

A FEATURE TO COMMEMORATE SRI AUROBINDO'S

## A revelation of human destiny

The world is currently celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. Manoj Das traces the life of Sri Aurobindo, his quest for realisation of the 'True Self' and the founding and growth of the Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry.

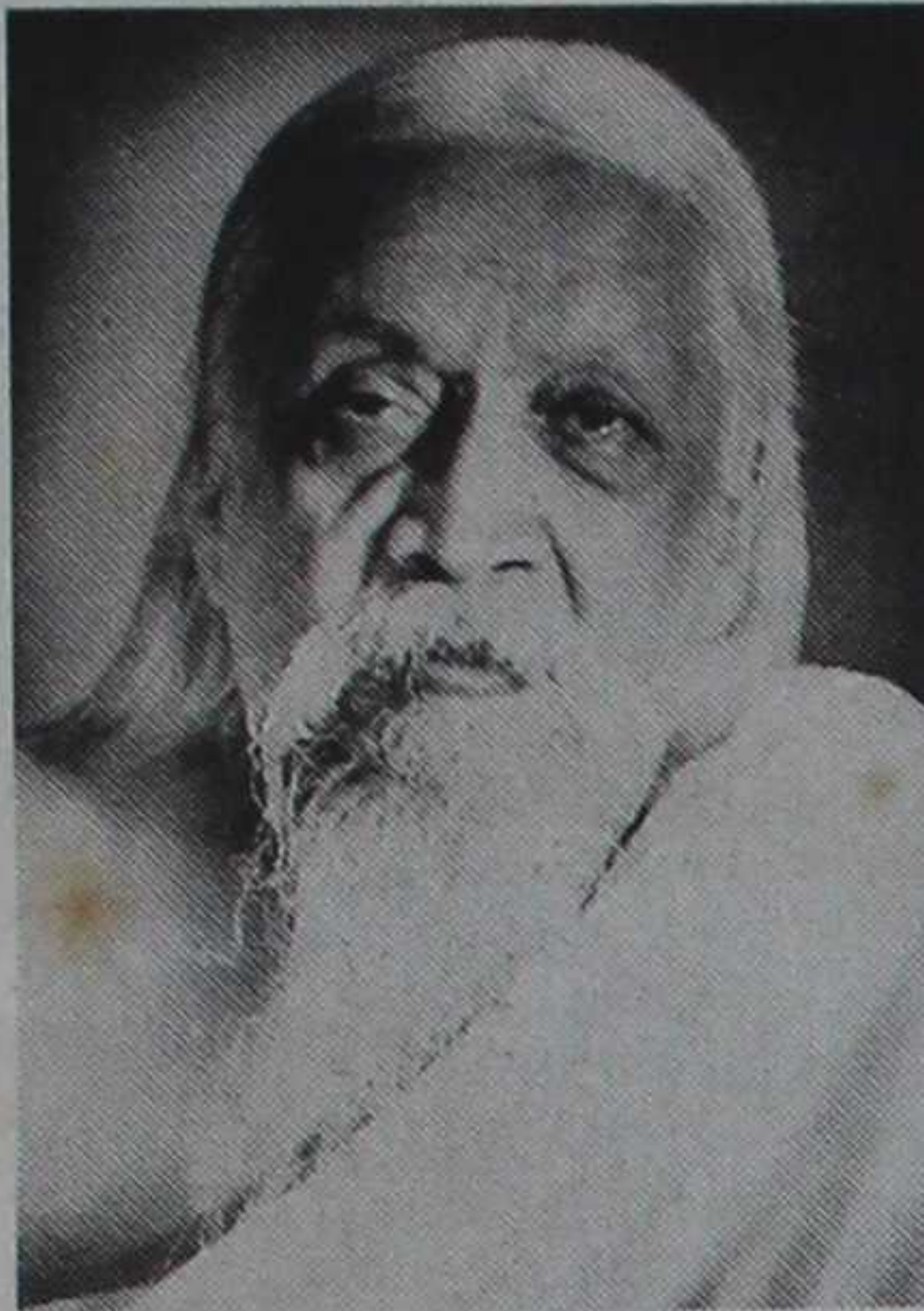
ONCE Sri Aurobindo categorically told an author who proposed to write about his life that there was nothing on the surface of his life for anybody to construct his biography. On the face of it this was surprising because the phase of his life lived in public was full of events with which one could write volumes. Obviously what Sri Aurobindo meant was, his true life was an inner life, his true contribution was an adventure in consciousness which humanity will realise in course of time, but the events on the surface of its were of no much import. However, let us take a brief look at his life. Born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo was sent to Loretto Convent School, Darjeeling and later, at the age of 7, left for England, where he was to spend the next fourteen years.

He proved himself a brilliant scholar at St. Paul's, London and at King's College, Cambridge, mastering several Western, classical languages. In accordance with his father's wishes, he appeared for the Indian Civil Service examinations but absented himself at the riding test and got himself disqualified for the service, as he had no inclination for it. The Gaekwad of Baroda, Maharaja Sayaji Rao, who was in London, recruited him to his service and Sri Aurobindo reached Baroda in February 1893.

During his 13 year-stay at Baroda he served the Maharaja's government in various capacities, but mainly as professor of English and French in his college, while he mastered Sanskrit and delved deep into the spiritual heritage of India. The other activities that he carried on simultaneously, were the practice of Yoga, creative writing and secretly organising a nation-wide political movement for achievement of Independence.

In 1906 he resigned his job and came to Calcutta at the request of his compatriots. He headed the National College, but soon the editorship of the newspaper, the *Bande Mataram* the herald of nationalism, claimed the greater part of his time.

He became more and more active in politics. In 1907, there took place the historic split in the Indian National Congress in its conference at Surat, the radicals deserting the moderates and assembling under Sri Aurobindo's presidency with Bal Gangadhar Tilak championing



Sri Aurobindo.

the cause of radical nationalism. Sri Aurobindo was the first leader to give a call for India's complete independence.

He was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 but was acquitted. Next year the British Government arrested him in connection with what is known as the Alipore Conspiracy Case. A year's detention in a solitary cell enabled him to concentrate on his yoga. He came out of the prison, in 1909, rich with splendid mystic experiences.

In 1910, while the government was plotting to arrest him once again, he left for Pondicherry, the French colony, in obedience to a command from above. In his Yogic Vision, he had known India's freedom to be a *fait accompli*. Now he devoted himself to exploring the mystery of evolution and human destiny through his 'Integral Yoga' and was convinced that a new consciousness, the 'Supermind', can transform the present man and usher in a new phase in the progressive unfoldment of life on the earth. In 1920 he was joined in his great adventure in consciousness by the Mother, who was born in Paris in 1878.

Sri Aurobindo visualises man as an evolving being, capable of transcending his present half-animal state and becoming a gnostic being. His vision is recorded in his major works such as *The Life Divine*. The Synthesis of Yoga, Essays on the Gita and last but not the least, the epic, *Savithri*.

Never in history has there been an age of paradox like ours. Today man builds magnificent cities, and also makes bombs capable of destroying them totally. Man has produced great wealth, yet the deadly sting of poverty keeps many limbs of humanity paralysed. Those who are in a position to enjoy the fruits of technological progress are haunted by an overwhelming sense of insecurity.

Can such broadening gulfs on so many fronts be bridged? Not until man has climbed to a new state of consciousness, a higher one than hitherto realised, where mentally irreconcilable situations can be reconciled. Sri Aurobindo's diagnosis

of the situations is that we are passing through an evolutionary crisis. The mind dominating civilisation for so long has achieved all it can. Unless man aspires to surpass the mind or to surrender it to a more enlightened power of consciousness, the chaotic spree of development and disintegration — like the labour of Sisyphus — leading us nowhere — is not going to stop.

The promise of such a stride in consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says, is inherent in the natural scheme of things and is evident in man's perennial urge to exceed himself, in his age-old quest for perfection.

Is the progress visualised by Sri Aurobindo spiritual in nature? Indeed, it is, but in the highest sense of the term.

True spirituality does not admit any dichotomy between the material world and the spirit. In his *Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo shows how man's earliest formula of wisdom also promises to be his last — his quest after God, Light, Freedom, Bliss and Immortality.

All his endeavours to improve his life and his environment and giving expression to his diverse inner urges — scientific, artistic, et al. can fall into one of these categories. Even the destructive instincts and emotions are not independent realities by themselves, but are either the pulls of an inconsistent state from which the process of our emancipation is continuing, or are the distortions and perversions of some of our positive qualities. Truth's relation to falsehood can be compared with light's relation to shadow. "A shadow depends on light for its existence, but light does not depend for its existence on the shadow."

For long man has tried to get rid

of the evil in life through the means of rejection or destructions. He has not succeeded. Rejection only keeps the evil in waiting, destruction is just not possible — for in a sense nothing can be destroyed. Besides, good and evil are intricately interwoven. Even man's noblest inspirations such as love and religion can be corroded with lust and violence ingrained in him.

Sri Aurobindo envisages the transformation of the evil. The transforming power, the Supermind, is in fact involved in the evolutionary process. Time has come for man to aspire for its emergence. We are passing through an evolutionary crisis and nothing short of this can really take us out of it.

No simpler summary of Sri Aurobindo's vision and Yoga can be made than the one by the Mother.

"There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance.

"Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During

the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called 'supramental', and to help those gathered around him to realise it." In 1920, the Mother came to Pondicherry, never to leave. As the Mother took her abode, children — the spiritual seekers — gathered around her and the Ashram grew up gradually. With its manifold activities, the Ashram is a living testimony to the organisational genius of the Mother. The inmates are not ascetics; they do not shun work; but all work, offered to the Divine Mother, become a means of their *Sadhana*.

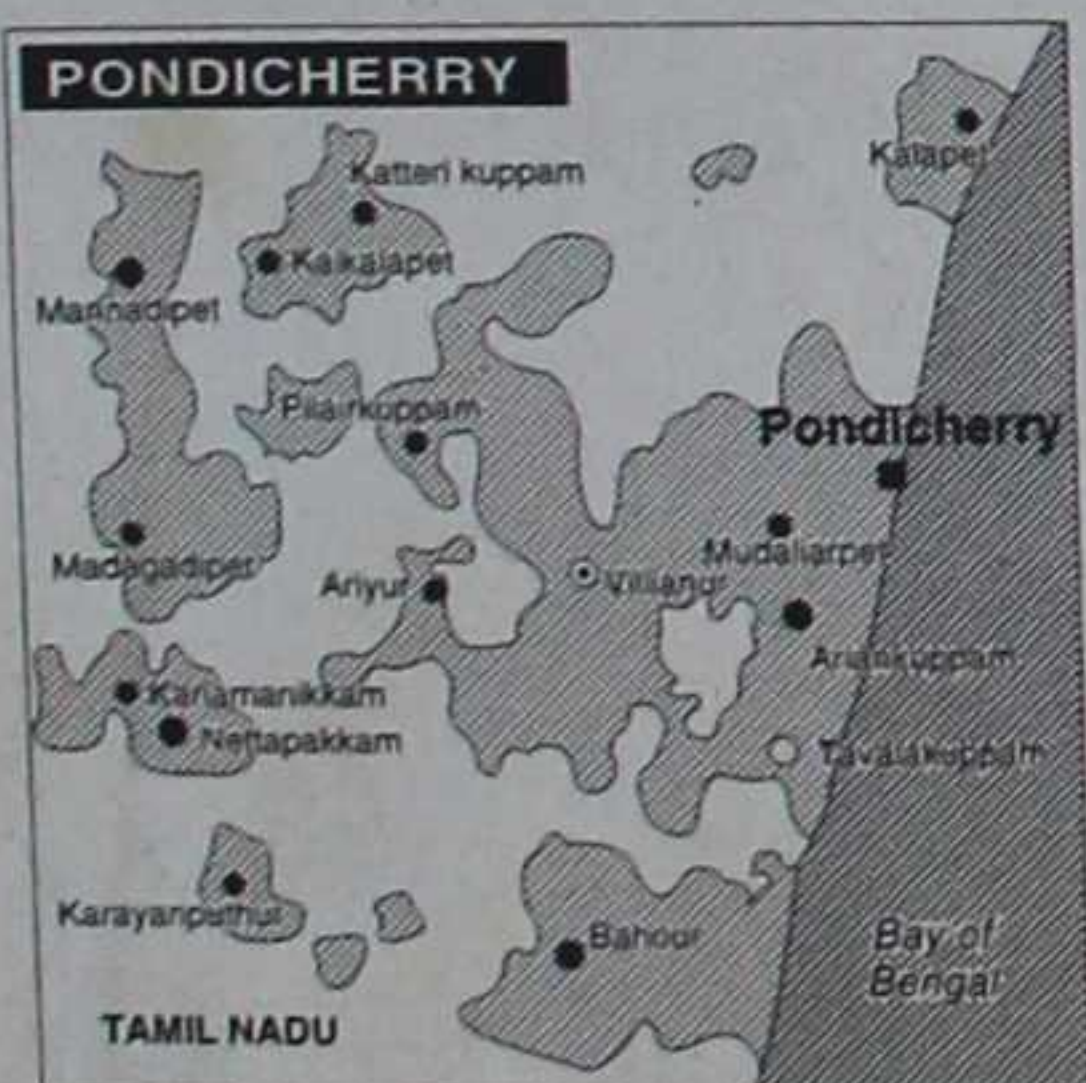
In 1926, after a milestone in his Yoga had been achieved, Sri Aurobindo lived in seclusion for the next phase of his Yoga which was to be more intense. The Mother then became the human Mother as well as the spiritual guide not only to the *Sadhaks* in the Ashram, but also to thousands of devotees and disciples spread all over the world.

An important part of the Ashram is the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. It views each child as unique and tries to help it grow in its own individual way, instead of clubbing a group of them together into the frame of one syllabus.

"The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught," said Sri Aurobindo. "The teacher is not an instructor or a task-master, he is a helper and a guide....He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself."

The system is integral in its approach, providing a scope for a simultaneous development of the child in his physical, vital, mental and psychic aspects. The provisions for physical education is not a mere appendix to the academic routine; it is the basis for the entire curriculum. The Ashram is not oriented for the superficial curiosity of the hurrying passers-by, although it is open for visitors who come with a quest and aspirations.

The author is a Pondicherry-based essayist.



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