



Roerich

Treasure of Snows

Smythe writes, "Is there any region of the Himalayas or even of the world, to excel this region in beauty and grandeur? Where else are there to be found such narrow and precipitous gorges, such serene vistas of alp, forest, snow-field and peak?"

Baur, the German explorer, thus describes these mighty mountains: "Of the countless wonders of this earth of ours, the Himalaya is surely the greatest and most overwhelming. The immensity of its mountain giants and the wild play of the forces inherent in them convey to the mind perhaps more forcibly than anything else the grandeur of creation. And what eternal variety is to be found within the fastnesses of this range itself: In the east Kangchenjunga and Siniolchum thrust their feet into the unfathomable depths of ever-verdant tropical forest; a sea of blossom covers the Sikkim mountain slopes sometimes to a height of over 13,000 feet; orchids and rhododendrons and a multitude of different kinds of butterflies make an enchanted paradise of color and beauty, while above are towers and pinnacles of glistening ice and fantastic patterns of

filigree and fluting formed by the falling masses of snow even in the steepest walls.

"But on approaching Nanga Parbat, which towers as a corner-pillar at the western extremity of the Himalayas nearly a thousand miles from Kangchenjunga, quite a different type of scenery is encountered. The foothills are covered with bright woodland and flower-strewn meadows calling to mind friendly Alpine scenes, but the deeply chiselled valley in which the Indus winds its grey and murky way through the mountains is a bare waste of rocks and one can imagine no greater contrast to it than the shimmering ice wall of Nanga Parbat, whose summit pierces the sky 23,000 feet above the Indus, yet only fourteen miles from its banks."

These expeditions made the common man in India realise the wonder and beauty of the inner Himalayas. The tales of heroism, of hardships undergone and lives lost in the struggle stirred the imagination of the people, and the photographs which these mountain climbers brought back came as a revelation to the Indian people who had forgotten their mountains.

The Himalayas began to attract gifted people from all over the world, particularly

THE Aryans greatly admired the Himalayas and they travelled widely in its ranges in the hoary past of India. Apart from visiting the Badri Nath and Kedar Nath peaks in Garhwal, they penetrated into the interior of Western Tibet and discovered the picturesque Kailas, the axis of their world and the throne of their gods.

"There," says one of the *Puranas*, "are the regions of *Swarga*, the seats of the righteous, where the wicked do not arrive even after a thousand births. There is no sorrow, nor weariness, nor anxiety, nor hunger nor apprehension; the inhabitants are exempt from all infirmity and pain, and live in uninterrupted enjoyment. The goddess never sends rain upon them, yet the earth abounds with water. In these regions there is no distinction or succession of ages, and Time is no more."

Snow-covered white peaks have a peculiar effect on the human mind. All over the world white color is associated with purity. White clothes, white roses, white lotuses, white snow-peaks—all denote purity. To some purity means a moral way of life, and to others it denotes physical cleanliness. To yet others it implies conquest of evil emotions like anger, hatred and jealousy, purging the mind of narrow and mean ideas.

The silence of the inner Himalayan valleys coupled with the grandeur of snow-peaks and rarefied atmosphere free from dust and haze, has a peculiarly soothing effect. While gazing at the white peaks from Dhakuri Pass and at Martoli in Pindari Valley one experiences a strange sensation of tranquillity. In these places one forgets the petty jealousies, bickerings, intrigues, and hatreds of the plains, and Time ceases to have any meaning.

In such places one wholeheartedly concurs with the writer of *Skanda Purana*, who, praising the beauty spots of the Himalayas says: "In a hundred ages of the gods, I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachal."

Kalidas was the last of the Hindu poets who was in intimate touch with the Himalayas. In his *Meghdhut*, he describes slopes of mountains covered with pines and deodars, gushing mountain torrents and snow-covered peaks. After the 5th Century A. D., the golden age of Hindu civilisation, there is a gradual decay. Apart from a few pilgrims wending their pious way to Amar Nath, Badri Nath, Kedar Nath, Rawalsar, Kailash and Mansarovar, most of the people in general forgot the mountains of their country and the Himalayan beauty spots which their ancestors had so wisely sanctified.

India owes a heavy debt to the Himalayan explorers, and mountain climbers like Smythe, Shipton, Ruttledge, Baur and scores of others who explored the various Himalayan peaks, for it is they who helped us to rediscover our mountains.

Describing the inner Himalayan ranges of Kumaon,

from the West. The year 1932 marks a great event in the history of pictorial art in India. In that year the greatest mountain painter of the age, Nicholas Roerich, came to India and settled down at Naggar in Kulu, in the Punjab Himalayas. Roerich had made a life-long study of rocks and mountains in Russia. In his paintings he captured the glory of the Himalayas. In vivid colors which create a strange sensation in the beholder and send a thrill of joy in the hearts of true nature lovers he has distilled the essence of the Himalayas.

Roerich's love of the Himalayas is intense; he thus wrote to one of his admirers: "You know my devotion to the majestic splendor of this wonderful mountain country of India. I am happy to have the privilege of disseminating throughout the world the glory of the Himalayas, the sacred jewel of India."

Another great artist of the Himalayas is an American, Earl Henry Brewster who along with his wife Achsah settled down at Almora in 1936. He has painted a large number of landscapes of the Outer Himalayas, characterised by simplicity of composition and sober coloring. The dark green pines, reddish terraced fields and blue autumn skies of Kumaon have been faithfully portrayed by him.

Comparing the art of Brewster and Roerich, we find that while both of them are deeply religious and have been intensely affected by the Himalayas, Roerich is essentially the painter of the snow-peaks and rocks of Tibetan plateau, the narrow gorges and precipitous valleys of Kulu and the snow-covered giants of the inner ranges of the Western Himalayas. He is more of an idealist.

Brewster, on the other hand, is manifestly realistic. He has painted the Kumaon Himalayas, the snow-peaks of Nanda Devi, the pine-covered slopes and terraced fields of the Outer Himalayas as we see them. He has also immortalized on canvas the quaint beauty of the hill-temples of Kumaon, the pink blossoms of jungle pears silhouetted against ebony-black branches, the white glory of bell-shaped *Datura* flowers, and the bluish metallic sheen of *Chir* pines bearing tassels of

needle-like leaves.

In Brewster's landscapes we actually see Kumaon valleys filled with purple haze and marvellous effects of light and shade when sunlight filters through cumulus clouds into the valleys. By using darker paints in the foreground and lighter ones in the background he produces an almost stereoscopic effect in his landscapes.

But then Roerich is not a landscape artist. He is one of those artists like Gauguin and Vroubel who are not satisfied with the plain reality; like them he freely draws on his imagination and uses Nature and its manifestations merely as plastic material, which he works into forms unusual and unexpected, but far more impressive and vigorous.

As one art critic observes:

"Roerich's paintings of the Himalayas are much more and far richer than a literal transcription of the magnificent scenery of earth. They reveal Nature strained through a profoundly intelligent and supremely intuistic consciousness. In them the light that is on sea and land by some potent magic has been translated into the light that never was on sea or land."

In the Himalayan pictures of Roerich we never see crowds but only solitary human figures overshadowed by mighty rocks and snow-covered peaks. In severe

A keen naturalist (he is Fellow of many scientific societies); an ardent aesthete (his forthcoming books on Art and Society are entitled "Beautifying India" and "Central Himalayas"); an administrator of repute (he was Secretary to the Indian Delegation at the Quebec Conference of the F.A.O., and is now Deputy Commissioner for Delhi), and a studious sociologist (his original work in the Provinces is highly commended), Mr. M. S. Randhawa, I.C.S., is a rare blend of scholar, scientist, connoisseur and executive.

contrast with the rugged grandeur of brilliantly colored rocks and mighty snow-covered mountains we see a Lama priest, a *sadhu* or a hillman. By this method

Roerich is able to convey an impression of the loneliness and peace which reign in these places; by contrast the grandeur of rocks and mountains is emphasized as well as the insignificance of man before the immensity of Nature.

The Himalayan expeditions and the paintings of Roerich exercised a profound influence on Indian art. Some of the younger artists realised that they must break the spell of Ajanta and open their eyes to the charm of their everyday environment and beautiful flowering trees of India, her towering mountains and meandering rivers and her toiling masses.

Many of the younger artists caught the lure of the Himalayas; and some, like Bireswar Sen, Kanwal Krishna, S. Sen Roy, R. N. Chakravarti, Manindra Bhushan Gupta and B. N. Jijja went trekking into the Himalayas and brought back a rich harvest of paintings. Kanwal Krishna and his wife Devyani have not only painted the colorful rocks of Tibet and Trans-Himalayas, they have also portrayed vividly the humanity of that country. All their pictures have an exotic appeal.

Bireswar's Transition

Out of the Indian artists who paint the Himalayas, Bireswar Sen of Lucknow is the most outstanding. Originally he was a figure painter. However, fairly early trees and mountains crept into his pictures. In *The Toilet*, against a background of a twisted tree and a dark shapeless mountain, he has painted a beautiful Bengali woman holding a mirror, seated on a *chauki*, her hair being combed by a maid-servant. His *Damyanti* is just a woman draped in tattered red garments sitting on a mound against a background of mast-like trunks of Sal trees.

Later his figures became smaller and smaller and Nature began to wield her sway. In 1932 he visited Naggar, the abode of Nicholas Roerich. This contact followed by a visit to Kashmir, decided once for all the future of his art; the influence of the Himalayas now became paramount in his soul. He devoted his ripening talents

exclusively to the glory of the Himalayas.

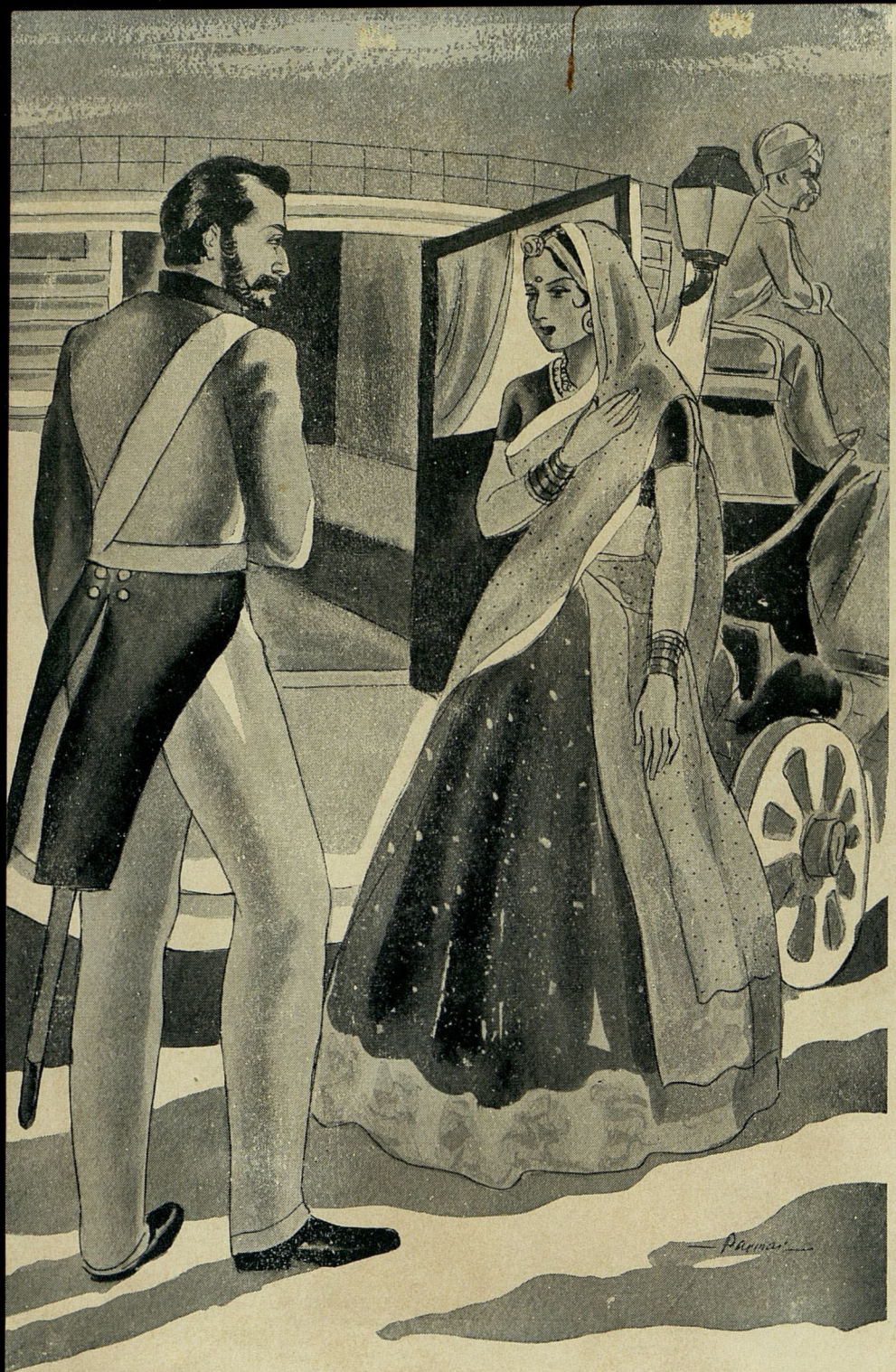
Early tendencies of this are visible in his famous picture *To Whom Shall We Offer Our Sacrifices*—an illustration of the famous Vedic hymn depicting a primitive worshipper tendering burnt offerings to a huge monolith tipped by the golden rays of the rising sun. The semi-draped figure of the young man with outstretched arms kneeling before a burning fire is symbolic of the spirit of man himself, bewildered and overwhelmed by the mystery of the universe and life, in search of his god.

Religion offers certain explanations of the great mystery, though they are far from convincing. Science tries to illumine some facets of the Unknown and the Unseen, but we are still far from finding an explanation. We are still bewildered, the great Unknown is still a mystery to us, and we still ask: "To Whom Shall We Make Our Offerings?" This interesting picture not only marks an important stage in the development of the art of Bireswar Sen, but is also an index of his rational mind. From amongst Hindu artists, he is perhaps the only one, who has successfully resisted the lure of romanticism and Hindu mythology. India has found the finest interpreter of the grandeur, mystery and beauty of her Himalayan mountains.

It is he who started the innovation of miniature landscapes which have now become so popular. In these little gems in so small a space so much is compressed without creating an impression of crowding—Tibetan *Chortens*, prayer-flags, lonely Lamas resting on weird crags, blazing flames and twinkling stars, and ghost-like figures of hermits and hillmen. In these miniatures he catches exquisitely the evanescent moods of Nature—passing showers, sunset gleams which appear for a moment to vanish for ever, shimmering sunlight on rusting foliage, clouds that form and reform in fantastic shapes and the approach of heavy rain-clouds of the Indian monsoon.

A new era in Indian painting has been started, and there now lie new vistas of beauty before the Indian people, making them conscious of their glorious heritage—Nature in all its majesty and resplendent glory. ♦♦





Tribune, Chandigarh.

- 6 OCT 1974

ART OF NICHOLAS ROERICH

by M. S. RANDHAWA

NICHOLAS Konstantinovich Roerich was born in 1874 in St. Petersburg. He graduated in Law, but his passion was for painting. He was deeply interested in archaeology and participated in a number of excavations including those of tumuli in his father's estate. He also acquired an intimate knowledge of Russian folk-art. In the summers of 1901-1903 he travelled in Russia and painted churches, monasteries and other ancient monuments and at the turn of the century saw his great historic paintings, mosaics and murals.

Very early he became interested in stage designs for ballets, operas and plays. His design of decor and costumes for the ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps* won applause from men of discrimination and taste in Paris in 1913. The subject of the ballet was the cult of earth worship.

When the Revolution took place in Russia in 1917 Roerich was made Chairman of the Council of Art Affairs by Maxim Gorky, who dealt with Art and Culture under the new regime. At that time Roerich under advice of his physicians had to go to Finland to recuperate from an attack of pneumonia and was cut off from Russia by the German occupation of Finland. After a series of most successful exhibitions in Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki, Roerich and his family went to England where an Exhibition of his Art was arranged at the Goupil Gallery in London in the spring of 1920. Among the sponsors of the exhibition was H.G. Wells. During his stay in London he painted many stage sets for operas for the Covent Garden.

In the winter of 1920 he was invited by the Chicago Art Institute to exhibit his works in America. In 1921 he founded the Master Institute of United Arts which included teaching of painting, sculpture, architecture, ballet, music and journalism. He also founded the International Art Center and Cor Ardens besides many other organizations.

His interest in Indian philosophy and culture, which began before the turn of the century, deepened, and in November 1923 he along with Madame Roerich and sons Gorges and Svetoslav came to India and explored the Himalayas. In 1928 the Roerich decided to settle at Naggar in Kulu Valley which became their Indian home. On his return to America in 1924, a Museum was founded in his honour in New York to house his paintings and collections of Himalayan Art.

In 1925-1928 Roerich embarked on an expedition to Chinese-Turkestan, the Altai Mountain, Mongolia and the Gobi desert. After his return from Central Asia in 1928, he purchased the Hall Estate at Naggar from the Raja of Mandi and finally settled there.

Roerich made Naggar, a cultural centre and from this place his influence radiated among lovers of art and culture, the world over. His idea of the cultural pact, named as the Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace won influential adherents and was adopted by some 40 countries in 1934. The aim of the Pact was protection of Museums and Art Galleries from ravages of war. One of his disciples was Henry Wallace, the great Soil Conservationist who in the early thirties introduced contour ploughing to counteract the menace of soil erosion in Mid-West and in 1940 became the Vice-President of U.S.A.

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School, Lucknow, for whom I had great regard. While posted at Rae Bareilly in 1941-1944 I met him frequently at Lucknow and used to admire his miniature Himalayan landscapes, which were in fact, reduced Roerich paintings in water colours.

In December 1947 I invited Nicholas Roerich for an exhibition of his paintings in the premises of the All-India Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi. Northern India was greatly disturbed at that time on account of partition riots. While the paintings came, Roerich himself could not come on account of illness. He was in a place where medical aid was not available and we were shocked to receive a telegram that he expired on December 15, 1947. In spite of this tragedy we arranged the exhibition of his paintings, which was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru. It was a great success and for weeks the galleries of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society were radiant with cosmic beauty.

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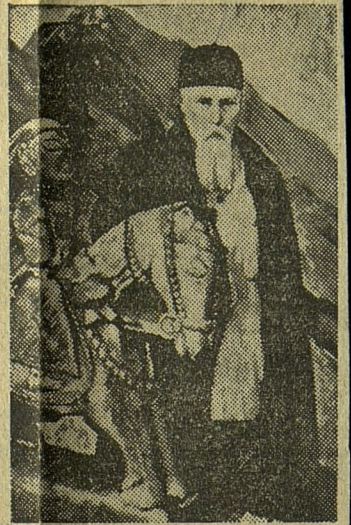
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In October 1948 when I left Delhi for Punjab I took a month's leave and decided to pay a visit to Roerich's home at Naggar. On reaching Naggar I enquired from a villager about Roerich's home. I was informed that it was nearby, and felt reassured. I passed through a forest of cedars and in a few minutes reached the Roerich Villa, which turned out to be more interesting than the Naggar Castle. Near the entrance gate was a large collection of stone sculptures from the valley. Under a tree was Guga Chauhan on horseback. In the background were the snowy peaks and below were the paddy terraces. The walls of the villa were covered with ivy and a giant agave was in bloom, bearing panicles of fragrant white flowers. Below the villa was an orchard, and in it

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The eminent Art Critic Dr. Hermann Goetz remarks that Nicholas Roerich was the first Russian representative of that simplified style developed by Manet, Gauguin and Van Gogh which led to a new spatial and atmospheric probability by means of intensive line and colour which in its turn evoked responses never possible in earlier art. Nicholas Roerich made a deep and intimate study of the rocks and mountains of the Inner Himalayas, and his Himalayan landscapes revealed unearthly beauty and grandeur. His colours may appear exaggerated to the people who live in the dusty plains, but those who have had an opportunity of travelling in high altitudes know what brilliant colours can be seen at dawn and at sunset.

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When Revolution took place in Russia in 1917 Roerich had to make a decision whether to stay or ^{to} quit. ^{Was in Finland recuperating from an attack of pneumonia} He came from an aristocratic family and, ^{and was cut off from Russia by the Finnish revolution,} his wife was a grand-niece of Field-Marshal Kutuzov who defeated Napoleon by his strategy of resistance and retreat. ^{was made by} Maxim Gorky, who dealt with art and culture under the new Soviet regime, made him Chairman of the Council of Art Affairs. ^{under advice of his physicians had to go to} Roerich was not happy in his changed environment ^{Finland to recuperate from an attack of pneumonia,} and after two months he migrated along with his family to Finland. ^{After he was cut off from Russia by the Finnish revolution,} After spending a winter in Finland he reached England. An exhibition of his paintings was arranged at the Goupil Gallery in London in the spring of 1920. Among the sponsors of this exhibition was H. G. Wells. During his stay in London, he painted stage sets for operas for the Covent Garden.

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In 1926-28 Roerich embarked on an expedition to *Tibet, Altai mountain,* and the Gobi desert. *after his return from Central Asia* In 1928, he purchased The Hall estate at Naggar from the Raja of Mandi and finally settled there.

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¹Penelope Chetwode, Kulu, London, 1972, p. 155

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16th August 1974.

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Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich was born in 1874 in St. Petersburg. He graduated in Law, but his passion was for painting. He was deeply interested in archaeology and participated in a number of excavations including those of tumuli in his father's estate. He also acquired an intimate knowledge of Russian folk-art. In the summers of 1901 - 1903 he travelled in Russia and painted churches, monasteries and other ancient monuments and at the turn of the century saw his great historic paintings, mosaics and murals.

Very early he became interested in stage designs for ballets, operas and plays. His design of decor and costumes for the ballet Le Sacre du Printemps won applause from men of discrimination and taste in Paris in 1913. The subject of the ballet was the cult of earth worship.

When the Revolution took place in Russia in 1917 Roerich was made Chairman of the Council of Art Affairs by Maxim Gorky, who dealt with Art and Culture under the new regime. At that time Roerich under advice of his physicians had to go to Finland to recuperate from an attack of pneumonia and was cut off from Russia by the German occupation of Finland. After a series of most successful Exhibitions in Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki, Roerich and his family went to England where an Exhibition of his Art was arranged at the Goupil Gallery in London in the Spring of 1920. Among the sponsors of the Exhibition was H.G. Wells. During his stay in London he painted many stage sets for operas for the Covent Garden.

In the winter of 1920 he was invited by the Chicago Art Institute to exhibit his works in America. In 1921 he founded the Master Institute of United Arts which included teaching of paintings, sculpture, architecture, ballet, music and journalism. He also founded the

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International Art Center and Cor Ardens besides many other organisations.

His interest in Indian philosophy and culture began before the turn of the century deepened, and in November 1923 he alongwith Madame Roerich and sons Gorges and Svetoslav came to India and explored the Himalayas. In 1928 the Roerichs decided to settle at Naggar in Kulu Valley which became their Indian home. On his return to America in 1924 a Museum was founded in his honour in New York to house his paintings and collections of Himalayan Art.

In 1925 - 1928 Roerich embarked on an expedition to Chinese-Turkestan, the Altai Mountain, Mongolia and the Gobi desert. After his return from Central Asia in 1928, he purchased the Hall Estate at Naggar from the Raja of Mandi and finally settled there.

Roerich made Naggar, a cultural centre and from this place his influence radiated among lovers of art and culture, the world over. His idea of the cultural pact, named as the Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace won influential adherents and was adopted by some forty countries in 1934. The aim of the Pact was protection of Museums and Art Galleries from ravages of war. One of his disciples was Henry Wallace, the great Soil Conservationist who in the early thirties introduced contour ploughing to counteract the menace of soil erosion in Mid-West, and in 1940 became the Vice-President of U.S.A.

I became interested in the paintings of Nicholas Roerich in 1929 when I was a student in Government College, Lahore. An Exhibition of his paintings in 1940 was widely praised by art-lovers of Lahore.

After my return from England in 1934 I kept in touch with Roerich through correspondence. One of the Indian artists who was influenced by his work was Bireswar Sen, Principal of Government Art School, Lucknow, for whom I had great regard. While posted at Rae Bareilly in 1941-44 I met him frequently at Lucknow and used to admire his miniature Himalayan landscapes, which were in fact, reduced Roerich paintings in water colours.

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white flowers. Below the villa was an orchard, and in it under the shade of a pine-tree was a rough hewn granite rock which marked the place where Nicholas Roerich was cremated. A Himalayan rock symbolically marks the last resting-place of this great mountain-painter, and on it is a simple inscription in Devanagari mentioning that Maharishi Roerich was cremated on 15th December, 1947. Above the inscription are three circles representing Art, Science and Literature.

For years Roerich's paintings remained in the Pusa Institute and in 1968 this collection was purchased by the Union Territory Administration for the Chandigarh Museum where they are now on display. A few still remain in the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society.

Nicholas Roerich lived in Kulu Valley which has a rich cultural heritage. In early eighteenth century, a style of painting flourished in Kulu, which can be regarded as a variant of Basohli style. In the closing year of the eighteenth century, painting in Kulu was influenced by the Kangra style. I was wondering whether Roerich saw some of these paintings and what influence they had on his work. In a book entitled ROERICH, published by Corona Mundi, 310 Riverside Drive, New York (1924) there are two paintings from the Roerich Museum, New York, which show influence of the Kangra school. One is entitled 'Language of the Birds', which depicts the familiar theme of Padmini and her parrot. The other called 'Song of the Morning' shows a virahini Mayika and a black buck. A peacock is shown perching on the cornice against a background of dark clouds.

The eminent Art Critic Dr. Hermann Goetz remarks that Nicholas Roerich was the first Russian representative of that simplified style developed by Manet, Gauguin and Van Gogh which led to a new spatial and atmospheric probability by means of intensive line and colour which in its turn evoked responses never possible in earlier art. Nicholas Roerich made a deep and intimate study of the rocks and mountains of the inner Himalayas, and his Himalayan landscapes reveal unearthly

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beauty and grandeur. His colours may appear exaggerated to the people who live in the dusty plains, but those who have had an opportunity of travelling in high altitudes know what brilliant colours can be seen at dawn and at sunset. Nicholas Roerich is not an ordinary landscape artist. It is nature strained through a fine consciousness, that we find revealed in his paintings. In his mountain pictures are solitary figures of lamas, sadhus or hillmen standing before snow-covered peaks, symbolizing the insignificance of man before the mighty forces of nature. These landscapes are not merely records of places, but a means of recording the sense of grandeur and exaltation which the artist felt looking at those mountains. On seeing lonely pilgrims ploughing their way through snowy wastes, a feeling of sadness steals over us. The sight of rishis lost in meditation in the Himalayan caves reminds us of an aspect of life which we are fast forgetting in the din of the cities. No doubt it has been correctly observed that every landscape is a state of the soul. In each of these landscapes we see a beautiful soul ! In the quiet of Naggar, Nicholas Roerich led a creative life, pervaded by spiritual understanding and harmony. Through his paintings he placed the Kulu valley on the cultural map of the world.

A vast International Bibliography exists on Nicholas Roerich with a large number of very important Monographs and many hundreds of publications, essays, critical appreciations and analysis of his Art by leading writers, art critics and scholars. A large number of volumes are added to it every year.

We are living in the machine age in which decadent Art reigns supreme. For an artist and art critic to achieve understanding, they must operate on the same wave-length. When the present generation will get satiated with inanities, crudities and horrors, which are the hall-marks of the present day art, they will turn back to Roerich and receive the spiritual message of his paintings which throb with colour and vibrate with harmonies which remind us of nature and the cosmos.

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