

RELEVANCE OF NICHOLAS ROERICH FOR INDIA

by

V. BALU.

Now and then, one comes across powerful, pulsating personalities who are so outstanding in so many fields of human endeavour that they are revered by all mankind.

Prof. Nicholas Roerich, whose centenary is being celebrated the world over on October 9, 1974, was one such dynamic figure, whose compelling contributions as master painter, writer, poet, scientist and philosopher, form part of the global heritage.

Prof. Roerich's researches in archaeology and history have given him special eminence in the twin fields and his extensive excavations in Russia are part of history. The theatre movement got considerable fillip because of the inspiration provided by him and even the stage settings introduced by him have become classics.

His versatility was amazing and his contributions to the world of art, culture and beauty so staggering that to just dub him a 'genius' would not do sufficient justice. However, the English language does not have a better word and hence one has to be content with using the word 'genius.'

Even at a very early age, Prof. Roerich received world recognition as an artist and his paintings were exhibited all over Europe and America. Learned Bodies and Government vied with one another to honour him. At the age of 31, he headed the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, a then leading art organisation.

Since 1920, Nicholas Roerich had several exhibitions throughout the world and founded numerous societies dedicated to art and culture; besides being an organiser and educator in the field of art, his own contribution has been a stupendous number of over 7000 paintings besides large frescoes in Churches and public buildings. It is said that there is hardly a major art gallery in the world that does not possess at least one Roerich painting.

The most significant contribution of Prof. Roerich has been his untiring work for world peace. He dreamed great dreams of achieving world understanding through art and culture. He said: "Art creates beauty ... Through beauty we gain victory ... Through victory we unite and through beauty we pray."

It was this ideal of his that is incorporated in the international Pact for the protection of cultural institutions and monuments in times of war and civil commotions.

This pact, known as the Roerich Pact, was initially accepted by 35 nations and signed by 21 nations, including the U.S.A. in 1935. It became the foundation for the Hague Convention of 1954 when it was adopted by all countries of the world. The Pact specifically provides that educational, artistic, religious and scientific institutions, as well as sites of cultural significance, shall be deemed inviolable and respected by all nations in times of war and peace. The Pact provides for man's cultural achievements the same guardianship the Red Cross gives for preventing the physical suffering of man.

THREE SPHERES

The Banner of Peace is the emblem of the Pact and the design of the banner shows a white flag with a symbol in red. The symbol comprises three spheres surrounded by a circle; the three spheres signify the past, present and future achievements of humanity within the circle of eternity.

Through this banner of peace, Prof. Roerich not only wanted protection for cultural and educational treasures of the world for posterity, but also reverence for world art and culture, through which, he hoped, humanity would achieve a newer and deeper understanding.

In the family of Roerich, where the BHAGAVAD GITA and Tagore GITANJALI were honoured, there was an old painting of a majestic mountain which Nicholas Roerich admired even as a child and which he later learnt was the famous Kanchenjunga Himalayan range. In 1923, Prof. Nicholas, Madame Helena Roerich, his wife, and their sons, Svetoslav and George, came to India. First they lived near Darjeeling, but later moved over to the Kulu Valley.

COSMIC CONCEPTS

In India, Roerich did several thousands of paintings immortalising the sublime beauty of the great Himalayas and the cosmic concepts pertaining to the ancient wisdom of India. The long gallery of pictures painted by him reflect the magnificent beauty of the hills and their shimmering spiritual satiety. Deeply religious, he got inspiration from all the world's great religions and philosophies. His paintings depict Jesus Christ and the Buddha, Mohammad the Prophet and Lord Krishna, Confucius and Lao-Tze, and many revered saints.

Those in India who would like to experience the joy of seeing his vibrant and beautiful works must be grateful for the representative specimen of his studies of the Himalayas and other paintings in Benares (Bharat Kala Bhavan), Allahabad (Municipal Museum), Calcutta (Bose Institute), Madras (Adyar Museum) and Trivandrum (Sree Chitralayam Gallery), the Shantiniketan collections of Rabindranath Tagore and in State Museums of Hyderabad, Baroda and other centres of India. The Benares collection includes paintings of the Buddha, the Kalki Avatar and Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna.

The residence of Prof. Nicholas Roerich in Kulu remains a fitting memorial to him and houses a good collection of his paintings of the Himalayas and of areas adjacent to the Kulu Valley. This gallery attracts visitors from all parts of India and the world.

Prof. Roerich envisaged development of this place as a cultural, scientific and research centre in his life time. He founded the Himalayan Research Institute for the study of the Himalayas and more especially the Western Himalayas in which the Kulu Valley is situated. Research at this centre has already been done in botanical and zoological fields, as well as in ethnology and philology and the local pharmacopia, which is a blend of Ayurveda, the local indigenous medical tradition and Tibetan medical lore.

Many scientists from all over the world have participated in this effort and it is envisaged that work at this centre will be further developed, as visualised by Prof. Roerich.

In his paintings, Prof. Roerich transports mundane scenes to dizzy heights of divinity. His sincere portrayal of the soul of nature that is inseparably linked with the soul of man, projects the saga of mankind's striving towards perfection. Indeed, this idea is innate in Prof. Roerich's art and life. Thus it is that his art has no limitations of time and space and binds the age of Adam to the modern age of the Atom. Small wonder that Rabindranath Tagore said Prof. Nicholas Roerich's paintings made him realise that truth is infinite.

To the present writer, one of the most important contributions of Prof. Nicholas Roerich has been his son Svetoslav, the painter in the class of the master painter. By a strange coincidence, Svetoslav Roerich completes his 70th birthday in October 1974. Svetoslav Roerich, and his wife Madame Devika Rani spend their time between their estate in Bangalore and their residence in the Kulu Valley. Svetoslav Roerich in his own rights is a great painter, whose masterpieces are also imbued with the same strange, mystic flavour and great vision. Exhibitions of the paintings of both the father and the son will be held in several parts of Russia throughout 1974-'75.

The relevance of Prof. Nicholas Roerich's life and work for India is indeed significant. He not only immortalised the beauty of the country and its culture but also spent his last days in the Kulu Valley where he died and was cremated in December 1947.

In the words of his son Svetoslav, "Prof. Roerich had always carried the message of India throughout the world from the very beginning of this century, when he began writing about India and the greatness of India's cultural heritage. In all his books and writings, India and India's message had always found a special place. . .

Prof. Roerich always hoped for closer and better understanding between India and Russia and he will indeed be happy to see this fond hope of his, having been realised today, since these two great countries are coming closer and closer together in mutual understanding and appreciation."



"From Beyond", a composition by Nicholas Roerich.

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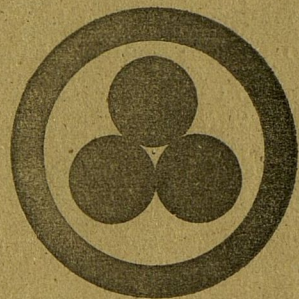
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Straight From The Shoulder

By Leslie F. Wilson

JUST when every cricketer, enthusiast and writer was trying to figure out who will lead India against the West Indies, Ajit Wadekar solved one quizz by announcing his retirement from first-class cricket. He said: "Although I am good for another two years, I would like youngsters to be given a chance at the right moment and have, therefore, decided to retire from first-class cricket." This is very generous of Ajit but, I am sorry because this is one pill that I cannot swallow.

AJIT, incidentally, gets a juicy Benefit Match of two days in his home town against the West Indies. He is still young, fit and fully capable of playing at his usual No. 3 position. The question now is whether he was going to be dropped as captain; whether he was blamed for some of the things that happened in the tour of England and whether the Cricket Board was willing to let him continue as a player but not leader of the team? Ajit will not answer these questions, of course. Here the bait, if it was such, was just too tempting: A benefit match against the biggest crowd-pleasers in cricket.

SO another question arises. Was Wadekar bought off? Well, to tell you the truth, if I were in Wadekar's position, I would have gladly accepted such a Benefit Match because this golden opportunity (22 carat) will never come again. Oh, to be a cricketer! Publicity (written and photographic); unlimited hospitality; ladies of various ages, dresses and measurements (yum, yum) chasing you with autograph books and "jelleby" smiles; various companies and dealers doing the grand in advertising campaigns, making hay while the cricketers shine; cash and material awards of large dimensions; suit-lengths and other attire to last a life-time (if not sold); and if Lady Luck has not smiled enough—one more Jackpot in a Benefit Match at a young age!

CRICKET, like most sport, is now big business. No one grudges a cricketer or any other sportsman benefiting in the course of playing. But one expects them to be men of character with grit and determination to do well and not submit like lambs to the wolves, Alex Bannister wrote: "It was a duel between heavy artillery and peashooters." Alex has come to India with an England touring team and he has seen our cricketers play here and abroad. He was never given the opportunity of writing in such a manner. So, you can well imagine, how tamely our men went down.

INDIA lost. In fact, was hammered. So what? We have been beaten before and we have also won. But the majority of the present set-up of cricketers just don't like being criticised.

They still think they are peacocks, the blue-eyed boys of sport. They ignore the writers who helped build their future in the game and fill their wallets. They want to cry on your shoulder when ignored by the powers-that-be. They speak ill of those who write anything against them, wanting to be praised even when they bowl short-pitched balls that are swiped and full tosses that are hammered.

AND, some of these so-called exports talk and talk about "what does he know when he has never held a bat." I have had many years of cricket (in fact every sport) before the present lot was born and then it was for the game and not fame and whatever one can get out of it. But, don't for a moment think that only those who have held a bat can give expert commentary on the game. I met the man who created 'Ghost Writers' in England when working with the Lord Thomson Foundation Editorial Study Centre. He always regretted the day he had done so because he felt that genuine writers in England were being deprived by cricketers who could not write a para. They had 'genuine writers' by their side doing the job for them. Only their names were used! I can show you some letters written to me by some of these cricketers-turned-writers, and you will understand whether they can write or not.

EVERYTHING comes with experience, if one follows the correct path. Writers do not have excuses such as injured fingers which were unable to pound the key-board of a typewriter; it rained so I had to run away from the ground or my long and "lively" unwashed hair would get wet. They do not get Benefit Matches or Arjuna Awards like youngsters in the country have been getting. This month I will have completed 26 years services in D.H. and my one and only reward—and no one can ask for anything better—is the joy of having contributed to the planning and promotion of sport from the school-level to the adult.

AND if only all our sportsmen would think in terms of having played, and played well, they would be much happier than they are at the moment. And if only many of them will try not to think of their days of playing to make comparison with the present generation, then sport will definitely improve. True there have been some outstanding personalities but has there been a Wilson Jones who won the lone individual world title among them? Even in the days of Vijay Merchant and Hazare and before that C. K. Naydu has India won Test series like Wadekar and his men have done, and that too against stalwarts like the West Indies and England?

JUST because they have lost this time everyone is ready to make comparisons. The only thing I feel sorry about is the tame manner in which they went down and certainly not because they lost. The three-man Probe Committee has realised this and also the fact that our players, whether the same or new, should not be demoralised on the eve of the West Indies tour of the country. I sincerely wish now that the choice of captain, no matter who he is, should be unanimous and that every player and his State Association accept him in the true spirit of sport. Cricket requires teamwork.

Suitor: "May I marry your daughter?"

Stern Father: "What do you do?"

Suitor: "I'm a cricketer."

Stern Father (angrily): "Then get out before I hit you for a six."

It was Induji's first tour abroad, I gathered and asked her how she felt, what countries she had visited before landing in America.

Trying to precariously balance the many bags of purchases she had made, including quite a lot of knickknacks and souvenirs she said: "Ham Tokyo bhi dekha our Japan bhi dekha." She felt proud. She spoke in great admiration of the wonderful roads the Americans had built in the mountains and deserts.

Poolchand cut her short: "Don't be silly and talk like a child. These things are taken for granted. Building good roads isn't difficult for those who can send men to the moon."

Induji didn't like to be snubbed, specially when there were so many Indians around. Husband and wife both entered into some long arguments in Marwari, the language I couldn't make out.

"She doesn't want to see any more of the Canyon. She has strong views. She says Badrinath is more beautiful." However, Poolchand tactfully persuaded her to go on the tour and they went.

IN LIGHTER VEIN

I made acquaintance with a Polish tourist who had hired a car and went along with him for a spin. The writing on a gold-coloured sticker in the car amused me. It said: "God bless this automobile. This is God's car. God's hand is at the wheel. God's law of order and right adjustment is manifest in all its mechanism. God's wisdom inspires in the driver's alertness, good judgment and quick decisions. God's patience gives him temperance and courtesy."

I doubted the judgment of my friend's driving on mountain roads. He was already smelling of whisky. His driving was somewhat reckless and I felt giddy. Inspired by the legend on the sticker, I began to burst out in Sanskrit, invoking the blessings of Lord Ganesha when suddenly, the Pole interrupted me: "What's that you are saying, chum?"

When I told him about the prayer to Ganesha for a safe journey he seemed somewhat amused. "Don't worry. I don't

The Canyon

By T. S.

think God was an automobile engineer. I'm one. He only knew how to create places like the Canyon." He pulled up his bottle and had another slug at the whisky. I closed my eyes.

"Don't go to sleep. You are nervous. Look at the grand sight. If you ever fall down, keep your eyes wide open. It is a grand sight," he said.

I was greatly relieved when we returned to the Bright Angel.

Soon after I got involved with another American near the Bright Angel. This man who wore a beautiful flowery bush shirt and khaki pants was a retired Major General of the American Army and looked very much younger than his 72 years. He said his wife had been to India on a group tour.

"India. Wonderful country. Bombay - Jaipur - Delhi. Delhi-Srinagar - Delhi, Delhi - Khajuraho-Banaras-Delhi. She did it in five days and says it was wonderful."

"Is she writing a book on her five-day odyssey?"

"Your guess is right, my dear, chap. Perfectly right. But it is a silly project. Downright silly."

"There is one tour that takes you to seven countries in twelve days. You may like to go on that."

"It's like reading Playboy with your wife turning the pages!"

The army man began to laugh enjoying his own joke.

Intellectual

The retired Major General, I found, was greatly interested in religion, Indian philosophy and the Vedas. He said he wanted to learn more "to find out things for myself."

"I have curiosity, intellectual and psychic, I instinctively fall in love with people, like you for example. Not because you are from India. You seem to be interested in people. I have been observing you, my dear chap. Observing."

"Are you from the C.I.A.?"

"No, no, no. Don't be afraid. I am just an ordinary American wanting to find things."

"You said you were interested in religion."

"I don't belong to any institutionalised religion. I'm an

Week End

By TINY

or look for a new place to live in. At home, a welcome visitor on Tuesday. If single, romantic hopes will be confirmed. Business hur-