



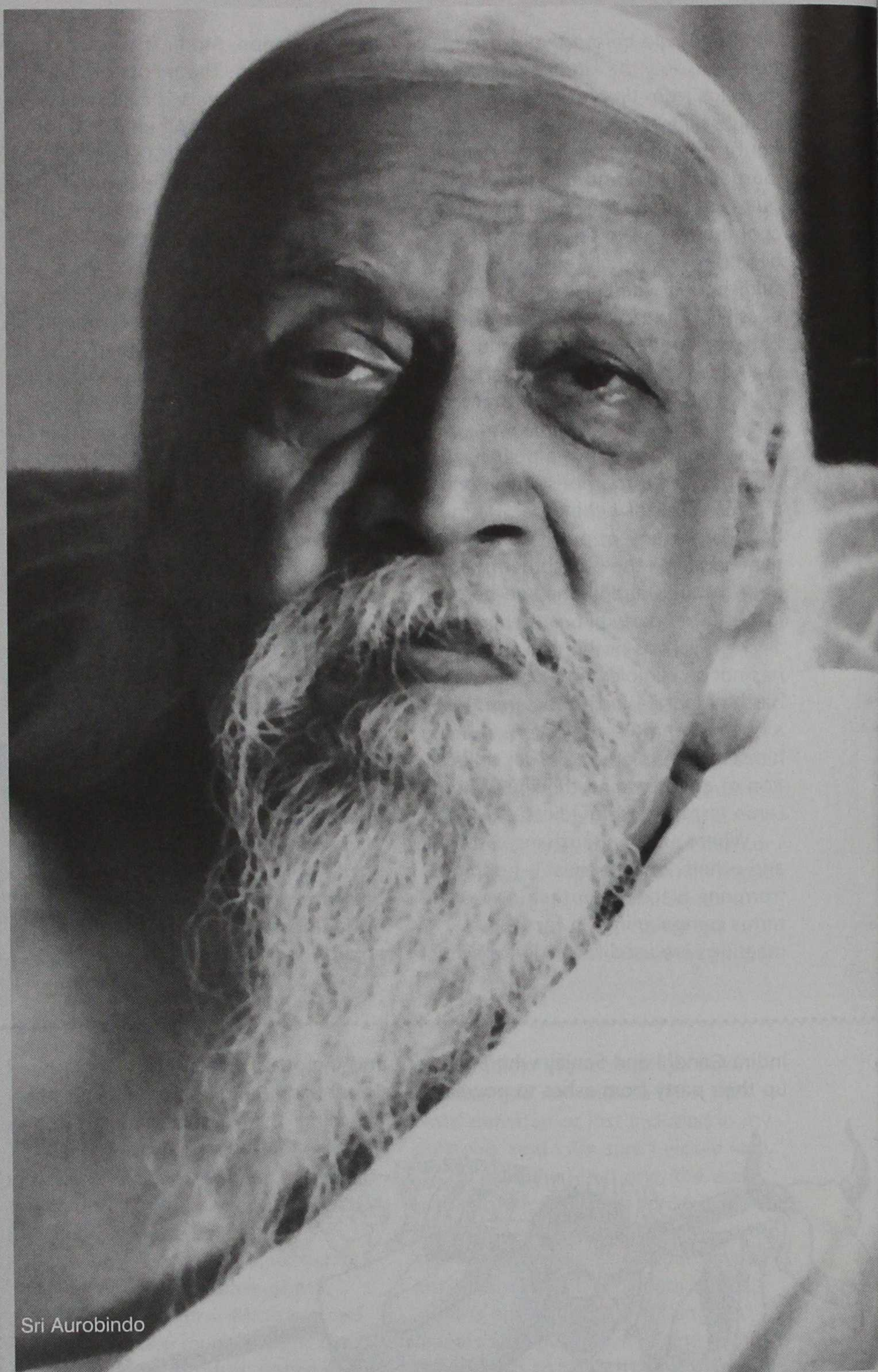
**Manoj Das**

It was the 21st of February 1963. A quiet twilight spread over the eastern part of Pondicherry (now Puducherry). The quietness in the air was certainly unusual, for a few thousand people stood facing the terrace projected from the top floor of the main building of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, but there was no murmur, not even a whisper. The moment was approaching when the Mother would appear on the terrace to bless the gathering.

Though my look was focused on the terrace, my thoughts had strayed away for a while. Suddenly, I woke up with a jolt to some kind of a spectacle. Had I dozed off and was dreaming a wondrous dream? But my suspicion of my own state of mind was over in a couple of seconds. It was the Mother. I saw her for the first time.

But was this the same face I had seen in photographs? Certainly not! For what I saw now was not a human face. It was the very concentration of unearthly beauty, a combination of hues from a distant rainbow, the serene and tender glory of a tranquil sunset on a vast horizon—a projection of the charms of divinities drawn by gifted artists—intangible and indescribable. I could not have imagined, had I not experienced it, that a physical frame and form could contain so much—so much beauty. For a long time, I wondered if what I saw was real.

It took me quite some time to understand that she was, in her true self, the very source of beauty; what I experienced was a transient touch of a spark from that beauty infinite.



Sri Aurobindo

# Celebrating the centenary of a

## A hundred years ago the Mother met S





That vision was of mine not repeated; but by and by I learnt that innumerable people had received different touches of similar magnitude. She had four aspects to her personality, as revealed by Sri Aurobindo: Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. If I had had the touch of Mahalakshmi, some others had had a touch from that Divine source of wisdom—Maheshwari—others a touch of Force—that of Mahakali and some more a touch of an inspiration for Perfection—from her Mahasaraswati aspect.

The physical form we called the Mother came into being on the 21st of February 1878, born of Maurice Alfassa and Mathilde Alfassa who, coming down from Egypt, had settled down in Paris only a year prior to her birth. Madam Alfassa's ancestry could be traced to the legendary Pharaohs.

"Do not ask questions about the details of the material existence of this body; they are in themselves of no interest and must not attract attention. Throughout all this life, knowingly or unknowingly, I have been what Lord had wanted me to be, I have done what the Lord wanted me to do. That alone matters," she exhorted us.

### **The Momentous Meeting**

And the moment came under a combination of chances. Isn't it said that chance is the pseudonym of God which He uses when He does not wish to put down His signature? As is well known, the first son of Mother India to demand unqualified freedom for our country was Sri Aurobindo. As Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the earliest historian of the National Congress observed, "Aurobindo's genius shot up like a meteor. He was on the high skies only for a short time. He flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light."

And as Subhas Chandra Bose recollected, "On the Congress platform he had stood up as a champion of left-wing thought and a fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders, with their tongues in their cheeks, would talk only of colonial self-government. He had undergone incarceration with perfect equa-

# momentous meeting

## Sri Aurobindo on March 29



nimity...When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth."

This "most dangerous man in India" as he was described by the then British Governor, however, grew sure through his Yogic vision that the liberation of the country was already a fait accompli at a higher plane and it was destined to materialise before long. Now it was time for him to try liberate mankind from its submergence in ignorance. He had wonderful spiritual experiences in that direction during his year-long imprisonment in Alipore jail, 1908-1909. While a desperate colonial power was trying to arrest him again in order to deport him under some pretext, he heard a command from above to proceed to Chandernagore and thereafter again to Pondicherry (now Puducherry), then a French colony. Arriving incognito at Pondicherry in 1910 Sri Aurobindo remained engrossed in Yoga, attended upon by a few young disciples who had been his lieutenants during his short and turbulent political phase of life.

### **Mirra's quest led her to Sri Aurobindo**

It was the 29th of March 1914. The train was approaching Pondicherry. She "had the occult experience of a great column of Light at the centre of the still distant town, and the awareness of the Light grew more intense

when her feet touched the soil of the place." At about 3.30 PM, she met Sri Aurobindo at his residence. Instantly she recognised him as the Krishna of her vision. She knew that she had no longer an agenda or a destiny separate from Sri Aurobindo's. For Sri Aurobindo as well as for her, the so-called worldly life was not something that must remain eternally divorced from a life divine. The earth and the emergence of life on it were no accident. The evolution had not come to an end. If out of gross matter life evolved first as plants and then as numerous animals leading to the birth of the human being, and if mind evolved out of life, there is no reason to think that something greater than mind could not evolve out of mind.

To Mirra, Sri Aurobindo represented the assurance and the certainty that the Hour of God had arrived for mankind to aspire for a transformation, for an ascent from the mental to a higher plane of evolution—the Supramental. That will usher in an era when the age-old human aspirations for God, Light, Freedom, Bliss and Immortality would be answered and fulfilled. On the 30th of March Mirra wrote in her diary: "Little by little the horizon becomes precise, the path becomes clear. And we advance to an ever greater certitude. It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth: His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth."

As the World War 1 began, practi-

cal conditions obliged Mirra to leave the French colony. But she came back in 1920. Before long she came to be looked upon as the Mother of the small community of seekers. It was she who revealed to those around Sri Aurobindo who he really was. As Sri Aurobindo's most trusted and earliest disciple Nolini Kanta Gupta records:

"...our mode of living, our life itself took a different turn with the arrival of the Mother. How and in what direction? It was like this: the Mother came and installed Sri Aurobindo on his high pedestal of Master and Lord of Yoga. We had hitherto known him as a dear friend and close companion, and although in our mind and heart he had the position of the Guru, in our outward relations we seemed to behave as if he were just like one of ourselves. ...the Mother taught by her manner and speech, and showed us in actual practice, what was the meaning of disciple and master...It was the Mother who opened our eyes."

Many saw in the Mother joining Sri Aurobindo as the coming together of the very essential genius of Europe and the highest spiritual consciousness of the East. But there was much more to it. As the renowned poet K.D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) wrote: "The meeting of the two represents the coming together of the necessary creative powers by which a new age would be born. And it is to be noted that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were pursuing the inner life on essentially identical lines which would unite spirit and matter. So their joining of forces was the most natural thing."

No wonder that the community would not remain small for long, for the irresistible love of the Mother would draw more and more children to her. In 1926, people's access to Sri Aurobindo completely stopped for reasons of his Yoga. Now that the Ashram had taken a regular shape, the Mother's incredible capacity for organising a new community found its full manifestation. It was an Ashram with a difference. Every inmate worked, be it in the agriculture field, in the cottage industry, in the press or in the education-centre of the Ashram. But all works were an offering to the Divine, an invocation to the new consciousness through action. External



The Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother



rules were kept to the minimum. The *sadhaks* were required to develop an inner sense of discipline that would mould their outer life.

Sri Aurobindo left his body in 1950. But the Mother continued his Yoga without slackening her attention over the Ashram in the process of growth and also acting like a physical mother as well as the source of faith and light for the ever-increasing number of people all over the world, attracted towards the vision of the Master.

### **A Vision of the Supra-mental Light**

Sri Aurobindo, in one of his aphorisms, said, "Great saints have performed miracles; greater saints have railed at them; the greatest have both railed at them and performed them." Obviously the mother belonged to the last category—mystics too great to remain bound by any dictum. Those of our readers who had reached the newspaper-reading age by the year 1950, could not have forgotten a amazing piece of news that was repeated for three days: Sri Aurobindo left his body on the 5th of December, as early as at 1.25 AM. The climate at Pondicherry was hardly cool and there was no air-conditioner in the Master's room. What was more, tens of thousands of people were filing past the body in a continuous chain emitting their bodily warmth.

Yet the Master's physical sheath, far from showing any sign of fading, remained lustrous till the 9th. At one point of time, when nobody was near the body barring the Mother and a renowned doctor-disciple, P.K. Sanyal who had flown down from Kolkata to attend upon Sri Aurobindo, the latter asked the Mother about the mystery of the phenomenon. In a matter-of-fact manner the Mother stated that until the Supramental Light that Sri Aurobindo had brought down into his body had left it, the physical law could not work on it! The lucky doctor hopefully asked if he could have a glimpse of that light! The compassionate Mother placed her palm on the disciple's head and he saw "a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue" around the Master's body. This is an example of a minor miracle the Mother per-

formed, but innumerable men, women and even children who are open to her feel her unpronounced miracles in the depth of their being.

### **Birth of Auroville**

After shaping the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, the Mother launched the daring experiment, well known as Auroville, in 1968. A boy and a girl from each country upon the earth gathered on the outskirts of Pondicherry, bringing with them handfuls of soil from their lands and offered them into a lotus-shaped huge urn, marking the beginning of the city of dawn, the seat of exemplary human unity. With the passing of years her

**In 1926 people's access to Sri Aurobindo completely stopped for reasons of his Yoga. Now that the Ashram had taken a regular shape, the Mother's incredible capacity for organising a new community found its full manifestation**

vision had blossomed, proving to the world that people from different nationalities, culture, tradition and religious background could indeed live together and strive for a new future transcending the bondage of the past, that people could work for the community giving up the habit of working for a career or one's family—in a society where there was no private property and everything belonged to the institution and to be used for its ideals - not under any compulsion but because of their love for liberation from the past patterns of life.

### **An Evolutionary Crisis and the Hour of God**

It is the Mother who radiated the vision of Sri Aurobindo. It was her meeting with Sri Aurobindo and collaborating in his Yoga, that has made clearer the possibility of a new humanity emerging from the present crisis in civilisation. As Sri Aurobindo says, "at present mankind is passing through an evolutionary crisis". In other words, no polit-

ical or economic or constitutional change alone could truly resolve the crisis. What is necessary is a total transformation of consciousness.

It seems from several statements of the Mother that the transforming force is already there, but working passively whereas what is necessary is a collective human aspiration for the force to act positively. The Hour of God is ready to clearly manifest and Sri Aurobindo gives out this call: "There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God's bounty.

"Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call. But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready, yet waste the force and misuse the moment; for them is irreparable loss or a great destruction. "In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph. But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the wine-press of wrath of God; but he who can stand up to it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; even though he fall, he shall rise again; even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected."