

WITH ROERICHS IN HIMALAYA

By S. SANJIVA DEV

To be in the presence of saintly savants—to whatever nation they might belong—is indeed an exalted experience. It was the middle of June, 1945. After traversing the Punjab plains, I entered the enchanted Kangra Valley, once a great centre of Indian painting—known afterwards as Kangra School. The great Dhauladhar Range overlooks the entire Kangra Valley, fascinating the Himalyan-minded traveller so intensely that the traveller forgets to enjoy the charm of the nearest hills and dales which are by no means less fascinating.

Through Kangra Valley to Mandi and from Mandi to Kulu the traveller loses himself in the surrounding magnificent Himalayan landscape vibrant with the music of rushing cascades. Thus form and sound blend into a visuo-audible delight. After entering the Kulu Valley one realizes why Gurudev Nicholas Roerich has selected this valley for his residence with his family. Kulu is one of the most beautiful valleys of the Himalayas. Through this valley a road passes to Central Asia *via* Rohtang Pass, Lahul and Ladak. Mule caravans always come and go loaded with various Himalayan products.

One morning leaving Kulu I arrived at Katrain by bus and thence reached the mountain where the Roerichs live at 12 noon. Far below the Roerich's residence is situated Naggar on a spur with its lovely temple of Tripurasundari. Words fail to describe the splendour of this place. The dwellings are surrounded by sylvan enchantment. What a dense Deodar Forest! The best Deodar trees are to be found here. The vast plain between this mountain and the road that goes to Manali is immensely charming seen from the flower-garden around the residence of Roerichs!

I stayed in the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute which is on an elevation of about two hundred feet above the residential quarters of Roerichs. This is the guest-house where visitors of Roerichs stay. In 'Urusvati' lives the family Doctor, Dr. Yelavenko, who is a very hard-working man and very amiable. He left Russia before the first World War and lived in Turkistan for many years and since 12 years he has been living here.

The saintly figure of Gurudev Roerich with the parted flowing beard under the shining bald head with eyes both introspective and prospective scrutinising into the depths of his visitors as well as viewing

far beyond the visible plane had indeed made me feel the joy of the Spirit. At the very first sight Roerich with his characteristic mystic smile said, "You have at last come from South India to this abode of snows. Your face tells that you have had a fierce attack of the scorching heat of the vast Indian plains."

I had with me a presentation from Principal Asit Haldar to Roerich. It was an exquisite head study of Buddha in terra cotta modelled by Haldar after an Original found at Kusinara which is now in the collection of the late V. N. Mehta of Bombay. Gurudev was extremely pleased with this Haldar's gift ; indeed a fitting souvenir from a celebrated Indian artist to a Russian artist of international repute !

Madame Helena Roerich came and with maternal affection asked me whether I was feeling quite 'at home' there and free from the troubles of the long journey. She is a profound student of the Occult science and has translated Madame Blavatsky's gigantic work "*The Secret Doctrine*" from English to Russian. She is a keen student of Music too. In reality Madame Helena Roerich has been the perennial source of all that we notice in Gurudev Roerich's active life. Gurudev is the outward expression of the inner creative impulse of Madame Roerich; her idealism culminates in his realism; she is the passive and contemplative aspect of Gurudev, while he is the active and creative aspect of Madame Roerich.

Then came George and Svetoslav Roerichs, the talented sons of Gurudev and Madame Roerich. George Roerich is a remarkable scholar of oriental learning as well as a profound Tibeto-Sanskritologist. He is the author of "*Trails to Inmost Asia*", "*Tibetan Paintings*", "*Animal Style Among Tibetan Tribes*", "*Tibetan Dialect of Lahul*", "*Tibetan-English Dictionary*" etc., He has recently translated the "*History of Buddhism*" from the original Tibetan into English. George Roerich is aged 42; he is always buoyant with enthusiasm and cheerfulness; he looks younger than his younger brother Svetoslav Roerich. A few moments of association with George Roerich would make a person full of optimism in life.

Svetoslav Roerich's temperament is quite different from that of his brother. Svetoslav is of very deep and contemplative nature; he remains always, it seems, lost in a mystic reverie which his introspective ecstatic eyes often reveal; one sees in his eyes a supramundane glow that is ever burning to consume the gloom of time and space that stood between him and the Supreme Himself. His art is too well known to

need any introduction like that of his venerable father. He showed me some of his portrait studies and some magnificent landscapes and architectural studies of Kathiawar. His "Snake Charmers" and "Rainbow Fall", hung on the walls of "Urusvati", are immensely fascinating both in colour and composition. While showing his works he told me : "So far my work has been very realistic. Realism, as you know is the base of all art whereas the development and climax of it lie only in idealism. Imitation of Nature is necessary to some extent no doubt, but all higher art begins where the imitation of Nature ends. With the advancement of creative ability and unfettered imagination the artist ceases to hanker after the outward form but seeks delight in giving form to his inner vision. Now I want to work in idealistic method." Svetoslav Roerich is aged 40.

We all—Gurudev, Madame, George and Svetoslav Roerichs, Dr. Yalavenko and myself—sat at the table for lunch. They enquired me of every detail of our South Indian diet. It had greatly surprised me to find that in Kulu Valley milk and curds were very scarce inspite of the existence of cattle in large number. After the lunch was over Madame Roerich expressed her eagerness to know how the Telugu language sounds like and asked me to sing something in Telugu. Then I sang a Kirtan of Tyagaraja, the distinguished devotee-musician of South India. All were pleased.

Our conversation turned to art in general and the mural paintings of Mulaganthakuti Vihara in particular. Gurudev said, "It was a great mistake to employ those Japanese artists for doing those murals; the work has failed to reach the ideal; modern Indian painters could have achieved far greater success. I do not know why the trustees of that Vihara did not utilise the really talented artists of modern India". Thus saying Gurudev sighed deeply.

Every inch of the interior of their house has been decorated with Tibetan Thankas and images and other paraphernalia that they have brought from their Central Asian Expeditions; wherever the eye passes we see only colour and colour everywhere. In colour Roerich lives, in colour he dreams and in colour he creates his marvellous colour-schemes yet he is beyond the touch of all colour !

One wonders how he manages doing such versatile work. He has to paint more than five hours a day ; he has to prepare article for the periodicals: he has to send messages to literary societies, scientific conferences, religious congregations, art exhibitions etc. He has also

to write books. Moreover he has to attend to a vast correspondence daily. Then there is the problem of sparing some time for the interviews with his visitors. One delightful evening during our conversation Roerich said, "One must learn to do regular work daily; some persons often complain that they do not regularly get inspiration for creative work daily; I cannot believe in this 'not getting inspiration'; it is due to lack of the habit of regular work daily. Inspiration for work does not come by itself to anybody but one must go to inspiration; inspiration is already there but what is lacking is the patience to catch it."

One fine morning Gurudev showed me his paintings. I think they would be about one hundred including the small sketches; the show lasted for four hours. It is no way possible to describe about the raptures of those paintings in this short article. Moreover one could never record one's impressions of a work of visual art, in the medium of words. Anagarika B. Govinda was right when he said :

To enjoy works of art means to rediscover visions of our own soul. The art of words has not got that power to express the ecstasies of the art of form and colour, because the art of form and colour belongs to the eye which has been considered as the most sensitive and delicate of all the other sense-organs. Beautifully says Okakura Kakuzo, ...the art lover transcends himself. At once he is and is not; he catches a glimpse of infinity, but words can not voice his delight for the eye has no tongue.

All the large paintings have been done on canvas in tempera; the medium sized as well as the small ones have been painted on grey paper in tempera. Since a very long time Roerich has not been using either oils or pastels; he has been doing tempera only. He says that tempera does in every way suit to the climate of India.

Among the paintings shown to me were some familiar ones whose reproductions I have already seen. There is a special delight in seeing those originals whose reproductions have been already seen. I noticed with much interest how often Roerich paints his pictures in a limited number of colours—sometimes in two colours only and sometimes in varying tones of a single colour only. Madame Roerich asked me to behold the pictures through the gap of my fist; by seeing in this way the eye does not tire and the stereoscopic effects of the picture could excellently be felt by the beholder.

During the course of the show the large horizontal canvas entitled "Lao-tze Coming to India" made its appearance upon the easel upon which the paintings were exhibited. No sooner had I identified

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that picture than the words came out of Roerich's mouth "I think you have identified this picture very well as a sketch of this picture has been with you." I wonder how he was able to remember that pencil sketch which he sent to me three years back. Roerich's memory is marvellous of which I have had many examples. The show ended with a concluding song by me. I once again descended the mundane plane from the Celestial plane of visual music of colour of which Roerich has been the peerless Wizard! I was surprised to find that Madame Roerich had seen those paintings with the same thirsty eyes as those of mine as if it were the first time for her to see them. Those Roerich's creations had been ever-new for her and always a veritable source of her spiritual experience. Yes, real works of Beauty are not limited by oldness and newness. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

Every afternoon on the upstairs facing fascinating Himalayan landscape we used to spend a long time in conversations on Art, Literature, Philosophy, Culture and kindred subjects. After returning from the Roerich's house to my room in Urusvati I used to take a walk into the dense Deodar forest upwards the same hill. The impression of the last evening of my stay there has been a lasting one and is fresh even today. After a long walk in the forest I took my seat upon a rock facing westwards. The sun was going to sink in the western hill-horizon, the sun-light began to ripen from white to yellow, yellow to orange and from orange to red. The sun had now completely disappeared; for some time the glow of twilight remained and slowly it began to turn into hazy dusk. At this moment the light of the day and the shade of the night began to blend into each other culminating into something that is neither light nor shade. The distant mountain-peaks gradually began to recede into the mystery of the deepening darkness. The majestic Deodars with their mystic fragrance were looming like ethereal towers in the darkening dusk. All the Himalayan Nature appeared to be mere shadows gradually vanishing behind the magic veil of the approaching night. A realistic dream-land of apparently evanescent shadow-forms! Unconsciously I uttered these words: Roerichs were indeed very wise in selecting this place for their dwelling where they are now active in constant *sadha* in quest after Beauty, eternal for the sake of Culturo-spiritual benefit of the entire humanity.

BY S.Sanjiva Dev

From time immemorial the votaries of Peace have been held in great esteem as the noblest and the finest flowers from the garden of humanity. The vedic seers particularly so wise about the significance and the glory of Peace that they had never commenced and concluded any work -- whether secular or sacred -- without uttering the word 'Shantih' or Peace.

Peace indeed is the veritable basis for everything noble. Devoid of Peace there is no creativity and hence no felicity; Devoid of internal Peace no joy of the Spirit is possible; Devoid of ~~internal peace~~ both internal and external Peace the chaos could never be transformed into Cosmos. Peace is the veneration Bliss!

It is in order to make this Peace permanent that the modern Maitreya the great Nicholas Roerich has conceived his encircled triple-sphere known as Banner of Peace. The three sphere suggest that Peace could be established not by war, violence and exploitation but by Liberty, Fraternity and Equality; and this Liberty, Equality and Fraternity could never be fostered by civilization but by Culture and Culture alone. Civilization is fleeting and feeble having no power to penetrate beyond the apparent; it is only surface-deep. Culture, on the other hand, is eternal and energetic able to reach the fathomless depths in order to touch the quintessence of life itself.

But Culture cannot exist in the absence of Art which is the finest phase of Culture and it is in order to preserve the art-treasures that Roerich has created his encircled triple-sphere the Banner of Peace. Unless the art-treasures are preserved and protected properly one can never think of Culture and unless the Culture is fostered intensely among the receptive hearts of men, women and children of all countries irrespective of creed and colour, there is neither hope nor scope for founding Liberty, Fraternity and Equality among humanity bereft of which the idea of establishing Peace in the World would be but ludicrous. So, Roerich's Banner of Peace stands for the foundation of Peace through Culture by preserving the products of human intellect, emotion and intuition alike.

About the symbolism of the Banner of Peace the writer of these lines has already dealt to some extent, in a previous article entitled "The Banner of Peace". Yet, the symbolism of the Banner of Peace could be interpreted in many more ways.

From the prehistoric times the sign of this triad has been in use upon the objects that were held in great reverence by all nations. Roerich says "The oldest Indian symbols, Chintamani, the sign of happiness, is composed of this symbol and one can find it in the Temple of Heaven in Peking. It appears in Three Treasures of Tibet; on the breast of the Christ, in Memling's wellknown painting, on the Madona of Strasbourg; on the shields of the Crusaders and the coat of arms of the Templars. It can be seen on the blades of the famous Caucasian swords known as 'Gurda'. Nicholas Roerich was indeed very comprehensive in designing his Banner of Peace basing upon this eternal and universal symbolism.

We may interpret the symbolism of the Banner of Peace as follows. The three sphere represent the universal vedic prayer "asatoma sadgamaya, tamasoma jyotirgamaya, mrityorma amritangamaya (Lead me from falsehood to Truth, from darkness to Light and from death to Immortality)" encircled by Bliss Eternal.

The three spheres also represent the three stages of Mysticism namely Dvaita, or dualism, Visishtavaita or qualified monism and Advaita or monism. The first stage denotes that the aspirant and his Goal are quite separate, the second stage shows that the aspirant and his Goal are neither fully separate nor fully inseparable while the third stage vividly emphasizes that the aspirant and his Goal are quite inseparable and the same one without a second. Thus the Banner of Peace is the concrete symbol of spiritual Culture. So, Banner of Peace is the great symbol that represents the ever-luminous Ascent Path that leads the aspirant to the Fountain-head of Perfection.

A Banner of such highest idealism alone is in every way able to protect all cultural treasures from the clutches of Vandalism at times of Peace in general and at those of war in particular. Vandalism is of two aspects -- active and passive. Active aspect of vandalism destroys the art-treasures willfully in spite of the fact that those that adhere to this active Vandalism might happen to be good connoisseurs and lovers of art; political vengeance is the main cause for this sort of Vandalism. But the passive vandalism is far more terrible than the active one for this passive aspect destroys the creative spirit itself. Active Vandalism destroys the created works of art whereas the passive one eradicates the spiritual urge for creation itself. Passive Vandalism finds its material form in the Philistines who have been more energetic enemies of Culture than the active Vandals. Because, the active Vandals destroy mere the works of art and not the art-impulse in human heart while the passive Vandals or the Philistines kill the art-impulse itself. Passive vandalism is no other than the nonappreciation of Beauty; all inaestheticism is passive vandalism. Banner of Peace, therefore, does not merely protect the art-treasures from active vandalism but annihilates as well all non-appreciation of art of the passive vandalism; destruction of non-appreciation of art nourishes real appreciation of art; hence Banner of Peace should be unfurled everywhere not only to protect art-treasures but also to foster ardent love for art.

Whose heart does not vibrate at the very sight of the harmonious composition of the Banner of Peace? Beautiful in form, noble in thought and effective in action has been the Banner of Peace! Every rhythmic flicker of the Banner of Peace is powerful to burn off every layer of Philistinism and Vandalism from the human heart. It should not only be hoisted upon the public institutions of Art, Science and Religion but also upon the dwelling of individuals. Every ~~man~~ individual should become ~~Banner~~ Banner-conscious; then alone the Banner of Peace could be well realized. In order a new idea should be propagated among the humanity it must begin from the individual and proceed to the society and the state and not from the state to society and thence to the individual. Real transformation in the individual could bring intensive change in the society and the state ~~and the state~~ as the society and the state are but a cluster of individuals. Any influence that comes from groups to the individual would not be deep and cordial. Instead of this educative method of approaching from the group to the individual the inductive method of approaching from the individual to the group would be much permanent and in many respects strongly effective. But the most effective method is to begin from both of the sides. Both the state and the individual should extend their mutual co-operation in this direction to each other; this is the perfect way to success.

If the Governments of the world are desirous of establishing real Peace among the humanity, if they want to exterminate Vandalism both active and passive for ever from our globe, if they are anxious to democratize Culture (without diminishing its purity and standard) among all nations irrespective of colour and creed and if they want to see the people flourish in Liberty, Fraternity and Equality, they must forthwith undertake to adopt the Banner of Peace and Roerich Peace Pact. This is the only way for the emancipation of humanity from the thralldom of the mechanical civilization. Blessed are Acharya Nicholas Roerich and Mata Helena Roerich who have created the Banner of Peace the eternal symbol of their as well as the whole humanity's spiritual incandescence.

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