This year marks two important centenary events: the Mother’s first arrival in Pondicherry and her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo on 29 March 1914, and the launching of the Arya on 15 August 1914. The lead article in this issue takes a look at how, during these few short months, the Mother’s presence gave a dynamic impetus to the scope of the Yoga, and the philosophical review Arya became, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “the intellectual side of my work for the world.”

Sri Aurobindo’s typewriter and some bound volumes of the Arya

In 1956, the Mother commented that when Sri Aurobindo wrote for the Arya, “he silenced his mind and sat at the typewriter, and from above, from the higher planes, all that had to be written came down, all ready, and he had only to move his fingers on the typewriter and it was transcribed.”
On 29 March 2014, we celebrated the centenary of the Mother’s first arrival in Pondicherry and her meeting with Sri Aurobindo. That meeting was destined to have profound repercussions for the future of humanity. Although we will never fully understand what passed between them that day and the ones that followed, we find hints in talks, letters, and diary entries, and their biographers have written eloquently of the deeper significance of the meeting. Sri Aurobindo had been engrossed in silent yoga since he arrived in Pondicherry in 1910, preparing the ground for future realisations. The Mother had been living an intense inner life in Paris and Algeria, intent on uniting with her psychic being, leading a small group of seekers, and studying occultism with Max and Alma Théon. When they met in Pondicherry, a new dynamic spirituality took form. As Nolini Kanta Gupta recounts, “it was then plans were clearly laid for the thing that was to be and the shape it was to take—this New Creation of theirs.” [Reminiscences, 49]

The Mother’s first impressions of Sri Aurobindo are recorded in the well-known passage from Prayers and Meditations dated 30 March: “It matters little that there are thousands 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, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.”[CWM, i, 113] And in November 1929, while speaking with a disciple, she described what happened in these words:

When I saw Sri Aurobindo for the first time, at once I knew that here was he, the Divine. It was a revelation. And once you know that here is the Divine, how can there be any more doubt, any questioning? I unburdened myself before him and became so happy, joyful, free! Whatever he said I at once accepted it as the truth, there was absolutely no room for doubts. When he said that my mental constructions were illusions, they at once broke down, though I had lived on them for fourteen years! [Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1977, 64]

On the day after their first meeting, the Mother had an unexpected experience, when Sri Aurobindo imparted to her the silent mind. Reading the Mother’s descriptions of this experience in her talks, one is reminded of Sri Aurobindo’s words regarding his realisation of the silent Brahman consciousness, obtained when sitting for three days in a room in Baroda with the Maharashtrian yogi Lele in 1908: “what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom.” [Letters on Himself and the Ashram, 249] Here is how the Mother related her own experience of 30 March:

I was seated close to him [Sri Aurobindo], simply, like that, on the floor. (He was sitting on a chair, with a table in front of him, and on the other side of the table was Richard, and they were talking.) Myself, I didn’t listen. I sat. I don’t know how long they remained, but suddenly I felt within me as if a great Force—Peace! Silence! Massive. It came, did like this [a gesture of sweeping at the level of the forehead], descended like that, and stopped there [the chest]. And when they finished talking, I stood and went out. And then I noticed that I didn’t have a thought in my mind—that I knew nothing any more, understood nothing any more, that I was absolutely in a complete blank. Then I gave thanks to the Lord, and thanked Sri Aurobindo in my heart. [SAAR, 116]

Nolini reports that the first time Sri Aurobindo happened to describe the Mother’s qualities, he said he “had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved” [Reminiscences, 81]. Her openness to the descent of Silence as described above betokens such a complete surrender.
We do know, from the Mother’s talks, some of the subjects that came up during those early meetings. She came ready with her questions, the very first being of utmost importance for their future work:

Truly speaking, it was the first question which came up when I met Sri Aurobindo. I think I have already told you this; I don’t remember now, but I spoke about it recently. Should one do one’s yoga and reach the goal and then later take up the work with others or should one immediately let all those who have the same aspiration come to him and go forward all together towards the goal?

Because of my earlier work and all that I had tried, I came to Sri Aurobindo with the question very precisely formulated. For the two possibilities were there: either to do an intensive individual sadhana by withdrawing from the world, that is, by no longer having any contact with others, or else to let the group be formed naturally and spontaneously, not preventing it from being formed, allowing it to form, and starting all together on the path.

Well, the decision was not at all a mental choice; it came spontaneously. The circumstances were such that there was no choice; that is, quite naturally, spontaneously, the group was formed in such a way that it became an imperious necessity. And so once we have started like that, it is finished, we have to go to the end like that. [CWM, vii, 409]

In another talk, dated 28 March 1964, she mentions that she “was born with a consciously prepared body—Sri Aurobindo was aware of that, he said it immediately the first time he saw me: I was born free. That is, from the spiritual standpoint: without any desire. Without any desire and attachment.” It was this quality that gave the Mother the power to withstand all the effort and struggle involved in the work of physical transformation. And when, about a year before Sri Aurobindo’s passing, she remarked to him that she felt like leaving the body, his reply was immediate and firm: that could never be, for it was she alone who could do the material thing [Van Vrekhem, 332].
The Launching of the Arya

What happened after these early meetings was a veritable whirlwind of activity and work. As soon as the canvassing for the French elections that Paul Richard was contesting was over, he and the Mother were able to spend more time with Sri Aurobindo. At some point in the course of their discussions, the publication of a review that would expound Sri Aurobindo’s views was mooted. The decision to launch the review was taken on 1 June 1914, with the first issue to come out on 15 August, Sri Aurobindo’s forty-second birthday. Initially, it was to be called The New Idea, or L’Idée nouvelle, although the title was soon changed to Arya. The French edition was to be called Revue de la Grande Synthèse. In a letter to Motilal Roy, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

That attempt takes the form of a new philosophical Review with Richard and myself as editors—the Arya, which is to be brought out in French and English, two separate editions,—one for France, one for India, England and America. In this Review my new theory of the Veda will appear as also translation and explanation of the Upanishads, a series of essays giving my system of Yoga and a book of Vedantic philosophy (not Shankara’s but Vedic Vedanta) giving the Upanishadic foundations of my theory of the ideal life towards which humanity must move. You will see so far as my share is concerned, it will be the intellectual side of my work for the world. [Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, 208]

At some point, word had got out about the new venture. In his reminiscences, we have K. Amrita’s account that prior to its publication, the review was widely talked about and eagerly anticipated, chiefly among the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati and his friends. It was said that the Arya would explain the secrets of the Veda and that Sri Aurobindo’s new method of Yoga would be divulged. After the declaration of war in July 1914, there was talk also that World War I was “but the unhealed sore in the human consciousness and the appearance of the Arya was destined to heal the sore.” [Reminiscences, 182]

While the editorial office of the Arya was located on the ground floor of the house where Sri Aurobindo was living, the “stack room”, where Arya copies were kept, was on the ground floor of the Richards’ rented house on 7 Rue Dupleix, which was also the publication address of the review. The details of the Arya’s planning and execution were taken up by the Mother. On 14 June, she wrote in her diary that “it is a veritable work of creation we have to do: create new activities and new modes of being, so that this Force, unknown to the earth till now, may manifest in its
plenitude.” [CWM, i, 173] She maintained the subscription lists, kept the accounts, translated Sri Aurobindo’s writings into French, and generally helped to keep everything moving towards publication. At the same time, she started a new society, called L’Idée nouvelle, or The New Idea (the originally proposed title of the Arya), aimed at bringing together like-minded young men who were interested in pursuing a higher ideal in their individual life and in their social action. It was, in some way, like the work of the group she had founded earlier in Paris.

Writing from a Silent Mind

The Arya’s first issue would begin the serialisation of The Life Divine, The Secret of the Veda, and The Synthesis of Yoga, these three giving form to the philosophical, the mystical, and the psychological and spiritual expressions of Sri Aurobindo’s own yogic experiences [Rishabhchand, 385]. But by mid-June 1914 nothing was ready for the press. Sri Aurobindo was still absorbed in his regular yogic experiments, which he was noting down in his diary, Record of Yoga. But now there also appear references to his work for the review:

17 June  
The first chapter of the Secret of Veda completed. The power of swift writing & the joy & force of inspiration have been entirely recovered; but cannot be used with sufficient continuity as yet, because of the obstructive tamas in the physical consciousness.

19 June  
Study of Veda is beginning to take its proper form.  
The Synthesis of Yoga commenced.

20 June  
The day has chiefly passed in karma.  
Synthesis of Yoga takes its final form; the first Book of the Life Divine begun (the Vedantic Affirmations).

25 June  
Karma.  
The first chapter of the Life Divine completed with great illumination in the thought & rapidity in its expression. Idea of a publication “The Divine Victory” or the “Conquest of Immortality” ie the Hymns of Vamadeva translated into English in their psychological sense; suggested by the rendering of verses to be prefixed to the first Chapter of the Life Divine.

Karma  
The first instalment of Yogic Synthesis recommenced & rapidly completed. What was written before, is reserved for the second instalment.

27 June  
Karma  
Life Divine Chapter I recopied & corrected.

30 June  
Karma.  
Final draft of Synthesis of Yoga begun.  
Veda IV. 1 completed & IV. 2. partly translated.

[Record of Yoga, 499–525 passim]

Within a few weeks Sri Aurobindo had written, from a completely silent mind, the bulk of the first issue of the Arya. In 1935, he wrote to a disciple about “a calm or silence which can support or produce action—that I know and that is what I have had—the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the Bande Mataram for four months and wrote 6½ volumes of the Arya” [Letters on Himself and the Ashram, 346].
The War Intervenes
On 21 June 1914, the Arya was announced publicly. Meanwhile, the rumblings of war began in Europe. On 28 June, a week after the announcement, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo. Exactly one month later, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. By 4 August, less than a fortnight before the debut of the Arya, other European powers had joined in the conflict. When asked if there was a special significance in these dates, or whether they represented “a kind of parallel movement”, Sri Aurobindo replied that “the Arya was decided on the 1st June and it was agreed that it would start on the 15th August. The war intervened on the 4th. ‘Parallelism’ of dates if you like, but it was not very close and certainly nothing came down at that time.” [Letters on Himself and the Ashram, 28–9] The outbreak of the war was a blow for the Richards, for Paul Richard was recalled to join the Reserve Army in France. They left in February 1915, which meant that after only seven issues, the French version of the Arya ceased publication, and Sri Aurobindo had to continue with sole responsibility for writing all sixty-four pages for each month’s issue. But the war and the peace which followed provided Sri Aurobindo with subject matter for some of his most forceful and prophetic utterances in the Arya. When the Armistice was signed, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the December 1918 issue of the Arya that “two great words of the divine Truth have forced themselves insistently on our minds through the crash of the ruin and the breath of the tempest and are now the leading words of the hoped-for reconstruction—freedom and unity.”[War and Self-Determination, CWSA, xxv, 621] The Treaty of Versailles, concluded six months later, failed to realise and act on this truth, and instead saw the major powers jockeying for position in the post-War world [Iyengar, 728–9].

And the World Heard
Sri Aurobindo’s major prose works – excepting The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth, a much later work – were serialised in the Arya between August 1914 and January 1921. Essays on the Gita started in August 1916; and The Ideal of Human Unity and The Psychology of Social Development (now known as The Human Cycle) began appearing from September 1915 and August 1916 respectively. The Future Poetry, Heraclitus, A Defence of Indian Culture and some shorter works such as Our Ideal, The Superman, Evolution, The Renaissance in India, and War and Self-Determination, as well as commentaries on the Isha and Kena Upanishads came pouring forth on paper. Comments on the progress of the war, discussions on materialism, meditation, art, astrology, reviews of books and journals, translations, aphorisms and epigrams—all found a place within these pages. By any yardstick, this was a remarkable intellectual achievement in just a handful of years. As an enterprise, the review was successful, always meeting expenses and even generating a respectable profit. This is even more impressive when one considers the high tone and complex subject matter of the writings. Sri Aurobindo was clear about the challenge posed in the review:

The thought of the Arya demands close thinking from the reader; it does not spare him the trouble of thinking and understanding and the minds of the people have long been accustomed to have the trouble of thought spared them…. The Arya presents a new philosophy and a new method of Yoga and everything that is new takes time to get a hearing. Of course, in reality it is only the old brought back again, but so old that it has been forgotten. It is only those
who practise and experience that can at first understand it. In a way, this is good, because it is meant to change the life of people and not merely satisfy the intellect. [Autobiographical Notes, 224]

The war undoubtedly interfered with a wider distribution of the review, but it did find readers as far away as the United States. In 1926, Sri Aurobindo wrote that he had recently received letters from different parts of that country which indicated the beginning of a demand for his writings, and that he was interested in bringing out his works in America. He also corresponded with a small publishing firm in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, regarding their proposal to publish some of his Arya writings, saying, “I gather that, having view to the conditions in America you propose to print ‘War and Self-Determination’ first as a booklet, to start the standardised series with ‘Essays on the Gita’ and to follow with the ‘Life Divine’. I would have no objection to such an order of issue.” [Autobiographical Notes, 387]

Style and Substance
Writing of himself in the third person, Sri Aurobindo described his more important works serialised in the Arya as embodying “much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture, the true meaning of the Vedas, the progress of human society, the nature and evolution of poetry, the possibility of the unification of the human race.” [Autobiographical Notes, 9] Denying the appellation of “philosopher”, he said that in writing for the Arya, he was putting in mental terms an overmind view of things, and that was the reason he had sometimes to use logic: “For in such a work—mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual—logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental philosophies.” [Letters on Yoga II, 451] Elsewhere, he took pains to clarify that there was very little argument in his philosophy:

The elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge. [Letters on Himself and the Ashram, 66]

Arjava (J. A. Chadwick), one of the early disciples, called the style of the Arya “global”, characterising both the wide reach of its thought and the manner of its expression. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1947 to a disciple: “I heard it [global] first from Arjava who described the language of Arya as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind.” [Letters on Himself and the Ashram, 158]

In his biography of Sri Aurobindo, K. R. S. Iyengar called Sri Aurobindo’s Arya style that of a teacher and prophet, and declared “it was the authority gained by his experience that weighted his writing with rich content.” [924–5] There can be little doubt of the force of Sri Aurobindo’s style evidenced in the cadence and power of the opening paragraph of The Life Divine, the words that appeared on the first page of the first issue of the Arya:

The earliest preoccupations of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and return after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.
As for plain substance, there is a letter to Motilal Roy written sometime in 1914–15, wherein Sri Aurobindo states categorically: “My business is now not man-making, but divine man-making.” The world was preparing for a new progress, a new evolution:

In the Arya I state the thought upon which this new evolution will be based as I see it, and the method of Yoga by which it can be accomplished. Of course, I cannot speak plainly yet my whole message… But the message is there, for those who care to understand. It has really three parts (1) for each man as an individual to change himself into the future type of divine humanity, the men of the new Satyayuga which is striving to be born; (2) to evolve a race of such men to lead humanity and (3) to call all humanity to the path under the lead of these pioneers and this chosen race. [Autobiographical Notes, 225]

**Centenary of the *Arya***

In a recorded talk [c. 1976] about how the Ashram developed, Nolini spoke of the significance of the *Arya*. He first describes the humble beginnings of Ashram life: Sri Aurobindo with his four young followers in a single rented house, with a monthly expenditure that did not go beyond Rs 75. He went on to point out that

The first outward activity, the first step of the child setting forth in the wide world, taking its measure in the arena of its future adult adventures, was inspired by the Mother when she came for the first time and joined Sri Aurobindo. It was in the form of a monthly philosophical magazine, which was in effect a trumpet call to man for the life divine that awaits him here and now. For the divine life on earth is the destined goal for humanity to reach. It is the next stage to which Nature raises herself in the progressive march of evolution when man will be at the head of earthly creation, no more as mere rational animal but as spiritual being.

This year marks the centenary of the launching of the *Arya*. The review called on mankind to embody the ideals represented by the term *Arya*, which Sri Aurobindo chose because of its “noble history”. In reply to a question on the significance of the word *Arya*, he explained its fundamental sense as “an effort or an uprising and overcoming. The Aryan is he who strives and overcomes all outside him and within him that stands opposed to the human advance. Self-conquest is the first law of his nature.” [Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, 442–3] Self-conquest would lead to self-perfection and the knowledge that a divine Will, Consciousness, Love, and Beatitude will become the birthright of man. The word meant more than just an ideal: it held a vision of a more highly evolved race that would lead humanity to its ordained future of a life divine.

**Sources**

Quotations by Sri Aurobindo are from The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA).
Quotations by the Mother are from the Collected Works of the Mother (CWM) unless otherwise cited.
*Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, April 1989 [SAAR].