

1  
RUSSIA AND THE HIMALAYAS

By E.Chelyshev

The Soviet and Indian peoples are celebrating the 110th anniversary of the birth of Nikolai Roerich, an outstanding Russian painter, thinker and public figure.

Roerich's life was incessant creative effort and pursuit of knowledge. Roerich wanted to reach the sources of artistic vision of the world, of folk art. His profound understanding of the national character of art made him aware of the internationalist nature of genuine culture. He went to India to return to Russia again; all his life he thought about the common sources of Russian and Indian cultures:

When....

2

When you look at Roerich's pictures of the Himalayas, you feel the spirit of these gigantic mountains which have for centuries risen high above the lowlands, and protected our country from foreign invasion. His pictures bring forth episodes from our history, our thoughts and aspirations, our cultural and intellectual legacy. They tell us of India's past and of something eternal and unfading, and we feel indebted to Nikolai Roerich who conveyed this spirit in his fine works. Roerich's art stands above human life and death. It continues to live after the artist's death. This statement was made by Jawaharlal Nehru at the opening of an exhibition of Roerich's paintings in Delhi in December of 1947. Nehru spoke of the artist's remarkable ability to penetrate into the Indian world and see the most sacred, intrinsic things hidden in its nature.

Nehru was right when he said that although years and decades had passed, Roerich's fame had not faded. His paintings which feature two subjects, as the artist put it, Russia and the Himalayas, have retained their vitality and his ideas appeal and their significance.

The artist's great talent enabled him to see the inexhaustible sources of spiritual closeness between the Soviet and Indian nations. "India has opened its heart to boundless Russia," Roerich wrote, "while the great Indian magnet attracts Russian hearts. I'm happy to see the vitality of Soviet-Indian ties."

One can only wonder how Roerich, who was born in Russia and absorbed and assimilated Russian culture, could so deeply penetrate into the Indian world. India captured his heart and he saw the beauty of the land and the human soul.

How could a Russian and an Indian soul coexist in Roerich, a truly Russian artist who made a new beginning in India?

The Russian artist's regard for India must be viewed in the context of the Russian democratic circles' great interest in India and their sincere concern for the Indian people and their liberation movement.

Leo....

Leo Tolstoy and Stasov helped the Russian artist to understand India with his mind and heart.

Roerich was greatly influenced by Rabindranath Tagore who shaped his attitude toward the Indians' spiritual life and ancient Indian cultural legacy, an attitude free from any religious prejudice. Roerich and Tagore were good friends and had similar approaches to life and creative work.

It is no coincidence that Roerich united his reminiscences of Leo Tolstoy and Rabindranath Tagore in one article. He regarded both the great Russian writer and the great Indian poet as the embodiment of the most beautiful, noble and wise trends in Russian and Indian life and art. Both authors were his guides and played an important role in his life and work. Tolstoy gave his blessing to the young artist whom he wanted to assert lofty ideals through his art. Tagore revealed India to Roerich both literally and figuratively. When Tagore first met Roerich in 1920 at the London exhibition of his paintings, he invited him to come to India.

The Indian poet helped the Russian painter to get an insight into the spiritual and artistic treasures of India and to understand its past and present.

The Roerich family settled in Punjab, in the Kulu valley at the foot of the Himalayas. Roerich came to love India, which became his second homeland.

Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi visited Kulu in 1942. The significance of Nehru's meeting with Roerich was truly historic. At a time of hard trials when the Nazis threatened the existence of world civilization and India was still under the colonial yoke, Nehru and Roerich discussed the destinies of Russia and India; they believed in the bright future of both nations and all mankind. Roerich described Nehru as "a fine and outstanding figure. People are attracted to him. Every day he says encouraging words to somebody. He works hard, sometimes till four in the morning and, of course, gets very tired. We spoke about the Indo-Russian cultural association. It's time to think about cooperation, useful and constructive."

ooooOoooo