

DRAFT

SAINT PAINTER NICHOLAS ROERICH

By

VIVEK BHATTACHARYA

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It was perhaps Goethe who said, "The highest problem of any art is to cause by appearance the illusion of a higher reality." This is because "the true work of art" to quote Michael Angelo, "is but a shadow of the divine perfection." A man is in tune with infinity when he either creates or even appreciates beauty. Who said, "Our responsibility before the Beautiful is equally great."? Who wanted to unify the world through an art movement?

It was the great artist - philosopher Nicholas Roerich, whose ninetieth birth anniversary is going to be observed in October in many countries of the World.

Nicholas Roerich was one of those great men who were deeply inspired by the majestic grandeur and the mystic hidden treasure of the Himalayas. He first came to India in the early twenties, after a brilliant career in Russia as an Educator, Artist, Archeologist, Writer and Social Worker, and already, a World figure. The beauty of the land, its great philosophy and art attracted the artist-philosopher from his earliest days and he settled in India permanently. He loved the Himalayas, and was able to translate the grandeur of the snow clad peaks and valleys on canvas with unequalled mastery and power. To him the Himalayas stood as a symbol of the highest thought. Speaking of the Himalayas he would say:- "Truly if one could trace back the force of attraction of these heights for a thousand years one could readily see why the Himalayas



have been called "Incomparable". Since times immemorial innumerable tokens of Divinity have been connected with this country of mountains. Even in the dark middle ages remote countries dreamt of beautiful India, which was epitomised in the imagination of people by the mysterious sacred snowy giants."

Nicholas Roerich had painted more than seven thousand paintings covering almost all the aspects of human aspiration. In all these paintings there is the touch of the great master who carries the onlooker to an altogether different world. The Roerich style, (for, it is equally true about his illustrious son Svetoslav's style too) has certainly an originality all of its own. It is possible only because of the master's magic brush which paints the canvas while in tune with infinity.

There is hardly any art gallery of international repute which does not possess Roerich's paintings. Because of his remarkable versatility he had the unique distinction of being compared to the world famed master Leonardo da Vinci. Some of his master-pieces can be seen in the museums of Louvre, Paris, London, Moscow, Leningrad, Vienna, Bruges, San Francisco, Rome, New York, Buenos Aires. In India, they occupy prominent places in several State collections. In some of the States separate halls are dedicated to them. Extensive collections are to be found in halls exclusively devoted to Nicholas Roerich's works at Varanasi, Allahabad and Travancore. He painted a number of remarkable murals and one of his outstanding achievements were the murals at the Church of the Holy Spirit near Smolensk. Besides these great monumental works he designed settings for world famous operas and ballets. His settings for Prince Igor and the Sacre du Printemps have become classics of the stage.



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As an Author Nicholas Roerich had written about thirty volumes mostly dealing with cultural and philosophical subjects. Among his more famous literary works are his Complete works, Flowers of Morya, Adamant, Altai Himalaya, Paths of Blessing, Realm of Light, Flame in the Chalice, Heart of Asia, Shambhala, Fiery Stronghold, Gates into the Future, Beautiful Unity, Himalayas - the Abode of Light, Himavat etc.

Welcoming Roerich's "Beautiful Unity" Abanindranath Tagore, father of the modern school of painting in India observed with joy.

"Nicholas Roerich has a place all of his own in the world of Art. His pen too has carved out a niche for itself in the world of letters. The brush has a wider appeal no doubt, but the pen has a distinct function of its own; and in the hands of Nicholas Roerich it has for long exerted an influence which is at once elevating and instructive." Abanindranath stressed, "A call to Beauty implies in its essentials an appreciation of the Vision which the Artist would fain share with the world at large. That the Artist's vision even when expressed in rhetoric can be quite as sincere as when it finds expression through line and colour and form is amply evidenced by what is set forth in this volume of essays." In this particular work Nicholas Roerich has voiced what fundamentally every sensitive mind feels about the values of Art including what is perhaps the greatest of all Arts - the Art of Living.

One of Nicholas Roerich's greatest contribution to modern civilisation was his great International Pact to safeguard works of art, cultural monuments and institutions from the destructive horrors of wars and civil conflagrations. This Pact was universally known as the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace. It was the outcome of a great



unifying concept and thought which did not believe in creative talent only, he laid equal stress on the preservation of it too. At the very beginning as many as 21 countries ratified this Pact and 36 countries approved it. Now it has been universally accepted.

The crux of the new great movement was expressed in the following words of Nicholas Roerich - its Founder. "Culture and Peace - the most sacred goal of Humanity. In these days of great confusion both spiritual and material, the disturbed spirit strives to these radiant strongholds. But we should not unite only abstractly in the name of these regenerating conceptions. According to our abilities, each in his own field, we should bring them into actual surrounding life as the most necessary and undeferrable."

... "The sign of beauty and action will open all gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty and labour we conquer. In beauty we are united."

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, opening an exhibition of paintings by Nicholas Roerich referred to the importance of paying special attention to India's cultural monuments. "I hope that when we are a little freer from the cares of the moment, we shall pay very special attention to the ancient cultural monuments of the country, not only just to protect them from decay but somehow to bring them more in line with our education, with our lives, so that we may imbibe something of the inspiration that they have."

Paying a tribute to Nicholas Roerich, Mr. Nehru said: "When I think of Nicholas Roerich I am astounded at the scope and abundance of his activities and creative genius. A great artist, a great scholar and writer,



archaeologist and explorer, he touched and lighted up so many aspects of human endeavour. The very quality is stupendous - thousands of paintings and each one of them a great work of art. When you look at these paintings so many of them of the Himalayas you seem to catch the spirit of those great mountains which have towered over the Indian plain and been our sentinels for ages past. They remind us of so much in our history, our thought, our cultural and spiritual heritage so much not merely of the India, that we cannot help feeling a great sense of indebtedness to Nicholas Roerich who has enshrined that spirit in these magnificent canvases."

Perhaps it is not generally known what tremendous interest ~~the~~ Rabindranath Tagore took in painting. His love for painting can be seen from the fact that the number of paintings he had drawn has outnumbered the total number of poems, he composed throughout his life. It is therefore little wonder that he found in Nicholas Roerich a great intimate friend. Both loved art, both were worshippers of Truth and Beauty, both dedicated their lives for promoting better understanding between man and man. It is interesting to note what the poet recorded about his illustrious painter friend Nicholas Roerich. Wrote the poet joyfully, "Your pictures profoundly moved me. They made me realise one thing which is obvious and yet which one needs to discover for oneself over and over again; it is that Truth is infinite. When I tried to find words to describe to myself what were the ideas which your pictures suggested, I failed. It was because the language of words can only express a particular aspect of Truth, and the language of pictures finds its domain in Truth where words have no access. Each art achieves its perfection when it opens for our mind the special gate whose key is in its exclusive possession. When a picture is great we



should not be able to say what it is, and yet we should see it and know, it is the same with music. When one art can fully be expressed by another then it is a failure. Your pictures are distinct and yet are not definable by words, - your art is jealous of its independence because it is great." This was indeed a unique tribute.

Nicholas Roerich, in his striving for the promotion of art and culture dedicated himself to the great cultural movements and to translate his thoughts into practice, Nicholas Roerich, founded and associated himself with a number of cultural organisations spread all the world over. The scope of his associations can be seen from a bird's eye view of his cultural life: Nicholas Roerich was a Fellow of the Russian Academy of Art, the Yugoslav Academy of Science and Art at Zagreb, the Portuguese Academy of Coimbra, the Rheims Academy (France), the Academy of the International Institute of Science and Literature, Bologna, etc. etc. and President and Honorary Member of innumerable societies and organisations throughout the World - As an Explorer, he explored vast tracts of innermost Asia and conducted expeditions to Mongolia, Tibet, China and Central Asia.

This great saint painter firmly believed that : "Art will unify all humanity. Art is one - indivisible." Time and again Nicholas Roerich stressed this aspect of art as a great unifying factor. He created great art but what immortalises him even more is his synthesis of art. He was convinced that art was not meant for a select few. Says Nicholas Roerich, "Everyone will enjoy true Art... The gates of the Sacred Source must be wide open for everybody, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love."



Nicholas Roerich wanted to popularise art among the masses, even among the illiterates, the ignorant and the down trodden he wrote. "At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after all it will purify human consciousness and how many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful! So give it to them." Nicholas Roerich emphatically proclaimed, "Bring art to the people where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals, but even prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons".

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His settings for Prince Igor and the Sacred Spring have become classics of the stage. *As an Author* Besides the seven ~~thousand paintings~~ Nicholas Roerich had written about thirty volumes mostly dealing with cultural and philosophical subjects. Among his more famous literary works are his Complete works, Flowers of Morya, Adamant, Altai Himalaya, Paths of Blessing, Realm of Light, Flame in the Chalice, Heart of Asia, Shambhala, Fiery Stronghold, Gates into the Future, Beautiful Unity, Himalayas - the Abode of Light, Himavat etc.



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he would say, "O Bharat all  
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Nicholas Roerich was one of those <sup>great men</sup> ~~saints~~ who were charmed by the majestic grandeur and the mystic hidden treasure of the Himalayas. He <sup>first</sup> came to India in the beginning of the century. <sup>Early Twenties</sup> The scenic charm of the land attracted the great artist just like a magnet. <sup>beauty</sup> He settled in India permanently. He loved the Himalayas. And, he caught some of the fascinating views of its snow clad peaks on the canvas <sup>with unequalled mastery and power</sup> with tremendous success. To him the Himalayas stood as the symbol of the highest thoughts. <sup>Speaking of the Himalayas he would say:-</sup> In his ecstasy he would say, "Himavat, the beautiful! Thou hast given us our greatest treasures and for ever thou shalt remain the guardian of the greatest mystery, the holy marriage of heaven and earth."

Nicholas <sup>Roerich</sup> had painted more than seven thousand paintings covering almost all the aspects of human aspiration. In all these paintings there <sup>is the</sup> ~~are~~ touches of <sup>the</sup> a great master who carries the onlooker to an altogether different world. The Roerich <sup>style</sup> touch, (for, it is equally true about his illustrious son Svetoslav's style too) has certainly an originality <sup>all</sup> of its own. It is possible only because of the master's magic brush which paints the canvas while in tune with infinity.

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<sup>Asian Studies</sup>  
He explored <sup>of innermost</sup> vast tracts of Asia and conducted expeditions to Mongolia, Tibet, China and Central Asia -



Roerich Pact (Bruges), French Roerich Association (Paris),  
Roerich Academy (New York), Flamma Association for the Advance-  
ment of Culture, Indiana (U.S.A.), Philadelphia Roerich Society  
(U.S.A.), Latvian Roerich Society (Riga), Roerich Society (Lithuania),  
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San Francisco (U.S.A.), League of Culture (Allahabad), American-  
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New Delhi 5



NEHRU AND THE ROERICHs

BY

VIVEK BHATTACHARYA

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It is more or less universally accepted that the object of art is 'to crystallize emotion into thought and then fix it in form'. It is much more difficult to crystallize emotion into thought if it is the face of a philosopher or artist or both.

That is why it was not an easy job for Svetoslav Roerich to draw the perfect portrait of a man who was not only a politician and a statesman but also a philosopher and artist.

It was perhaps Michael Angelo who once said that "the true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection".

It was the contact between the artist and the Statesman for nearly a quarter of a century that helped Svetoslav to 'study' the face more intimately. Svetoslav painted several studies and portraits of Jawaharlal Nehru. Jawaharlal was intimately known and admired by all the members of the Roerich family - the late Maharshi Nicholas Roerich, Madame Devika Rani Roerich and Svetoslav Roerich. It was Nehru's love for the aesthetics and all finer things in life - art, music and the stage - that brought Nehru so near the Roerichs.

It was equally befitting a tribute to Nehru by the most learned scholar of India Dr. Servapalli Radhakrishnan to have unveiled the portrait in the Central Hall of the Lok Sabha.

The Speaker of Lok Sabha Mr. Hukum Singh perhaps expressed the feeling of the House when he described the late Prime Minister Nehru's portrait by the world famous artist Svetoslav Roerich as a 'piece of great art'. A great lover

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of art Jawaharlal Nehru certainly admired Roerich's style. True painting is silent poetry. While inaugurating the Art Exhibition of Svetoslav Roerich in New Delhi Jawaharlal Nehru was indeed enchanted. Panditji came to the exhibition before time and saw the great work of Svetoslav minutely and then he spoke on Svetoslav's painting in the AIFACS Hall, New Delhi. 'Svetoslav's paintings are poems in colour' observed Jawaharlalji.

The colour, the pattern and above all the harmony of the master painter made a deep impression on the mind of the great Statesman. The two minds mingled to appreciate the beauty of nature.

The Lok Sabha has paid the best tribute to the memory of the great leader by getting the portrait from the brush of a master painter who was so near to Nehru. Both Svetoslav and Jawaharlal respected each others thoughts. Jawaharlal had great respect for the Roerichs' - both Nicholas and his illustrious son Svetoslav for their love of the Himalayas. Svetoslav has been "a revealer in form and colour of the mysteries of nature and a daring explorer from the 'devaic' world where colours take their birth and have their being in all their pristine purity".

Nehru was nothing less than a great artist himself. His description of natural scenery of India in his books, his great love for the Himalayas, his weakness for the beautiful flowers certainly show his keen love for the finer things of life. Both Nehru and Svetoslav have been loving the Himalayas from the core of their hearts. Says Svetoslav, "For many years I have intimately known the Himalayas - the mighty ranges of the west as well as the towering peaks of the east. My first impressions and visions called forth by their unparalleled beauty and grandeur have only become more vivid as years went by and their message has become even more

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eloquent. Gradually their outward form and their inner meaning have assumed a new significance, blended into one and transmuted by the very power residing in the multiple concepts for which the Himalayas stand, "This great 'Temple of Nature' reserved for the true seekers after Truth in all its forms".

Continues Svetoslav, "From time immemorial, the best aspirations of mankind and the loftiest concepts and legends have been woven about the Himalayas".

"It is not only the concept of tremendous heights, the call of unconquered peaks, uncharted glaciers and valleys or the unbelievable richness of vegetation and animal kingdom; there is something else besides these outward attractions, there is a greater and deeper significance which the word Himalayas conveys to us all".

In his "Autobiography" Jawaharlal tells us, "The sight of the towering Himalayas near by was a joy which went a long way to removing the weariness of prison. It was my good fortune that during the long period when I had no interviews, and when for many months I was quite alone, I could gaze at those mountains that I loved. I could not see them from my cell, but my mind was full of them and I was ever conscious of their nearness, and a secret intimacy seemed to grow between us". This is one of hundreds of expressions by Jawaharlal describing the deep love of his heart for the Himalayas.

Both the philosopher statesman and the artist associate Indian art with Indian philosophy. In his "Discovery of India" writes Jawaharlal "Indian art derives its basic character from certain ideals associated with the religious and philosophic outlook of India" (p. 213). Talking about the tradition of Indian painting Svetoslav says, "when one contemplates the brilliant and rich mosaic of Indian art, as a whole, one becomes aware that what we can clearly define and what strikes

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us most are the highlights and efflorescences and upsurges stimulated by a variety and multitude of influences and circumstances, some extraneous and some local or both. But underlying these upsurges there flows and always flowed uninterrupted in one form or another the vast river of Indian creative expression, feeding at the recurrent tributaries, but constituting the undying tradition and expression of the Indian creative genius and cumulative artistic experience."

Quoting Michaelangelo Svetoslav firmly maintains, "True art is made noble and religious by the mind producing it. For those who feel it, nothing makes the soul so religious and pure, as the endeavour to create something perfect, for God is perfection and whoever strives after perfection is striving for something divine".

Truth is beauty and beauty truth. To both search for truth is the yearning of the heart, the heart filled with love for humanity and international brotherhood. Nehru's love for international brotherhood, his great contribution in the better understanding between man and man is known universally. Svetoslav finds another vista for better relation between man and man. He firmly believes that when we talk of art, we talk of an international language. Humanity can be brought much closer through this international language which is universal. "Art has its many branches, yet all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all. Every one will enjoy true art". These are words of Nicholas Roerich. This is also the feeling of his illustrious son Svetoslav.

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# The Saga of Delhi—XIX NICHOLAS ROERICH AND HIS ART

by Dr Vivek Bhattacharya

Nicholas Roerich was one of those great men who were deeply inspired by the majestic grandeur and the mysticism of the Himalayas. He first came to India in the early '20s after a brilliant career in Russia as an educationist, artist, archaeologist, writer and social worker.

The beauty of the land, its great philosophy and art, attracted the artist, who chose the Indian land to make his permanent abode. He loved the Himalayas, and was able to translate the grandeur of the snow-clad peaks and valleys on canvas with unequalled mastery and skill. To him the Himalayas stood as a symbol of the highest thought. Speaking of the Himalayas he would say: "Truly if one could trace back the force of attraction of these heights for a thousand years one could readily see why the Himalayas have been called 'Incomparable'. Since time immemorial, innumerable tokens of Divinity have been connected with this country of mountains. Even in the dark middle ages, remote countries dreamt of beautiful India, which was epitomised in the imagination of people by the

mysterious sacred snowy giants."

Nicholas Roerich had painted more than seven thousand paintings covering almost all the aspects of human aspiration. In all these paintings there is the touch of the great master who carries the onlooker to an altogether different world. The Roerich style (for, it is equally true about his illustrious son Svetoslav's style too) has certainly an originality all of its own. It is possible only because of the master's magic brush which paints the canvas while in tune with infinity.

There is hardly any art gallery of international repute which does not possess Roerich's paintings. Because of his remarkable versatility he had the unique distinction of being compared to the world-famed master Leonardo da Vinci. Some of his masterpieces can be seen in the museums of Louvre, Paris, London, Moscow, Leningrad, Vienna, Bruges, San Francisco, Rome, New York, Buenos Aires. In India, they occupy prominent places in several State collections. In some of the States separate halls are dedicated to them. Extensive collections are to be found in halls exclusively devoted to Nicholas Roerich's works at Varanasi, Allahabad and Travancore. He painted a number of remarkable murals and one of his outstanding achievements were the murals at the Church of the Holy Spirit near Smolensk in Russia. Besides these great monumental works he designed settings for world-famous operas and ballets. His settings for Prince Igor and the Sacre du Printemps have become classics of the stage.

As an author Nicholas Roerich had written about thirty volumes mostly dealing with cultural and philosophical subjects. Among his more famous literary works are his 'Complete Works', 'Flowers of Morya', 'Adamant', 'Altai Himalaya', 'Paths of Blessing', 'Realm of Light', 'Flame in the Chalice', 'Heart of Asia', 'Shambhala', 'Fiery Stronghold', 'Gates into the Future', 'Beautiful Unit', 'Himalayas—the Abode of Light', 'Himavat' etc.

Welcoming Roerich's 'Beautiful Unit' Abanindranath Tagore, father of the modern school of painting in India, observed with joy, 'Nicholas Roerich has a place all of his own in the world of Art. His pen too has carved out a niche for itself in the world of letters. The brush has a wider appeal no doubt, but the pen has a distinct function of its own and in the hands of Nicholas Roerich it has for long exerted an influence which is at once elevating and instructive.'

Abanindranath stressed, 'A call to Beauty implies in its essentials an appreciation of the Vision which the Artist would fain share with the world at large. That the Artist's vision even when expressed in rhetoric can be quite as sincere as when it finds expression through line and colour and form is amply evidenced by what is set forth in this volume of essays.'

In this particular work Nicholas Roerich has voiced

what fundamentally every sensitive mind feels about the values of Art including what is perhaps the greatest of all Arts—the Art of Living.

One of Nicholas Roerich's greatest contributions to modern civilization was his great International Pact to safeguard works of art, cultural monuments and institutions from the destructive horrors of wars and civil conflagrations. This Pact was universally known as the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace. It was the outcome of a great unifying concept and thought which did not believe in creative talent only, he laid equal stress on the preservation of it too. At the very beginning as many as 21 countries ratified this Pact and 36 countries approved it. Now it has been universally accepted.

The crux of the new great movement was expressed in the following words of Nicholas Roerich—its Founder: "Cultural and Peace"—the most sacred goal of Humanity. In these days of great confusion, both spiritual and material, the disturbed spirit strives to these radiant strongholds. But we should not unite only abstractly in the name of these regenerating conceptions. According to our abilities, each in his own field, we should bring them into actual surrounding life as the most necessary and undeferrable.... The sign of beauty and action will open all gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty and labour we conquer. In beauty we are united'

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, opening an exhibition of paintings by Nicholas Roerich, referred to the importance of paying special attention to India's cultural monuments: 'I hope that when we are a little freer from the cares of the moment, we shall pay very special attention to the ancient cultural monuments of the country, not only just to protect them from decay but somehow to bring them more in line with our education, with our lives, so that we may imbibe something of the inspiration that they have'

Paying a tribute to Nicholas Roerich, Mr Nehru said: "When I think of Nicholas Roerich I am astounded at the scope and abundance of his activities and creative genius. A great artist,

a great scholar and writer, archaeologist and explorer he touches and lighted up so many aspects of human endeavour. The very quality is stupendous—thousands of paintings and each one of them a great work of art. When you look at these paintings, so many of them of the Himalayas, you seem to catch the spirit of those great mountains which have towered over the Indian plain and been our sentinels for ages past. They remind us of so much in our history, our thought, our cultural and spiritual heritage so much not merely of the India, that we cannot help feeling a great sense of indebtedness to Nicholas Roerich who has enshrined that spirit in these magnificent canvases.'

Perhaps it is not generally known what tremendous interest Rabindranath Tagore look in painting. His love for painting can be seen from the fact that the number of paintings he had drawn has outnumbered the total number of poems he composed throughout his life. It is therefore, little wonder that he found in Nicholas Roerich a great intimate friend. Both loved art both were worshippers of Truth and Beauty, both dedicated their lives for promoting better understanding between man and man.

It is interesting to note that the Poet recorded about his illustrious painter friend Nicholas Roerich. Wrote the Poet joyfully: Your pictures profoundly moved me. They made me realise one thing which is obvious and yet which one needs to discover for oneself over and over again; it is that Truth is infinite. When I tried to find words to describe to myself what were the ideas which your pictures suggested, I failed. It was because the language of words can only express a particular aspect of Truth, and the language of pictures finds its domain in Truth where words have no access. Each art achieves its perfection when it opens for our mind the special gate whose key is in its exclusive possession. When a picture is great we should not be able to say what it is, and yet we should see it and know, it is the same with music. When one art can fully be expressed by another then it is a failure. Your pictures are distinct and yet are not definable by words—your art is jealous of its independence because it is great.'

This was indeed a unique tribute.

Nicholas Roerich, in his striving for the promotion of art and culture, dedicated himself to the great cultural movements and to translate his thoughts into practice. Nicholas Roerich founded and associated himself with a number of cultural organisations spread all over the world. The scope of his associations can be seen from a bird's-eye view of his cultural life: Nicholas Roerich was a Fellow of the Russian Academy (France), the Academy of the International Institute of Science and Literature, Bologna, etc. etc. and President and Honorary Member of innumerable societies and organisations throughout the world—as an Explorer, he explored vast tracts of innermost Asia and conducted expeditions to Mongolia, Tibet, China and Central Asia.

This great saint painter firmly believed that: 'Art will unify all humanity. Art is one—indivisible. Times and again Nicholas Roerich stressed this aspect of art as a great unifying factor. He created great art but what immortalises him even more is his synthesis of art. He was convinced that art was not meant for a select few. Says Nicholas Roerich: 'Everyone will enjoy true Art... The gates of the Sacred Soul must be wide open for every body, and the light of Art will

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## The Saga of Delhi

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influence numerous hearts with a new love."

Nicholas Roerich wanted to popularise art among the masses even among the illiterate, the ignorant and the down-trodden he wrote: 'At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after all it will purify human consciousness and how many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful! So give it to them.'

Nicholas Roerich emphatically popularise art among the masses people where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals, but even prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons.'

Delhi is proud to have been honoured with several visits of the great artist. The art and cultural movement in India in general and Delhi in particular, owes much to the contribution of the Roerichs which will ever be written in letters of gold.

(Next week: Tagore in Delhi)