

Collected Works of
NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

VOLUME TWO

ESSAYS ON MYSTICISM

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
OF EDUCATION. PONDICHERRY

Ex oriente lux. Out of the East the Light, and that light is of the nature and substance of beauty, of creative and ^dsynamic beauty in the life of the spirit. This, I suppose, is Roerich's message in a nutshell. The Light of the East is always the light of the "ample consciousness" that dwells on the heights of our being in God.

The call that stirred a Western soul, made him a wanderer over the world in quest of the Holy Grail and finally lodged him in the Home of the Snows is symbolic of a more than individual destiny. It is representative of the secret history of a whole culture and civilisation that have been ruling humanity for some centuries, its inner want ^aand need and hankering and fulfilment. The West shall come to the East and ^{re}be born. That is the prophecy of occult seers and sages.

I speak of Roerich as a Western soul, but more precisely perhaps he is a soul of the mid-region (as also in another sense we shall see subsequently) intermediary between the East and the West. His external make-up had all the characteristic elements of the Western culture, but his mind and temperament, his inner soul was oriental. And yet it was not the calm luminous static-ancient-soul that an Indian or a Chinese sage is; it is a nomad soul, newly awakened, young and fresh and ardent, something primitive, pulsating with the unspoilt green sap of life-something in the manner of Whitman. And that makes him all the more representative of the young and ardent West yearning for the light that was never on sea or land.

Is it not strange that one should look to the East for the light? There is a light indeed that dwells in the setting suns, but that is the inferior light, the light that moves level with the earth, pins us down to the normal and ordinary life and consciousness: it leads into the Night, into Nihil, pralaya. It is the light of the morning sun that looks up to in his forward march, the sun that rises in the East whom the Vedic Rishi invoked in these magnificent lines:

Lo, the supreme light of all lights is come, a vast and varied consciousness is born in us...

// It is not a mere notion or ^{notion} superstition, it is an occult reality that gives sancity to a particular place or region. The ^{sanctity} sanity soul has always been also a pilgrim, physically, to holy places, even to one single holy place, if he so chooses. The puritan poet may say tauntingly:

Here pilgrims roam, that strayed so far to seek

In Golgotha him dead who lives in heaven --

// the pilgrim's soul of Roerich declares with but equal vehemence and assurance:

All teachers journeyed to the mountains. The higher knowledge, the most inspired songs, the most superb sounds and colours are created in the mountains. On the highest mountains there is the Supreme: the highest mountains stand as witness of Great Reality.

Indeed, Roerich considers the Himalayas as the very abode, the tabernacle itself-the sanctum sanctorum-of the spirit, the Light Divine. Many of Roerich's paintings ^{have mountain especially snow-bound mountain ranges} ranges, as their theme. There is a strange kinship between this yearning artistic soul, which seems solitary in spite of its ardent humanism, and the silent heights, rising white tier upon tier reflecting prismlike the fiery glowing colours, the vast horizons, the wide vistas vanishing beyond.

Roerich is one of the prophets and seers who have ever been acclaiming and preparing the Golden Age, the dream that humanity has ^{been} dreaming continuously since its very childhood, that is to say, when there will be peace and harmony on earth, when racial, cultural or ideological egoism will no longer divide man and man-a thing that seems today a chimera and a hallucination-when there will be one culture, one civilisation, one spiritual life welding all humanity into a single unit of life luminous and beautiful. Roerich believes that such a consummation can arrive only ^{or} chiefly through the growth of the sense of beauty, of the aesthetic temperament, of creative labour leading to a wider and higher consciousness. Beauty, Harmony, Light, ^K knowledge, Culture, Love, Delight are cardinal terms in his vision of the deeper and higher life of the future.

The stress of the inner urge to the heights and depths of spiritual values and realities found special and significant expression in his paintings. It is a difficult problem, a problem which artists and poets are tackling today with all their skill and talent. Man's consciousness is no longer satisfied with the customary and the ordinary actions and reactions of life (or thought), with the old-world and time-worn modes and manners. It is no more turned to the apparent and the obvious, to the surface forms and movements of things. It yearns to look behind and beyond, for the secret mechanism, the ~~yearns to look behind and beyond~~, for the secret mechanism, the hidden agency that really drives things. Poets and artists are the vanguards of the age to come, prophets and pioneers preparing the way for the Lord.

Roerich discovered and elaborated his own technique to reveal that which is secret, express that which is not expressed or expressible. First of all, he is symbolical and allegorical: secondly, the choice of his symbols and allegories is hieratic, that is to say, the subject-matter refers to objects and events connected with saints and legends, shrines and enchanted places, hidden treasures, spirits and angles, etc.etc; thirdly, the manner or style of execution is what we may term pantomimic, in other words, concrete, graphic, dramatic, even melodramatic. He has a special predilection for geometrical patterns the artistic effect of which—balance, regularity, fixity, solidity—was greatly utilised by the French painter ^Cezanne and poet Mallarme who seem to have influenced Roerich to a considerable degree. But this Northerner had not the reticence, the suavity, the tonic unity of the classicist, nor the normality and clarity of the Latin temperament. The prophet, the priest in him was the stronger elements and made use of the artist as the rites and ceremonies—mudras and chakras of his vocation demanded. Indeed, he stands as the hierophant of a new cultural religion and his paintings and utterances are, as it were, gestures that accompany a holy ceremonial.

A Russian artist (Monsieur Benois) has stressed upon the primitive almost aboriginal-element in Roerich and was not happy over it. Well, as has been pointed out by other prophets and thinkers, man today happens to be so sophisticated, artificial, material, cerebral that a fall-back seems to be necessary for him to take a new leap forward on to a higher ground. The pure aesthete is a closed system, with a consciousness immured in an ivory tower; but man is something more. A curious paradox. Man can reach the highest, realise the integral truth when he takes his leap, not from the relatively higher levels, when the of his consciousness-his intellectual and aesthetic and even moral status-but when he can do so from his lower levels, when the physico vital element in him serves as the springing board. The decent and the beautiful-the classic grace and aristocracy-form one aspect of man, the aspect of "light"; but the aspect of energy and power lies precisely in him where the aboriginal and the barbarian find also a lodging. Man as a mental being is naturally sattwic, but prone to passivity and weakness; his physico vital reactions, on the other hand, are obscure and crude, simple and vehement, but they have life and energy and creative power, they are there to be trained and transformed, made effective instruments of a higher illumination.

All elemental personalities have something of the unconventional and irrational in them. And Roerich is one such in his own way. The truths and realities that he envisages and seeks to realise on earth are elemental and fundamental, although apparently simple and commonplace.

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NICHOLAS ROERICH

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