



Svetoslav Roerich **The Russian Who Came To Paint And Stayed**



Indian summer. Dr. Svetoslav Roerich with wife Devika Rani.

Very little is known about Svetoslav Roerich. Most people identify him because of his wife, Devika Rani, the First Lady of the Indian Screen. Others remember him because of his famous father Nicholas Roerich, one of the great painters of his time. A few know of his brother, George who led expeditions into terrains untouched by man. But Svetoslav too had made it in his own right. He is the recipient of the Padma Bhushan; much earlier at the age of 32, he was received into the Circle Of Immortals for his remarkable portraits of his father by the Luxembourg Museum in Paris; he was the first foreigner to be elected Honorary Fellow of the Bulgarian Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia; he's held exhibitions all over the world, and Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, brought out a special folder of 20 colour reproductions of his painting.

His eyes twinkle, a gentle smile plays on his lips, the silver goatee bobs in rhythm as he talks eloquently of his life and times.

The Days Of The Czar:

I was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1904, and received my early education in Russia and Sweden. In 1918, I went to England where I studied for two years. Then across the Atlantic to the States where I studied at Columbia University and the Graduate School of Architecture at Harvard University.

Among my childhood, one of the experiences I remember most vividly happened when I was fourteen. It was the memorial service in the underground crypt of two great Russian Saints conducted by all the Recluses and Anchorites who came out from their retreats. In that crypt, around the granite sar-

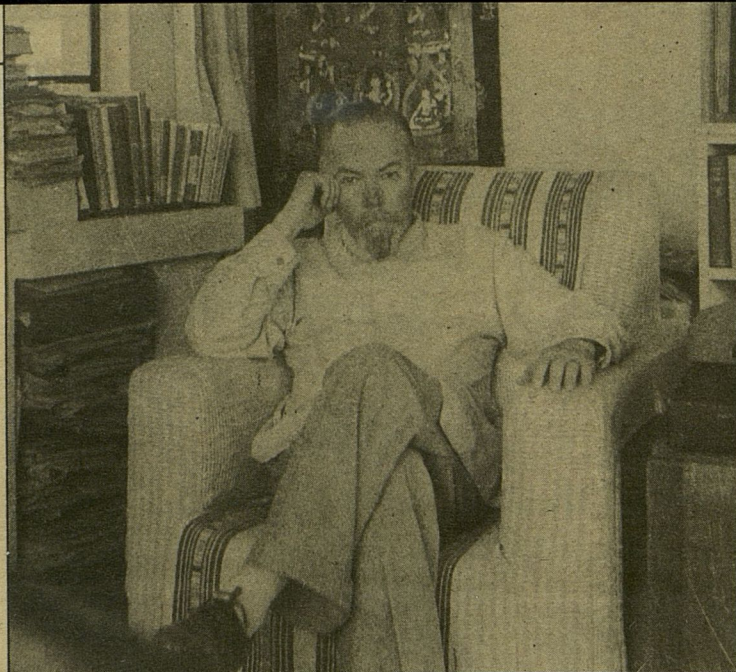
cophagi, they stood in their solemn garments, the Elders who had renounced the world, and came out to pray in a most beautiful service to mark the day of the two great saints. Their emaciated, stern and kind faces were hidden under the hoods of the Anchorites' attire, and only their grey beards could be seen while their thin fingers held long wax candles. What greater joy than to stand with men who had attained Sainthood and join them in their prayers during the Divine Service!

All In The Family:

It is rare for an artist to achieve greatness, but for a great artist to be an even greater man

is indeed something which can be found only with the greatest of difficulty. It was so with my father. A painter himself, my father had a great deal of interest in Indian culture. He was one of the leading figures in building the Buddhist Temple in Leningrad at the beginning of the century. He was also a prolific writer, besides, of course, the over 7000 paintings he had done.

His activities were really stupendous. Speaking of art, my father would say, "Art will unify humanity. Art has its many branches, yet all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all. Everyone will enjoy true art. The gates of the 'Sacred Source' must be wide open for every-



Brother love. Dr. George Roerich.

body, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love Bring art to the people — where it belongs. We should not have only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals, but even prisons decorated and beautiful. Then we shall have no more prisons.”

My mother's name was Helen. A beautiful and gracious person. I think of her as a remarkable contemporary figure, an outstanding Russian woman. Revealing unusual qualities even in childhood, she is seen, through her published letters, as a little girl secretly carrying away a heavy volume of Dore's Bible. She used to say, that though bending from its burdensome weight, and hiding it from the grown-ups, she would take the treasure in order to study the illustrations, and eventually (when she taught herself to read) to study the Testaments.

The Women's Movement, cosmological researches, the Living Ethics — all these can be found in her letters to friends. And it seemed as if her whole life was imbued with fire.

My brother, Dr. George Roerich, died in 1961. I recall a remarkable continuity in our lives. My brother, for example, was interested in history even when he was very, very young. Similarly, my interest in art and culture came during my earliest days. George specialised in Central Asia and Buddhism. He was a great Tibetan scholar.

Under the direction of our father, an expedition was conducted for five years through the various countries of Central Asia. It penetrated regions where no westerner had been seen for many years; it brought back to the scientific world new knowledge of the history of that region of the 'Roof of the World'. Of an exceptionally synthetic tendency of mind, George had studied Sanskrit, Persian, Tibetan and Chinese. This extensive knowledge of languages provided him with the key to the mysteries of the 'closed land'.

Naggar — The Home In the Hills

To me it is a place of great historical importance and very beautiful and rich in natural scenery. It remains as such even today and I go there once a year and would have liked to go more often. Naggar is the old capital of Kulu. It was mentioned in the 4th century. The valley is famous for herbal plants. At present the art collection is entirely my father's. Later, we will add other things. We will enlarge and develop it so that it becomes a monument to attract people interested in art and culture. It is also a memorial to my father. A nucleus of a place where he lived and died in 1947. A samadhi. It attracts a lot of people. One is surprised at the number of visitors. Some, out of curiosity, others who are genuinely interested in art. The exhibitions of

A generation older. Jawaharlal Nehru with Nicholas Roerich in Kulu (1942).



his works will be there permanently.

The Rani In His Life:

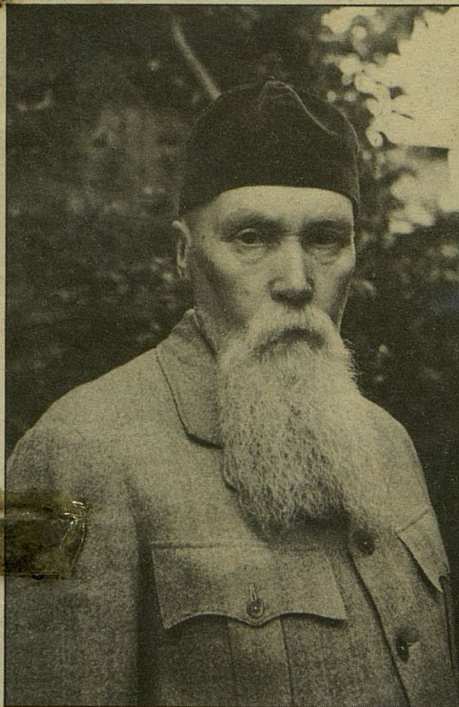
I met Devika Rani in 1944. We got married a year later. Let's say we had common interests which mutually drew us together and have bound us so over the years.

The Second Homecoming:

I first came to India in 1923, and then again, in 1928, after an absence of several years. As I came off the boat in Bombay I was filled with a feeling of having come back to something so familiar and near to me, as if I had returned to the soil I knew so well. I went to Calcutta and from there to Darjeeling. From Siliguri I went by car and a great happiness filled me as we drove through the wooded foothills until suddenly at a certain turn of the road I saw the peaks of the Great Himalayas bathed in the orange rays of the glorious sunrise. There are no adequate words to describe the feeling of transport and joy at the sight of these glorious golden masses reaching out towards Heaven, like a symbol of our striving, rising towards the infinite bathed in the light of divine illumination.

Inspiring A New Cycle:

Inspiration is a very difficult concept to define. It can be on so many planes and embody so many complex facets of our existence. From day to day our outlook and attitude change. That which had a profound influence upon us sometime past, fails to evoke in us same emotions and feelings which seemed so stable and paramount. In some cases there is a complete reassessment of values, as we emerge into a new cycle of life and that which we often overlooked before suddenly acquires great significance and purpose. This transformation comes sometimes quite suddenly as if we were reborn into a different world. Yet, there are many experiences which remain with us throughout our



My parents. Professor Nicholas Roerich and Madame Helen Roerich (1912)

entire life, unchanged and even grown in importance and clarity as time passes.

Looking back over many years, I can see a definite central thread passing through and uniting all the highlights of my inspiration and striving.

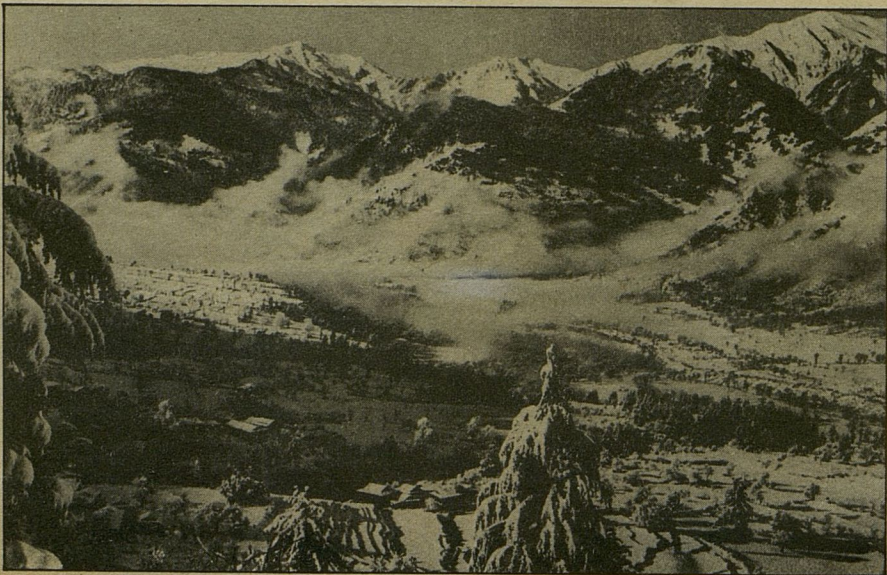
The Inner Force:

From my early years I was surrounded by people who were deeply concerned with the search of spiritual values, whose aim in life were the higher values, with all the wonderful vistas which these values unfold. It is the study of philosophy, the study of the teachings of such great personalities as Shree Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo which constantly

provided a living source of inspiration and fulfilment. Comparative philosophies lighting up the great paths of human striving and achievements filled my life with new understanding and approaches.

All these great teachings provided a powerful and unified director which remained with me all my life. Our inner striving towards something more perfect, more beautiful, is that great inner force which will transform us and transform our lives as well. Without that inner flame one cannot awaken our hidden energies and one cannot rise to a higher place of realisation and experience. This inner striving culminates in the development and activation of certain nerves which are the conductors of subtle energies.

View from the Roerich house in Naggar, Kulu



The Effect Of Art And Religion:

From my early days I was closely aware of spiritual values and they have always served as great wayside signs and sources of inspiration and realisation. And then there was always my love of Nature. My constant studies and contacts with marvellous, breathtaking world of Nature, manifesting itself in thousands of examples of supreme beauty, be it in the wonderful crystals of minerals or sparkling wings of butterflies, the plumage of birds, or marvellous flowers and plants which left me spellbound before the incredible beauty and intricacy of examples of life's infinite wisdom.

Beholding The Magic Of Rembrandt:

Have you ever experienced the wonderful feeling which fills you when you stand before a great work of Art, and when you partake of this — the wondrous emanations which flow from a great masterpiece? Rembrandt, the Great Master told Leibnitz that the emotions of the artist stay captured in the surface of the painting and flow out upon the onlooker and influence him as a participant of the artist's creative experience.

There is a certain inexpressible aura of glory which emanates from great masterpieces, which is an outflow of all the subtle vibrations which are locked within the fabric of a great work of art. It is the magic of the emotions, thoughts and aspirations of the great masters which stay captured within the masterpiece and radiate upon the onlooker, awakening in him similar responses besides the purely aesthetic and spiritual appreciation of the subject. We respond to more perfect combinations and call them beautiful. We appreciate a more perfect balance and harmony as we respond to this natural evolutionary trend of evolving more perfect forms and combinations of colour, sound, words and form. These great masterpieces are the storehouses of vast energies which may activate and change millions of onlookers — and influence countless generations through the message of beauty which radiates from them.

It is not possible even to enumerate the great masterpieces which influenced my life, and often gave me new directions but one can definitely say that my love of Nature, my love of Art and my study of Philosophy and Inner Striving towards the Realms of the Spirit, provided me with my greatest Inspiration, were the guidelines and constituted the most priceless treasures of my life.

His Critics:

I think one of the best compliments I've received was from Major Yuri Gagarin, the first Russian Cosmonaut, who stated that the resplendent colours he saw in space were almost identical with the colours in my paintings.

Amita Sarwal

The
importance
of elegance
in a woman's
life



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