

Mme. DEVIKA RANI ROERICH

&

Dr. SVETOSLAV ROERICH





### DEVIKA RANI: A LIFE SKETCH

Devika Rani Roerich is not only one of the most colourful personalities of India, but the darling of film fans of more than two generations. She is a gifted artiste, well versed in all the techniques of film making. Indeed, she is verily a symbol of "Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram" (Truth, goodness and beauty).

Daughter of Col. M.N. Choudheri, I.M.S., and Mrs. Leela Choudheri. she was born in Waltair. Her father had a distinguished medical career and was the first Indian Surgeon General of Madras.

She was educated in England and while at School, she received a scholarship from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and the Royal Academy of Music in London to study acting and music.

She took up the study of applied arts in London, specialising in textile designing and decor, and also studied architecture. At an early age, she was already earning her living as a textile designer at a leading art studio in London.

While in London in 1928, she met the well-known Indian producer Himansu Rai who produced famous Indian films like "The Light of Asia", "Shiraz" and "A Throw of Dice" for Indian and international markets.

Mr. Rai persuaded Devika Rani to join his production unit, to further the cause of Indian films. She signed a contract in London with Mr. Bruce Wolfe who was then associated with Himansu Rai. She later returned to India with Himansu Rai and his English and German experts to work on "A Throw of Dice" which was scheduled for production for England, Germany and the Continent. She worked on the costumes and sets of this production under the guidance of the art director Pramod Roy and studied the art of production.

In 1929, she married Himansu Rai and returned with him to Germany. Mr. Rai was the only Indian producer with the famous German film concern U.F.A. in Berlin. At the U.F.A. Studios, Devika Rani learnt costume designing, make-up, decor and other different branches of film production, with special training in acting.

She apprenticed in the Eric Pommer production Unit at U.F.A., where she studied the art and techniques of acting under the guidance of Germany's great director Pabst, and other famous directors.



She was at U.F.A. at the time of the epoch-making change over from silent to the sound films, and with Himansu Rai had the rare opportunity of seeing and studying the various changes and experiments in the new talking pictures.

At the time, Devika Rani also acted with Himansu Rai in a play for U.F.A. Which took them to Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries, where they were received with the highest honours.

She was also a student in the production unit of the famous State producer Max Heinhardt in Germany.

From Germany, Devika Rani and Himansu Rai returned to India, to produce their first international talking picture "KARMA" in which Devika Rani, Himansu Rai, Princess Suda Rani of Burdwan and others acted. "KARMA" was produced both in English and Hindusthani and was completed at the Stall Studios in London. It was the first Indian talking picture in English and Hindusthani to be released in England and on the Continent as well as India.

"KARMA" was received with the highest approbation by the public of London. The premier was inaugurated by Lord Irwin and attended by the highest officials and England's most distinguished artiste. The same success was accorded to "KARMA" throughout Great Britain and wherever it was released.

The release of "KARMA" in India created a sensation, it was the beginning of a new era in Indian motion picture production.

It was in "KARMA" that Devika Rani established herself as a "star" of first magnitude.

During the screening of "KARMA", Devika Rani was honoured by an invitation of the B.B.C. at London to act in the first television broadcast in Britain which was relayed throughout the country. She was also chosen to inaugurate the first B.B.C. broadcast on the short wave length to India.

The Bombay Talkies Ltd., was founded by Himansu Rai and Devika Rani in 1934 in Malad, Bombay. It was a public limited company formed by eminent businessmen of Bombay including F.E. Dinshaw, Sir Firoze Sethna and others. The advent of the Bombay Talkies gave an impetus to Indian films.

It was Himansu Rai's idea to attract to films the best elements of society as he believed that education and a cultured background were essential to achieve high standards in art.

The Bombay Talkies set a new standard in motion picture production in India on most up-to-date lines with experts from England, Germany, France who also trained young Indian men and women in the art and techniques of films production. It was responsible for a vast number of famous producers, directors, stars, musicians, writers, poets and technicians who even today rank among the best in the country.

Devika Rani was the star of the Bombay Talkies Ltd. Her outstanding portrayals, her style of acting and new approach created a distinct form and tradition. She acted in numerous films, many of which have become classics of the Indian screen. Among her most famous pictures were "Jawani-Ki-Hawa", "Jeevan Nayya", "Achoot Kanya", "Savitri", "Jeevan Prabhat". "Durga", "Vachan", "Niirmala" and "Izzat".

She was acclaimed as India's greatest film actress, and was popularly known as the "First Lady of the Indian screen".



During this period, Devika Rani was the recipient of numerous honours, awards, medals and prizes from the film industry, the Press and the public.

After the death of the great founder of the Bombay Talkies Mr. Himansu Rai in 1940, Devika Rani was made Controller of Production of the Bombay Talkies. She was a partner and also a producer of the concern. She was asked to assume the responsibility of management of the Bombay Talkies, including the business.

As producer and controller of production of the company, Devika Rani continued the high standard of its productions with such outstanding successes as "Punarmilan", "Kangan", "Bandhan", "Basant", "Kismet", "Hamari Baat", etc.,

The shares of the company rose to their highest level during this period. Among some of the outstanding artistes trained and presented for the first time on the screen during the period are such famous names as Leela Chitnis, Dilip Kumar, Madhubala, Mumtaz, Shanti, etc., as well as many outstanding technicians, producers, directors, story and screen writers and artistes who are among the most successful film personalities of today.

In 1945 at the height of her film career, Devika Rani decided to retire from the Bombay Talkies Ltd.

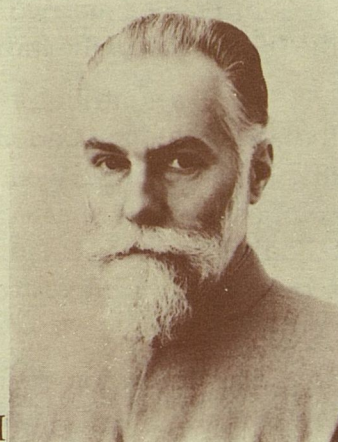
She married Dr. Svetoslav Roerich, the famous Russian artist and in their beautiful Himalayan home, Devika Rani had the opportunity to study all the subjects she was unable to give time to during her busy and active career.

Besides her many other interests, she was a member of the central Government Audio Visual Education Board. She was also nominated to the National Academy of Dance, Drama, Music and Films, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi, as a nominee of the central Government and was a member of the Executive Board of the National Academy, Member of the Lalit Kala Akademi and the National Handicrafts Board and Member of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

On Republic Day, January 26, 1958, the President of India conferred the decoration of "PADMA SHRI" on Devika Rani for her valuable contribution to Indian motion picture.

On November 21, 1970, the Government of India conferred on Devika Rani the first Dadasaheb Phalke Award for her outstanding service to the film industry. Equally invaluable is the prestigious Soviet Land Nehru award conferred on her in 1989.





**Dr. SVETOSLAV ROERICH**

Son of the great Master Nicholas Roerich, Svetoslav Roerich was born in 1904 in St. Petersburg, Russia. He received his early education in Russia and Sweden. In 1918 he went to England where he studied art for two years. His further studies were in United States at the Columbia University and the Graduate School of Architecture at the Harvard University. As a student he travelled widely in Europe and America acquainting himself with art trends.

In 1923, he visited the east for the first time.

His first one-man exhibition in 1923 in the United States was a big success, it was followed by several others.

In 1926, the twentyone year old artist was awarded the Medal of the Sesquicentennial Exposition at Philadelphia for an oriental composition. His portrait studies of his great father Nicholas Roerich exhibited at Venice in 1930 and at New York in 1932 won the highest appreciation. One of the most eminent portrait painters of the world, Svetoslav Roerich's portraits of his father have won international renown and are in some of the leading museums all over the world.

At the age of 32, in June 1936, Svetoslav Roerich was received into the Circle of the Immortals by the acquisition of one of his remarkable portraits of his venerable father by the Luxembourg Museum in Paris.

An artist who has grown up in an international milieu, his paintings adorn the principal art galleries and leading private collections all over the world, and have been reproduced in the foremost magazines, journals, books, postcards, etc.

He is actively associated with several important cultural organisations. He was not only the principal student of his father, but was his constant collaborator in his numerous Cultural organisations of which he was Director and Vice - President. He actively participated in the Pact for the Protection of Cultural and Scientific Treasures initiated by his Father and was Director of the International Art Centre in New York.

He first exhibited his paintings in India in 1936-1937, at Lucknow, followed by a large number of exhibitions throughout India in the succeeding years. Distinguished art critics and connoisseurs highly appreciated his large canvases depicting the people and landscapes of India.

While living in the Himalayas he made a special study of the Tibetan and local pharmacopoeia and systems of medicine.



In 1945 he married Shrimati Devika Rani, grand-niece of Rabindranath Tagore and the "First Lady of the Indian Screen".

He is a contributor of learned articles on art and culture to some of the well-known Indian and foreign periodicals. A master artist who is deeply interested in the portrayal of life. He is distinguished as a painter of magnificent landscape and highly imaginative compositions. A master of technique, his portraits of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Dr. James H. Cousins, Mme. Devika Rani Roerich, have won international repute. Deeply interested in philosophy and religion, his paintings provide unlimited spiritual joy.

The exhibition of his paintings at New Delhi in 1960 was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was invited by the Prime Minister of U.S.S.R. to hold an exhibition in Moscow and Leningrad in 1961. These exhibitions in Delhi and Moscow were great events in the art world, drawing record crowds both in New Delhi and the Soviet Union. Due to public demand, a folder of 20 colour reproductions of his paintings was brought out by the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad.

Major Gagarin, the first Russian Cosmo Naut stated that the resplendent colours he saw in space were almost identical with the colours in Roerich's paintings.

Dr. Roerich is the recipient of many awards and honours and was conferred the PADMA BHUSHAN by the President of India in 1961.

In 1971, he received the Gold Medal of the Calcutta Art Society.

His exhibitions in the Soviet Union in 1974-1975 lasted almost two years and attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors wherever they were shown.

In December 1977, Svetoslav Roerich received an invitation from the Minister of Culture of Bulgaria, Her Excellency Madame Ludmila T. Zhivkova to visit Bulgaria and to hold exhibitions of Prof. Nicholas Roerich and Svetoslav Roerich's paintings throughout Bulgaria beginning in Sofia in March 1978. The exhibitions comprising some 300 paintings travelled throughout Bulgaria upto November 1978 and were exhibited in all the major cities.

In May 1978, an exhibition of selected paintings of Svetoslav Roerich was shown in Vienna at the House of Wittgenstein.

In November 1978, the exhibitions went to the Soviet Union from Bulgaria where they were exhibited throughout the major cities and Republics of the Soviet Union. Wherever they went, the exhibitions were received with the greatest acclaim by the public and art critics and attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

In the course of these exhibitions, Svetoslav Roerich received many honours including the following :

- 1) On March 31st 1978 in Sofia, Bulgaria, he was unanimously elected Honorary Fellow of the Bulgarian Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia, the first foreigner to receive the Fellowship.
- 2) On May 8, 1978, Svetoslav Roerich received the Doctorate of the University of Cyril and Methodius, the oldest university of Bulgaria at the old capital of Veliko-Tyрноvo.
- 3) The Medal of the Veliko - Tyрноvo University of Cyril and Methodius.



- 4) The Order of Cyril and Methodius, Highest Class.
- 5) The Medal of One Hundred Years of Bulgaria's Independence.
- 6) On 7th June 1978, at Moscow, U.S.S.R., Svetoslav Roerich was unanimously elected Honorary Fellow of the Academy of Fine Arts of the U.S.S.R.

The exhibitions of Svetoslav Roerich's paintings are continuing throughout the U.S.S.R. and attracting vast crowds of visitors wherever they are shown. The following cities have already exhibited the paintings :- The Russian Museum, Leningrad, Odessa, Lvov, Kiev, Moscow and Minsk. They are stated to go for exhibition to Turkistan, Central Asia, Mongolia and Siberia.

A large number of important articles by eminent writers and art critics have appeared throughout Bulgaria and the Soviet Union and a popular Monograph was brought out in Moscow in 1978. A few books including a biography of Svetoslav Roerich are under preparation and will be published shortly.

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| 1. | 1987 (Oct.16)  | Fellowship of the Central Lalit Kala Akademi at Bangalore.  |
| 2. | 1990 (Aug. 23) | Honoured by the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore.  |
| 3. | 1991 (May 16)  | Foundation laid to the Roerich Art Centre at Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath.                          |
| 4. | 1991 (Oct.23)  | Citizens honour Dr. Svetoslav Roerich and Mme. Devika Rani Roerich at Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath. |

The eminent art historian P. Belicov writes :

"The mastery of the artist, the skill to create complex harmonious compositions, the expressiveness of his drawing, the extraordinary purity of colours, the richness of his colour schemes have long ago received their deserved appreciation".

"However, it is not only the perfect mastery of technique, but the understanding of the high pan-human mission of art which characterises his paintings. Many canvases of Svetoslav Roerich such as "MAN BEHOLD" "AMONG THESE SHADES I MOVE". "WE BUILD OUR OWN PRISONS", "YOU MUST NOT SEE THESE FLAMES" and "NEARER TO YOU MOTHER EARTH" are imbued with a profound social direction, the condemnation of the dark sides of life. All this, together with the progressive public life of the artist, has placed him in the ranks of the foremost contemporary humanists".

From the Monograph on Svetoslav Roerich by the eminent Soviet art critics S. Tyulyaev : Moscow 1977.

"His talent and warm heart, which are reflected in his art have attracted to his exhibitions an endless stream of visitors. These exhibitions which reveal the creative path of Svetoslav Roerich as well as his other activities, have made priceless contribution in the consolidation of friendship and the development of cultural ties between the great people of India and of the Soviet Union".



## JUBILEE MEDAL OF 1300 YEARS OF THE BULGARIAN STATE

Svetoslav Roerich was decorated with the Jubilee Medal of 1300 years of Bulgaria by the State Council of the Bulgarian People's Republic on June 8th 1982 for his outstanding contribution in the field of Art and Culture, and for further strengthening the friendship and co-operation between India and Bulgaria.

"We are fortunate in having this beautiful exhibition of paintings of the great artist Mr. Svetoslav Roerich for nearly a month. We find in him not only technical skill and intellectual power, but also creative imagination and spiritual insight.

His portraits are not mere representations but catch the spirit of the human face divine. His landscapes are poems of colour.

I have no doubt he will enrich our art and give joy to thousands of people. We wish him long life".

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

19th February, 1960.

Excerpt from the Inaugural Speech by the Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru at Svetoslav Roerich's Exhibition, 20 January 1960, New Delhi.

"Obviously, we have here in this Exhibition something very remarkable and something not only beautiful but lasting, which will leave a powerful effect on the minds of those who see it. At any rate, that is the effect it will leave on my mind, and I feel sure, most people who see it, will feel that way".

"I declare this Exhibition open and invite you to a FEAST OF BEAUTY".

"European progressive art".....??

Excerpt from the Speech by Mr. A.I. Zamoshkin, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, at Svetoslav Roerich's Exhibition, the Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 11th May 1960.

"The Art of Svetoslav Roerich is modern and it stands at par with the best achievements of European progressive art".



