was nine years old. He was a precocious scholar, both in Hindi and English. He read all 3.000 books in the local public library when he was a teenager. Often he would read all night, which occasionally gave him a headache. He would then apply painkilling balm to his forehead to continue reading and at dawn would go to the river for a swim.

From 1958 to 1966, Osho was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Jabalpur. Thereafter, he devoted himself entirely to spiritual study, reading close to 100 books a week. He is said to have read 100-200.000 titles over a period of forty years, some fiction, but mostly philosophy, psychology, religion and science.

In *Books I have loved* (1985), a book dedicated to the memory of Alan Watts and his effort to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western thinking and spirituality, Osho cites authors as diverse as Walt Whitman, Lewis Carroll, Friedrich Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Book of Mirdad, Lao Tzu, Hahlil Gibran, D R Susuki, Herman Hess, Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Samuel Beckett, Karl Marx,

Turgenev, Herbert Marcuse and Aristotle.

In 1954, at the age of twenty-three, he spent his entire salary for a month (seventy rupees) on a copy of P D Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*. He had a particular passion for 19th century Russian novelists and maintained that if he had to count only ten outstanding novels, five of them would be Russian.

Osho first came to the attention of students from the West during his stay in Bombay from 1970 to 1974. Thereafter he settled in Poona, on the edge of the Deccan plateau, 120 miles from Bombay. His mansion, known as Lao Tzu House, is entirely filled with books. His private library of 100.000 volumes is said to be exceeded in the 20th century only by that of Henry Edwards Huntington, the American railway tycoon (1850-1927).

Using Bowker's *Books-in-Print*, Osho, during his years in Poona, ordered books by the hundreds through Bombay and Poona Booksellers. His days were fully occupied with reading, interrupted only by meals and morning discourses.

He left very specific instructions for the design of his library. No two books of the same size or colour were to be placed next to each other, so that visually the library looks like rainbow-coloured waves. The aesthetic dimension is underlined by glass and metallic silver painting of book cases and mirrors on shelves behind the waving books.

Osho has 600 books of which he is officially the author. They are transcriptions of his talks. Seven thousand of his discourses are also available on digital tape and 1.700 on digital video tape.

Following his move to Poona in 1974, he launched a series of discourses in English entitled *My Way: The Way of the White Clouds*. It has been estimated that from 1974 to 1981, Osho spoke over thirty-three million words in his daily discourses, averaging 13.000 words per day, for seven days a week. During the same period, he answered over 10.000 questions. In the evenings, at intimate *darshans* (blessings), he would answer questions on subjects such as love, jealousy and meditation. These *darshans* are recorded in sixty-four diaries, of which forty have been published.

Today the Lao Tzu Library is basically an archive, with entrance permitted only for copyright and research purposes. Only a few outsiders, mostly American scholars, have been

allowed to do their research into Osho's stay in Oregon from 1981 to 1985, where he was known as Bhagwan Shree Rhaneesh ("Lord of the Full Moon") and became a controversial figure, being ultimately imprisoned for immigration violations.

After his move to Oregon, he fell silent until 1984, after which he confined his announcements to answers to questions from disciples. This period was followed by discourses during his travels to five continents, including countries such as Nepal, Crete and Uruguay, where he was allowed to stay without being expelled immediately. He returned to Poona in 1987 and died there in 1990.

Osho took an intimate personal interest in each of his books, involving himself in every phase of production, including choice of title and design of book jackets. All of the books are lavishly produced. Publishing and copyright are handled by the Osho International Centre, New York, which ensures that nothing can be edited. In the elegant surroundings of the forty-sixth floor of the old General Electric building on 51st and Lexington, dialogues have been conducted for publishers who want to modify Osho's harshness on subjects such as women, the Pope, politicians and Mother Theresa.

In India, Osho is reckoned to be the country's bestselling non-fiction author, selling over one million books and tapes annually, covering 450 titles in thirteen Indian languages. There are more than 2.000 translations into forty other languages, publishers including Mondadori in Italy; Grupa Planeta in Spain; Ediouro in Brazil; Heyne in Germany, St Martin's Press in the US and Element with Penguin in the UK.

Osho's works are featured in Bertelsmann's Chinese Book Club. Half a million books by Osho have been sold in Russia from 1994 to 1997. At St Martin's Press, *Osho Zen Tarot* cards sold 100.000 copies in two years. St Martins also published *The Book of the Secrets*, a 1.200-page paperback on Bible paper, which sold 15.000 copies in its first year.

The video library, consisting of 1.700 video tapes, at the Lao Tzu Library is being converted onto Betacam SP, using one of the finest studio facilities in Europe. This will produce noise reduction, effect image enhancement and colour correction.

The Lao Tzu Library can also be consulted on the Web (<http://www.osho.com>), which has offered more than 1.000 web pages since December, 1995. By January 1999, the site

was receiving 110.000 hits per month.

Osho is today the world's bestselling audio book author, publishers being reconciled to the fact that only the originals can be sold - no readings, no editing. Sales of meditative audio tapes are booming, 20% of all respondents being oriented towards New Age and spiritual matters, 70% of this number being women.

Whatever the merits or demerits of his teachings, Osho is a phenomenon in publishing, reading and book collecting, with an astonishing output recorded and preserved on paper, audio and video.