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'REMINISCENCES' OF PROF. NICHOLAS ROERICH

by

DR. SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI

SENT TODAY:

Life Sketch (Green Folder)
Pink Folder
His own Poem
Dr. Rajamannar's article
1 photograph of Prof. Roerich

C/o. The Indian Bank,
Lady Curzon Road,
Cantonment,
BANGALORE - 1.
KARNATAKA, South India.

26th August 1974.

My dear Dr. Chatterjie,

I have pleasure in informing you that the Birth Centenary of Prof. Nicholas Roerich will be on the 9th of October this year.

India is honouring Prof. Nicholas Roerich by bringing out a stamp on the 9th of October in his name and other countries also are marking this event, in particular the U.S.S.R. where the celebrations are being arranged on an extensive scale.

I enclose for your information some data which may be of interest to you. It would be perhaps nice if you could write on Prof. Nicholas Roerich for the Journal of the Sahitya Academy as you have known Prof. Roerich on his work for so many years, and there is hardly anybody who could write better than you. I would like to have at least six copies as it will be most useful to Institutions abroad and also in the U.S.S.R. where we shall be going shortly for Svetoslav's Exhibition. I attach also your Poem which is precious.

Dear Suniti Babu how can I write to you about Prof. Roerich when you yourself know him so well? I am merely taking the liberty of sending you this letter because I am sure that it will give you pleasure to know about the Centenary.

With our respects and affectionate greetings,

Yours affectionately,

DR

(Mme. DEVIKA RANI ROERICH)

Dr. S. K. Chatterji,
President,
THE SAHITYA AKADEMI,
Rabindra Bhavan,
Ferozshah Road,
NEW DELHI - 1.

भारतीय डाक-तार विभाग
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Mme. Devika Rani Roerich,
C/o. The Indian Bank,
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Cantonment,
BANGALORE - 1.
KARNATAKA, South India.

Date-stamp



भारतीय-54 R. P.-54

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Shri P.C. Chatterji,
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26/9/73



RESIDENCE :
"SUDHARMĀ"
16 HINDUSTHAN PARK
CALCUTTA-29
PHONE : 46-1121

//āvīr āvīr ma ēdhi//
mānavikīṣu *bhāratasya
jātiya ācāryaḥ
SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI
NATIONAL PROFESSOR OF INDIA
IN HUMANITIES

OFFICE :
NATIONAL LIBRARY CAMPUS
BELVEDERE
CALCUTTA-27
PHONE : 45-5319

August 30, 1974.

Mme.Devika Rani Roerich,
C/O The Indian Bank,
Lady Curzon Road,
Cantonment,
Bangalore-1 (Karnataka State)

Dear Srimati Devika Rani Roerich,

Thank you for your letter of
August 26, 1974, which reached me this morn-
ing.

I am happy to hear that the
memory of Prof. Nicholas Roerich is going
to be internationally honoured in different
countries of the world, including U.S.S.R.
and India. I am now 84, and my hands are
full, and more and more work is being thrust
upon me. Still I shall try to write a brief
article on Prof. Roerich, whom I had the
privilege of meeting during my student days
in London in 1921-22 and subsequently also
in India. I also knew closely his elder son
Yuri, and I had met Sviatoslav also in
London long ago, and subsequently, as you
know, in India.

I trust you are keeping good
health, and I am sending my kindest regards
to both your husband and yourself.

Yours very sincerely,

Suniti Kumar Chatterji
(Suniti Kumar Chatterji)

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DR. SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI
"SUDHARMA"
16 HINDUSTHAN PARK
CALCUTTA - 29.

6th September 1974.

DR. SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI
"SUDHARMA"
16 HINDUSTHAN PARK
CALCUTTA 29

MOSTT GRATEFUL YOUR LETTER STOP PLEASE SEND ME
A COPY OF YOUR ARTICLE ON NICHOLAS ROERICH WHICH
IS PRECIOUS NOT ONLY FOR US BUT ALSO TO TAKE TO
RUSSIA WHEN WE GO FOR OUR EXHIBITION STOP
WITH RESPECTS AND LOVE FROM BOTH OF US

DEVIKA RANI

Mme. Devika Rani Roerich, C/o. The Indian Bank
Lady Curzon Road, Cantonment, BANGALORE - 1.
KARNATAKA, South India.



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"SUDHARMĀ"

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//āvīr āvīr ma ēdhi//
mānavikīṣu *bhāratasya
jātiya ācāryaḥ

SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI

NATIONAL PROFESSOR OF INDIA
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OFFICE:
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CALCUTTA-27
PHONE: 45-5319

September 24, 1974.

Mme.Devika Rani Roerich,
C/O The Indian Bank
Lady Curzon Road, Cantonment,
Bangalore-1 (Karnatak State)

Dear Sm.Devika Rani,

As desired, I have prepared a little
"reminiscences" of Professor Nicholas Roerich,
and I am sending it to you herewith, in
duplicate. It was not possible to have more
copies typed than three, because the subsequent
copies would be very difficult to read. But
you can easily get other copies made as
necessary.

I am afraid my Paper has not done
justice to the memory of the great man. But
I have done my best, and you kindly put it
into any use you like.

With my best regards for Mr.Svyatoslav
Roerich and yourself,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Suniti Kumar Chatterji
(Suniti Kumar Chatterji)

RESIDENCE :
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PHONE : 46-1121



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Professor Nicholas Roerich, who was born on the 9th of October 1874 in St. Petersburg in Russia and passed away on the 13th December 1947 in Naggar, Kulu (Himalayas), India, had quite a quiet ^{but} an eventful career. ~~He~~ ^{He} has left his mark in contemporary life and culture as an artist and explorer, a scientist, a poet, an author and an educator, and was a man of high culture who was quite unique in his personality as a great and a good man. He became very well-known outside his own mother-country Russia, in Great Britain, ^{in the} U.S.A., ⁱⁿ Belgium, ⁱⁿ France and ⁱⁿ India, besides having done a good bit of travelling and exploration in various lands of Central Asia, particularly Mongolia. Prof. Roerich came to know very closely such eminent persons of the present day as Albert Einstein, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Abanindranath Tagore, and others. Apart from his greatness as an artist and poet, scientist and explorer, he was also ^{great as} an archaeologist, particularly of pre-historic antiquities, and he was also a great collector of objects of ^{prehistoric and} ancient art. His writings indicate that he was also a philosopher and a mystic, as well as something ^{even} of a prophet. In fact, Nicholas Roerich has been quite a unique personality during his life time. ~~He~~ ^{about him}, as said before, had an eventful life, but he did not have anything sensational. His life was that of a quiet artist and thinker - a man who tried to find out the secret of man's past history in both the departments of material and spiritual

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culture. He came to India, where he finally laid his bones, and in India he founded an Institute for Research into the deeper things of human culture as it found its expression in ^{the} art of both Asia and Europe and in the thought of India, China and Tibet - of the world of the Vedas and the Upanishads, of Buddhism, of Taoism, and ^{of} Lamaism.

Persons, who have had the opportunity of coming into closer touch with him and who have also the competence to appreciate his greatness and to write about it for the benefit of humanity, have already given their appreciation of the many facets of Nicholas Roerich's personality as an artist and as a thinker. I myself had the privilege of knowing him ^{though} only to a very slight extent, during my student days in London in 1918-21, when ^{Professor} Roerich and his family were staying in London. Later on when he came to India and planned to establish his Himalayan Research Institute of Urushvati at Naggar in Kulu district in Western Himalayas (present-day Himachal Pradesh), I had occasion also to meet him in Calcutta once or twice. But through the kindness of the Roerich Society in New York I was enabled to retain my contact with Prof. Roerich's activities in America, and I was very much impressed by all that he was doing for the development of art and letters and international study of art and also ^{for} the stabilisation of international peace through art and science, and I also came to know how he was leading some expeditions in Central Asia with American co-operation.

It will be seen that although I appreciated Roerich's greatness and admired him generally from a distance, the only occasions for intimate contact which enabled me to see the man

in his intimate family environment was in London, and I can only present a few reminiscences of Nicholas Roerich ^{as I saw him} over more than half a century ago.

I did not have any idea of this great man before I first met his son Yuri or George Roerich at the School of Oriental Studies in London. I was studying in London as Government of India research scholar in Indo-Aryan linguistics, and my place of work was the School of African and Oriental Studies. This Institution was then under a very great scholar of Islamic studies, who was an erudite ^{savant} ~~scholar~~ as well as a ~~man~~ most affable man, Sir E. Denison Ross. Ross was the ^{Director} ~~Provost~~ of the School, and he was for many years an active and a very popular Principal of the Government of India Centre of Islamic Studies in India, the Calcutta Madrasa. As Principal of this Institution Ross was connected with the University of Calcutta, and I joined his School of Oriental Studies in London as a scholar sent by the Government of India from the University of Calcutta. This made Sir E. Denison Ross feel a personal interest in me, as if I was one of his old students from Calcutta; and in the School of Oriental Studies in London, although the discipline in which I ^{inscribed my name} ~~worked~~ was Sanskrit and Indo-Aryan and Indo-European Linguistics, I used to attend Ross's classes in Middle Persian. I also benefited by some of his works on the Old Turki inscriptions at Orkhon in Mongolia - and this was a point of contact which I could develop with Central Asian and Mongolian studies. Dr. L. W. Barnett, a very ~~well~~ distinguished Indologist, who was ^{Keeper} of Oriental Manuscripts in the British Museum Library, was my

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officially-appointed guide during my two years' stay and study in London when I was preparing my thesis for my London Doctorate. Sir George Abraham Grierson, who was at that time just completing the closing volumes of his monumental work 'The Linguistic Survey of India', also very kindly took me under his wing, and I had the great good fortune of spending my two years' stay in London as virtually like a student of Grierson; and Grierson was one of the examiners of my Doctorate thesis. But I developed an interest in a good many humanistic subjects, particularly relating to languages, literature, art and archaeology and antiquities.

It was while in the School that I met Yuri Roerich. I was at that time just 30 years of age, coming as a senior student (or as a junior lecturer) from India, and Yuri was a boy in his later teens, and he was studying Sanskrit, I think it was under Dr. Barnett, and I was working in Tibetan and possibly also Mongolian. I got interested in him as he was Russian. It was in 1919, and the great October Revolution had just taken place in Russia. The whole world was filled with news about Russia and the great things which were happening there. Yuri was also interested in me because I was a young scholar from India, who was studying Sanskrit and was also eager to know more about the different countries of Asia and their ancient history and culture. So with these common interests we developed a great friendship, and then from Yuri I heard about his father.

He gave me a number of articles in English, particularly some re-prints with illustrations of his pictures of articles which appeared in ^(an) English Art Journal like 'The Studio'. There I found that his father had a peculiar style of his own, parti-

cularly in his landscapes. One picture which I saw, I remember, impressed me to a great extent - it was that of a Greek Orthodox Christian Monk, who was in his black robes seated on the top of a hill adjoining a river in North Russia. It was a sun-lit scene on the river and there were ships passing up and down, and we had the picture of this holy man, out of a love for all mankind, was blessing the voyagers in the ships and other river-craft, which were passing along the river. Yuri also told me that his father had a great collection of pre-historic artifacts and objects of art, as well as archaeological relics. But this along with his pictures and other valuable properties he had to leave behind when he came away from his motherland to the countries of Western Europe and to America. The reason why he left Russia after the Great October Revolution I could not clearly understand at that time. But it was because of his ideological differences with some of the Bolsheviks and other leaders of the Russian people. He got settled in England for some time, and then he passed on to America. Although he had distinguished himself as a great artist in his own country, his artistic genius was recognised everywhere, particularly in his vivid use of colours in his landscapes. There was a particular quality in the sky, the sea and the forest which he painted, and I read, when in Russia, they used to speak of "Roerich's ~~sky~~ skies" (just as we are accustomed to hear about "Corot's landscapes" in France). I did not have occasion to see any of Roerich's original pictures. The colour re-prints that I saw certainly were very striking. As I am always interested to know about the names and origins of families, to my query Yuri told me

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that his family was descended from Scandinavian Vikings in the 16th or 17th centuries, and the name was originally Scandinavian "Hroerikr" (or "Rurik"). His own ^{personal} name "George" was of course from the Greek "Georgios," which means "a tiller of the soil", "a farmer", and this name was modified in Russian to "Yuri".

Yuri became a great friend of mine and he was also curious in a vague way about India. He wanted me particularly to come to his ^{home in London} ~~house~~ to meet his father, who was also interested in India as well as in Buddhism. He took me one day to their residence in London, where I found his parents. His father was a very kindly man, with the ways of a born aristocrat; and his mother was also a noble lady to her finger-tips. The artist Roerich spoke excellent English, but as far as I remember Yuri's mother was not so very much at home in English language. But her kindness and courtesy and her noble manners made ample amends for her inability to speak fluently a language I understood.

I think I visited the Roerich House four or five times. To enable Yuri's father to form an idea of the music of the Sanskrit language, I had to read or rather chant some Sanskrit passages, and particularly I gave him 'the Lord's Prayer' in Sanskrit which I also knew in Old Church Slav (which was the language used in the Liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia). We used to have quite interesting talks about various things, and I had the pleasure of meeting remarkable Russian people, who were friends and relations of the Roerich family. I remember particularly a beautiful young Russian lady of an aristocratic family who used to come with her husband. They

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were both Russians, but the lady struck me as being rather out of the way in professing Roman Catholic Christianity. She seemed to have the greatest amount of faith in this form of the Christian religion which she ^(had) adopted, and she spoke in most glowing terms about the humanistic ^(side) of Christianity.

While I was in London in 1919, Poet Rabindranath Tagore from India came to pay one of his visits to London en route to America. He stayed for only a short while during his first visit, and then later on about the middle of 1919, as far as I remember, he came back from America and made a longer stay. As I had the great good fortune of having come in contact with Rabindranath in India from 1911 onwards, and as I knew him a little more closely before I came to Europe in 1918, as a senior student from India, I naturally went to visit him at his hotel and was very kindly received by him and also by members of his family who were with him — his daughter-in-law, Pratima Devi and his son Rathindranath Tagore. Rabindranath allowed me the privilege of going to see him almost every other day, and I was benefited immensely by speaking to him and hearing from him about all sorts of things. Besides, lots of literary and other celebrities of England at that time would make it a point to come and see the Noble Laureate from India at his residence. I was also benefited by the little conversations that would ensue. It was a great education by itself, as it can be easily understood — quite a source of elevation of the intellect and the spirit.

Sometimes my hostel-mates, mostly students from the

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different countries of Europe, with an occasional British student, would request me to take them to meet the great Indian Poet. With the Poet's permission I would do it, and we used to have very interesting discussions with these students and Rabindranath. They had the greatest amount of regard for the poet, and they would ask ^{him} questions. The poet would be talking to them freely, and all my friends were very much impressed by the poet's kindness and his simplicity. On one occasion the poet suggested to some of my friends that it would be better if the poet's authentic voice could reach his "Readers" - and these readers would benefit much more if they became direct "hearers". Of course, they must have a common language, whether the poet's own or English, to follow him properly ; and the poet said that such a direct appeal to the ear with the poet's voice would be of greater use than reading his message from the printed page, forming a contact through the eye with something which did not represent a part of the poet's own being but was a reflex of his speech. The future library, the poet suggested, should be, if one were to follow this idea - not of printed books but of discs or records of voice. The "hearer", not the "reader", will then come and put the disc on the machine and turn it on, and then listen to the voice of the poet or the writer. But one of the students who visited him said that if there were 20 people in a "reading room" (or a "hearing" room) then there would be - pandemonium - with so many records going ^(on) on top speed. But the poet said that science in future will see that this kind of inconvenience does not occur, and there can be a provision of

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little sound-proof cells or cubicles, where individual listeners would confine themselves and do their hearing undisturbed and not disturbing anyone. In this way the poet would regale them with some of his suggestions, half in a spirit of joke and half in seriousness, and all my friends appreciated very much this kind of light-hearted conversation from the poet, ~~and~~ ^{deeper} there were also serious discussions when somebody posited a question. I had quite a number of such experiences with these fellow-students from different countries of Europe whom I took to Rabindranath.

After Rabindranath had come back from America, Professor Roerich asked me, if I could do it, to arrange for a visit to Rabindranath's place when he wanted to come to see him and pay his personal regards. He also very kindly gave me some English literature on his own art to hand over to the poet. This I did most gladly, and the poet was interested — he had already come to know about Roerich. A visit was arranged, and I had the privilege of introducing one great man to another. I have the date down somewhere in my diaries, but that does not matter. Prof. Roerich was accompanied by his two sons. His younger son, Svyatoslav was about ⁴12 or 15 at the time. When I had first met him at the Roerich house, I ^{had} asked him if he knew what his name in Russian meant, and whether he knew that it had an exact Sanskrit equivalent. "Svyato-Slav" meant "he of wide or bright glory," ⁱⁿ Sanskrit, as a sister language of Russian, the equivalent words would be "Sveta-Śravas". I had explained the whole connexion through the primitive Indo-European, and that had made Svyatoslav very pleased, to find ^{that} such a close agree-

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ment his name had with its Sanskrit equivalent.

After exchange of greetings, the poet and the artist had some ^{cer?} gen^l talk, and it was Yuri who acted mainly as the -- interpreter whenever his father wanted him to make a point clearer to the poet. Professor Roerich had taken with him a small painting, his own handiwork, as a present to the poet. It was, as far as I remember, something in the style of an old Russian religious Icon, and the dominating colour was read with gold. Then Professor Roerich said to the poet; "Now I want to read to you two of your little poems in my own language which have impressed us very much". The poems that he read, as far as I could understand from a few words of Russian that I knew, were ^{the following} -- The first one was about a young girl who threw from her balcony her jewel necklace in front of the young prince going in his chariot along the road in front of her house. The prince did not have any chance to look at her or at her gift, ^{and} ~~off~~ the necklace was crushed under the wheels of the chariot. The girl's mother looked at her in surprise and annoyance, but the girl's reply was "Mother, how could I refrain from throwing it as a gift for the prince when he passed in front of our house, ~~for~~ even though he did not have any chance to see it?" After he had read this well-known poem in its Russian version, he smiled and asked the poet -- "Can you now recognise your own creation in the version in my own language?" The poet also smiled, and I showed myself off by quoting the lines opening of the original Bengali poem which I had remembered. The other poem was a similar poem in Rabindranath's earlier mystic-romantic vein. This I had remembered immediately at the time, as in the case of the first one -- but now my memory fails me.

After this preliminary visit, when Yuri and Svyatoslav were quietly listening, the Roerichs left.

Subsequently, the poet himself told us that ^{Professor} Roerich came to his hotel and invited him and his son and daughter-in-law to dinner at their place. There they had the occasion to meet -- Mrs. Roerich for the first time. Rabindranath was very much impressed by Mrs. Roerich and also the whole family. I think he had given one or two of his own books to Professor Roerich as ^a memento. Then Rabindranath went back to America. After that they had correspondence with each other, and I do not know the details of their further contacts abroad. But I know when Professor Roerich came to

India, he met the poet in his residence at Jorasanko in Calcutta.

^{Professor} Roerich ~~Rabindranath~~ had his own scheme for the establishment of a Central Academy of Research in the Himalayas, and it is likely that he consulted the poet. It is well known Rabindranath himself had established his International University of Visva-Bharati ^{Santiniketan} ~~in at~~ ^{near} Calcutta, after his return from Europe and America in 1921.

In Calcutta I met also Yuri Roerich, and after sometime Yuri settled down with his younger brother in Naggar in Kulu, running the Urushvati Research Centre, under the inspiration and guidance of Professor Nicholas Roerich. In the meanwhile, I think that the two brothers also accompanied their father in his Central Asian and particularly Mongolian expeditions. By this time ^{Professor} Roerich's pictures, specially of Himalayan scenes, which were illustrative of Mahayana Buddhistic and Hindu Brahmanical mystic lore, were making him famous. Collections of his pictures were established in several towns in the United States, particularly in New York

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and also in London and some Indian towns like Allahabad, Banaras and Calcutta. Some pictures depicting Tibetan Buddhist legends were unique in their character. Professor Roerich did not formally bring out in a special volume his own mystic and religious ideas. But scattered through his writings were many striking passages where his philosophy of life found an expression. There is no doubt that Professor Nicholas Roerich, the artist and scholar, and the philosopher and the sage, was a mystic visionary of the Ultimate Truth. His sons fully appreciated the greatness of their father. The elder son was a scholar and the younger an artist, and from the brush of the artist Svyatoslav we have a most unique painting of Professor Roerich, dressed in a formal Central Asian robe of black silk, which was the proper garb of a sage and a thinker and philosopher in Central Asia and the Far East. In this picture, Professor Roerich looks like a combination of an Indian Rishi, a Taoist Saint and a Confucian Sage, as well as a Mongol or Tibetan Lama, whose face showed that he had some kind of inner perception.

I wish I had the good fortune of knowing Professor Roerich more intimately. This has been among the greatest disappointments in my life - not to have ^{met or} come in close touch with a personality like Vivekananda Swami, Albert Schweitzer, Nicholas Roerich and a few other great souls whose life partly coincided with mine. I was denied this great good fortune by destiny, but the memory of my brief contact with him still remains in my mind and acts as a fragrance and a glow in my inner spirit when I have occasion to meditate on the benefit I received from this ^{kind of} touch of the great.

Calcutta
The 20th September 1974.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji
(Suniti Kumar Chatterji)



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"SUDHARMĀ"
16 HINDUSTHAN PARK
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PHONE : 46-1121

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Professor Nicholas Roerich, who was born on the 9th of October 1874 in St. Petersburg in Russia and passed away on the 13th December 1947 in Naggar, Kulu (Himalayas), India, had quite an eventful career, who has left his mark in contemporary life and culture as an artist and explorer, a scientist, a poet, an author and an educator, and was a man of high culture who was quite unique in his personality as a great and a good man. He became very well known outside his own mother country Russia, in Great Britain, ^{in the} U.S.A., ⁱⁿ Belgium, ⁱⁿ France and ⁱⁿ India, besides having done a good bit of travelling and exploration in various lands of Central Asia, particularly Mongolia. Prof. Roerich came to know very closely such eminent persons of the present day as Albert Einstein, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Abanindranath Tagore and others. Apart from his greatness as an artist and poet, scientist and explorer, he was ^{great as} also an archaeologist, particularly of pre-historic antiquities, and he was also a great collector of objects of ^{prehistoric and} ancient art. His writings indicate that he was also a philosopher and a mystic as well as something ^{even} of a prophet. In fact Nicholas Roerich has been quite a unique personality during his life time. He, as said before, had an eventful life, but he did not have anything sensational. ^{about him} His life was that of a quiet artist and thinker - a man who tried to find out the secret of man's past history in both the departments of material and spiritual

- 2 -

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Persons who have had the opportunity of coming into closer touch with him and who have also the competence to appreciate his greatness and to write about it for the benefit of humanity have already given their appreciation of the many facets of Nicholas Roerich's personality as an artist and as a thinker. I myself had the privilege of knowing him ^{though} only to a very slight extent, during my student days in London in 1918-21, when ^{Professor} Roerich and his family were staying in London. Later on when he came to India and planned to establish his Himalayan Research Institute of Urushvati at Naggar in Kulu district in Western Himalayas (present-day Himachal Pradesh) I had occasion also to meet him in Calcutta once or twice. But through the kindness of the Roerich Society in New York I was enabled to retain my contact with Prof. Roerich's activities in America, and I was very much impressed by all that he was doing for the development of art and letters and international study of art and also ^{for} the stabilisation of international peace through art and science, and I also came to know how he was leading some expeditions in Central Asia with American co-operation.

It will be seen that although I appreciated Roerich's greatness and admired him generally from a distance, the only occasions for intimate contact which enabled me to see the man

in his intimate family environment was in London, and I can only present a few reminiscences of Nicholas Roerich ^{as I saw him} over more than half a century ago.

I did not have any idea of this great man before I first met his son Yuri or George Roerich at the School of Oriental Studies in London. I was studying in London as Government of India research scholar in Indo-Aryan linguistics and my place of work was the School of African and Oriental Studies. This Institution was then under a very great scholar of Islamic studies, who was an erudite ^{savant} scholar as well as a ~~xx~~ most affable man Sir E. Denison Ross. Ross was the ^{Director} ~~Provost~~ of the School, and he was for many years an active and a very popular Principal of the Government of India Centre of Islamic Studies in India, the Calcutta Madrasa. As Principal of this Institution Ross was connected with the University of Calcutta, and I joined his School of Oriental Studies in London as a scholar sent by the Government of India from the University of Calcutta. This made Sir E. Denison Ross feel a personal interest in me, as if I was one of his old students from Calcutta; and in the School of Oriental Studies in London although the discipline in which I ^{inscribed my name} ~~worked~~ was Sanskrit and Indo-Aryan and Indo-European Linguistics I used to attend Ross's classes in Middle Persian. I also benefited by some of his works on the Old Turki inscriptions at Orkhon in Mongolia - and this was a point of contact which I could develop with Central Asian and Mongolian studies. Dr. L. W. Barnett, a very well distinguished Indologist, who was ^Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts in the British Museum Library, was my

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officially-appointed guide during my two years stay and study in London when I was preparing my thesis for my London Doctorate. Sir George Abraham Grierson, who was at that time just completing ^{the} ~~his~~ closing volumes of his monumental work 'The Linguistic Survey of India', also very kindly took me under his wing, and I had the great good fortune of spending my two years stay in London as virtually like a student of Grierson; and Grierson was one of the examiners of my Doctorate thesis. But I developed an interest in a good many humanistic subjects, particularly relating to languages, literature, art and archaeology and antiquities.

It was while in the School that I met Yuri Roerich. I was at that time just 30 years of age, coming as a senior student (or as a junior lecturer) from India, and Yuri was a boy in his later teens, and he was studying Sanskrit. I think it was under Dr. Barnett, and I was working in Tibetan and possibly also Mongolian. I got interested in him as he was Russian. It was in 1919, and the great October Revolution had just taken place in Russia. The whole world was filled with news about Russia and the great things which were happening there. Yuri was also interested in me because I was a young scholar from India, who was studying Sanskrit and was also eager to know more about the different countries of Asia and their ancient history and culture. So with these common interests we developed a great friendship, and then from Yuri I heard about his father.

He gave me a number of articles in English, particularly some re-prints with illustrations of his pictures of articles which appeared in ^{an} ~~an~~ English Art Journal like 'The Studio'. There I found that his father had a peculiar style of his own, parti-

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cularly in his landscapes. One picture which I saw, I remember, impressed me to a great extent - it was that of a Greek orthodox Christian Monk, who was in his black robes seated on the top of a hill adjoining a river in North Russia. It was a sun-lit scene on the river and there were ships passing up and down, and we had the picture of this holy man, out of a love for all mankind, was blessing the ^avoygers in the ships and other river-crafts which were passing along the river. Yuri also told me that his father had a great collection of pre-historic artifacts and objects of art, as well as archaeological relics. But this along with his pictures and other valuable properties he had to leave behind when he came away from his motherland to the countries of Western Europe and to America. The reason why he left Russia after the Great October Revolution I could not clearly understand at that time. But it was because of his ideological differences with some of the Bolsheviki and other leaders of the Russian people. He got settled in England for some time, and then he passed on to America. Although he had distinguished himself as a great artist in his own country, his artistic genius was recognised everywhere, particularly in his vivid use of colours in his landscapes. There was a particular quality in the sky, the sea and the forest which he painted, and I read, when in Russia, they used to speak of "Roerich's ~~skys~~ ^{skies}", (just as we are accustomed to hear about "Corot's landscapes" in France). I did not have occasion to see any of Roerich's original pictures. The colour re-prints that I saw certainly were very striking. As I am always interested to know about the names and origins of families, to my query Yuri told me

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that his family was descended from Scandinavian Vikings in the 16th or 17th centuries, and the name was originally Scandinavian "Hroerikr" (or "Rurik"). His own ^{her name} name "George" was of course from the Greek "Georgios", which means "a tiller of the soil", "a farmer", and this name was modified in Russian to "Yuri".

Yuri became a great friend of mine and he was also curious in a vague way about India. He wanted me particularly to come to his ^{home in London} house to meet his father, who was also interested in India as well as in Buddhism. He took me one day to their residence in London, where I found his parents. His father was a very kindly man, with the ways of a born aristocrat, and his mother was also a noble lady to her finger tips. The artist Roerich spoke excellent English, but as far as I remember Yuri's mother was not so very much at home in English language. But her kindness and courtesy and her noble manners made ample amends for her inability to speak fluently a language I understood.

I think I visited the Roerich House four or five times. To enable Yuri's father to form an idea of the music of ^{the} Sanskrit language, I had to read or rather chant some Sanskrit passages, and particularly I gave him the 'Lord's Prayer' in Sanskrit which I also knew in Old Church Slav; (which was the language used in the Liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia). We used to have quite interesting talks about various things, and I had the pleasure of meeting remarkable Russian people, who were friends and relations of the Roerich family. I remember particularly a beautiful young Russian lady of an aristocratic family who used to come with her husband. They

were both Russians, but the lady struck me as being rather out of the way in professing Roman Catholic Christianity. She seemed to have the greatest amount of faith in this form of the Christian religion which she ^{had} adopted, and she spoke in most glowing terms about the humanistic ^{side} of Christianity.

While I was in London in 1919, Poet Rabindranath Tagore from India came to pay one of his visits to London en route to America. He stayed for only a short while during his first visit, and then later on about the middle of 1919, as far as I remember, he came back from America and made a longer stay. As I had the great good fortune of having come in contact with Rabindranath in India from 1911 onwards, and as I knew him a little more closely before I came to Europe in 1918, as a senior student from India, I naturally went to visit him at his hotel and was very kindly received by him and also by members of his family who were with him - his daughter-in-law, Pratima Devi and his son Rathindranath Tagore. Rabindranath allowed me the privilege of going to see him almost every other day, and I was benefited immensely by speaking to him and hearing from him about all sorts of things. Besides, lots of literary and other celebrities of England at that time would make it a point to come and see the Noble Laureate from India at his residence. I was also benefited by the little conversations that would ensue. It was a great education by itself, as it can be easily understood - quite a source of elevation of the intellect and the spirit.

Sometimes my hostel-mates, mostly students from the

different countries of Europe, with an occasional British student, would request me to take them to meet the great Indian Poet. With the Poet's permission I would do it, and we used to have very interesting discussions with these students and Rabindranath. They had the greatest amount of regard for the poet, and they would ask ^{him} questions. The poet would be talking to them freely, and all my friends were very much impressed by the poet's kindness and his simplicity. On one occasion the poet suggested to some of my friends that it would be better if the poet's authentic voice could reach his "Readers" - and these readers would benefit much more if they became direct "hearers". Of course, they must have a common language, whether the poet's own or English, to follow him properly; and the poet said that such a direct appeal to the ear with the poet's voice would be of greater use than reading his message from the printed page, forming a contact through the eye with something which did not represent a part of the poet's own being but was a reflex of his speech. The future library, the poet suggested, should be, if one were to follow this idea - not of printed books but of discs or records of voice. The "hearer", not the "reader", will then come and put the disc on the machine and turn it on, and then listen to the voice of the poet or the writer. But one of the students who visited him said that if there were 20 people in a "reading room" (or a "hearing" room) then there would be - pandemonium - with so many records going ^{on} on top speed. But the poet said that science in future will see that this kind of inconvenience does not occur, and there can be a provision of

little sound-proof cells or cubicles, where individual listeners would confine themselves and do their hearing undisturbed and not disturbing anyone. In this way the poet would regale them with some of his suggestions, half in a spirit of joke and half in seriousness, and all my friends appreciated very much this kind of light-hearted conversation from the poet, and there were also serious discussions when somebody posited a ^{deeper} question. I had quite a number of such experiences with these fellow-students from different countries of Europe whom I took to Rabindranath.

After Rabindranath had come back from America, Professor Roerich asked me, if I could do it, to arrange for a visit to Rabindranath's place when he wanted to come to see him and pay his personal regards. He also very kindly gave me some English literature on his own art to hand over to the poet. This I did most gladly, and the poet was interested - he had already come to know about Roerich. A visit was arranged, and I had the privilege of introducing one great man to another. I have the date down somewhere in my diaries, but that does not matter. Prof. Roerich was accompanied by his two sons. His younger son, Svyatoslav was about ¹⁴14 or 15 at the time. When I had first met him at the Roerich house, I ^{had} asked him if he knew what his name in Russian meant and whether he knew that it had an exact Sanskrit equivalent. "Svayato-Slav" meant "he of wide or bright glory"; ⁱⁿ Sanskrit, as a sister language of Russian, the equivalent words would be "Sveta-Sravas". I had explained the whole connexion through the primitive Indo-European, and that had made Svyatoslav very pleased, to find ^{that} such a close agree-

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ment his name had with its Sanskrit equivalent.

After exchange of greetings the poet and the artist had some ^{general} talk, and it was Yuri who acted mainly as the -- interpreter whenever his father wanted him to make a point clearer to the poet. Professor Roerich had taken with him a small painting, his own handiwork, as a present to the poet. It was, as far as I remember, something in the style of an old Russian religious icon, and the dominating colour was red with gold. Then Professor Roerich said to the poet "Now I want to read to you two of your little poems in my own language which have impressed us very much". The poems that he read, as far as I could understand from a few words of Russian that I knew, ^{the following} were /- The first one was about a young girl who threw from her balcony her jewel necklace in front of the young prince going in his chariot along the road in front of her house. The prince did not have any chance to look at her or at her gift, ^{and} ~~as~~ the necklace was crushed under the wheels of the chariot. The girl's mother looked at her in surprise and annoyance, but the girl's reply was "Mother, how could I refrain from throwing it as a gift for the prince when he passed in front of our house, ~~if~~ even though he did not have any chance to see it ?" After he had read the well-known poem in its Russian version, he smiled and asked the poet - "Can you now recognise your own creation in the version in my own language?" The poet also smiled, and I showed myself off by quoting the opening lines of the original Bengali poem which I had remembered. The other poem was a similar poem in Rabindranath's earlier mystic-romantic vein. This I had remembered immediately at the time, as in the case of the first one - but now my memory fails me.

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After this preliminary visit when Yuri and Svyatoslav were quietly listening, the Roerichs left.

Subsequently, the poet himself told us that ^{Professor} Roerich came to his hotel and invited him and his son and daughter-in-law to dinner at their place. There they had the occasion to meet -- Mrs. Roerich for the first time. Rabindranath was very much impressed by Mrs. Roerich and also the whole family. I think he had given one or two of his own books to Professor Roerich as ^a memento. Then Rabindranath went back to America. After that they had correspondence with each other and I do not know the details of their further contacts abroad. But I know when Professor Roerich came to India, he met the poet in his residence at Jorasanko in Calcutta. ^{Professor} Roerich ~~Rabindranath~~ had his own scheme for the establishment of a Central Academy of Research in the Himalayas, and it is likely that he consulted the poet. It is well known Rabindranath himself had established his International University of Visva-Bharati ^{Santiniketan} ~~in~~ at ^{near} Calcutta, after his return from Europe and America in 1921.

In Calcutta I met also Yuri Roerich, and after sometime Yuri settled down with his younger brother in Naggar in Kulu, running the Urushvati Research Centre, under the inspiration and guidance of Professor Nicholas Roerich. In the meanwhile I think that the two brothers also accompanied their father in his Central Asian and particularly Mongolian expeditions. By this time ^{Professor} Roerich's pictures, specially of Himalayan scenes, which were illustrative of Mahayana Buddhistic and Hindu Brahmanical mystic lore, were making him famous. Collections of his pictures were established in several towns in the United States, particularly in New York

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and also in London and some Indian towns like Allahabad, Banaras and Calcutta. Some pictures depicting Tibetan Buddhist legends were unique in their character. Professor Roerich did not formally bring out in a special volume his own mystic and religious ideas. But scattered through his writings were many striking passages where his philosophy of life found an expression. There is no doubt that Professor Nicholas Roerich, the artist and scholar, and the philosopher and the sage, was a mystic visionary of the Ultimate Truth. His sons fully appreciated the greatness of their father. The elder son was a scholar and the younger an artist, and from the brush of the artist Svyatoslav we have a most unique painting of Professor Roerich, dressed in a formal Central Asian robe of black silk, which was the proper garb of a sage and a thinker and philosopher in Central Asia and the Far East. In this picture Professor Roerich looks like a combination of an Indian Rishi, a Taoist Saint and a Confucian Sage, as well as a Mongol or Tibetan Lama, whose face showed that he had some kind of inner perception.

I wish I had the good fortune of knowing Professor Roerich more intimately. This has been among the greatest disappointments in my life - not to have ^{met or} come in close touch with a personality like Vivekananda Swami, Albert Schweitzer, Nicholas Roerich and a few other great souls whose life partly coincided with mine. I was denied this great good fortune by destiny, but the memory of my brief contact with him still remains in my mind and acts as a fragrance and a glow in my inner spirit when I have occasion to meditate on the benefit I received from this ^{kind of} touch of the great.

Calcutta
The 20th September 1974.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji
(Suniti Kumar Chatterji)

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DR. SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI
"SUDHARMA"
16 HINDUSTAN PARK
CALCUTTA - 29.

3rd October 1974.

DR. SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI
"SUDHARMA"
16 HINDUSTAN PARK
CALCUTTA 29

MOST GRATEFUL YOUR INSPIRING REMINISCENCES OF
NICHOLAS ROERICH WITHOUT WHICH THE CENTENARY
WOULD HAVE LOST ITS LUSTRE STOP SHALL MAKE COPIES
WITH YOUR PERMISSION FOR RUSSIA ENGLAND AND AMERICA
AND OTHER COUNTRIES STOP WITH MY PRANAMS AND OUR
LOVE AND GRATITUDE

DEVIKA RANI

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