

Sveto Slav Roerich

I was introduced to Mr. Sveto Slav Roerich, artist of international fame by his beautiful wife, Smt. <sup>Devika</sup> ~~Devilia~~ Rani, who incidently was the reigning queen of the Indian Screen. In this way, for the first time in life I had the honour to meet the artist whose work adorn the public galleries of Europe, America and Asia.

U.S.S.R. claims this artist as his own because he was born in Petergrad (lat~~ter~~ on named as Leningrad), While Americans are proud of him as he was educated in America. Britons and West Germans also associate his name with themselves as he had spend a few years in their countries. India regards him the best painter of the age as this country is his permanent abode. The Roerich<sup>s</sup> live at a a calm and beautiful place near Bangl<sup>a</sup>ore. The estate yields good (income) besides being idealy suited for artistic pursuits. Prime Minister Nehru, Vice President Dr. Radha-Krishnan and many other statesmen appreciate his work very much. He is so popular that the President of U.S.S.R, Mr. Vorosholov went there personally to see his work.

The out standing feature of his art that it has no stampmark of any particular School or style, it is highly indivisualistic. Every school and every style has some impressions on his art but like his personality his art is also international. His father Nicholos Roerich was a great master and he is recognised as one of the best painters of his time. Thus Sveto Slav inherited this art



from his illustrious father but he never imitated him and developed his own style. According to some critics the paintings of Sveto Slav are more vital, vigorous and vibrating than his father.

In all the pictures which he has painted after setting in India, there is depth, mysteries of life, deep satire and poetic symbolism. Though his pictorial vocabulary is unlimited his works can<sup>be</sup> classified broadly in five categories; Portraits, Lands cape, Ge<sup>n</sup>re, Religious themes and imaginative and philosophical compositions.

He uses water colour and oil and excels in both. According to chief justice of Madras High Court and president of Sangeet Natak Akademy " he is not only a painter but a Rishi (Sage) who composes ex<sup>c</sup>cellent verses by the touch of <sup>his</sup> the brush."

His every picture carries a message. Famous Russian Critic Egrobar once remarked about Roerich that he is a very serene painter and his works influences the mind to a great extent. Another famous critic Dr. Goetz says that " Roerich intermingles the spirit of christianity and depth of <sup>e</sup>vedanta. His works are such a wonderful combination of East and West that every man is bound to be enchanted by it. Though he has learnt the art in Europe and America he lays stress on spiritualisim and thus earned a great distinction for himself.

In 1939 his paintings were kept in the Paris Museum and this was a clear recognition of his merit or rather a tribute to the great master. Unlike other painters his



works can be appreciated by everybody as they are so expressive, clear and heart <sup>m</sup>warning. Pandit Nehru has said that though his works are imaginative but they are lively. They give the message of hope and truth. Dr. Radha Krishnan has said that his works are full of philosophy.

Settled in India in 1923, he went round the world <sup>d</sup> many times. In his own words " India is not only my home it is the <sup>w</sup>dwelling place of my soul also". Kulu's Ghepan Peak, Rewsi, Kullu's Blacksmith, Dream of Ravana, Thakurdwar, Butterflies, Rainbow and scores <sup>of</sup> other paintings depict the various aspects of India. In his works there is synthesis of every religion.

When I entered the central Hall with the Roerich's I was very much impressed by the three pictures which has won many prizes throughout the world. They <sup>not</sup>met only indicate the religious bent of mind of their creator but symbolise the very essence of religion. In wither Humanity <sup>humanity</sup> is shown as a maiden in wilderness. The maiden has no peace of mind and is tortured and tormented by her own griefs and sorrows. " Humanity <sup>C</sup>crucified," another famous work of the talented artist depicts the horrors and destruction of war. In " Humanity Released " he has shown that when there is complete darkness and no light of hope then only God's grace brings in man humanity <sup>of</sup> instead/haughtiness and nobleness instead of ignobility". Thus humanity is redeemed and gets the highest place which it rightly deserves. There <sup>S</sup>works are based on three



important aspects of Christ's<sup>s</sup> life. These pictures made Dr. Goetz to exclaim. "He is not a painter, he is a prophet".

The most salient feature of his style is the exuberance<sup>b</sup> and boldness of the colours. But he uses them

*x. Works with great speed and the lines are embellished* → work with great artistry and without being tawdry. His hand<sup>c</sup> work with hues and colours and a wonderful form emerges.

I said "your colours are bright and poignant". He smiled and replied. <sup>f</sup> The colours reveal my inner self, my mind. They impress the spectator at the very first sight and he finds himself in a new world of ideas. A painting which do not create a trance and when eyes do not believe the colours can not be successful." I asked "what are the secrets of your success and popularity." He said "what I can say about them. However, people say that they are about human greatness, hence they are *in mortal*."

When he explained to me the significance of his three above mentioned pictures I was bewildered. In them he has embodied the philosophies of Panch Sheel, Buddhism, Vedanta and Christianity. "Can I say that India has impressed your art?" I asked.

"Yes, Yes, the truth is that I who was born in U.S.S.R., educated in U.S.A. and Europe liked to settle in India, because it is the land of my dreams, it is my paradise. The Himalayas and Ganges, <sup>v</sup> vast expanses of green-ery, its rainy season, temples and above all its culture has profound fascination for me. Now, I am admirer of India's youth and beauty, too". While saying this he glanced smilingly at Devilia<sup>ka</sup>. Then I asked "Have you painted any picture of your beloved wife?"



" Not one but two," was the reply. Then he asked Devika<sup>ka</sup> to show me the pictures.

When I entered the second Hall I noticed that after the pictures of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. Radha Krishnan, Dr. Rama Swamy and Maharaja of Basse<sup>ro</sup> a wonderful picture of Smt. Devika<sup>ka</sup> Rani was hanging. It was not a painting but presentation to the goddess of beauty from a worshipper. For such creations brush and colour is not enough. It needs the passion of a lover too. One of the picture was painted in 1946, just after the marriage and the other was of 1951. I was lost in them and tried to <sup>fathom</sup> the <sup>depth</sup> ~~depth~~ of his love and art but in vain.

Devika remarked " These pictures are immortal memoirs of our love. They are combination of beauty and art. But which of the Roerich pictures are with out them? " She asked. Roerich said " true art is that which comes from the ~~depth~~ of the heart, which is created with devotion and singleness of mind with a special purpose. "

In the words of <sup>a</sup> Reb<sup>a</sup>indra Nath Tagore true art is Bhakti ( <sup>e</sup> divotion). Swami Viveka nand used to say that a " man who do not appreciate art, who do not derive pleasure from a work of art can never be a good man. To me it is a message of peace and love, friendship and humanism. "

I have read that the famous French painter Rembrandt while painting used his brush with great restraint but viewed every line many times from different angles. He said that " every line should be the <sup>r</sup>eflection of heart, every stroke of brush should be imaginative and every colour should be full of life. " Painting is not only a poetry composed



through the medium of brush and colour. It is the devotion the seriousness of purpose that matters. Any artist who <sup>w</sup>ants to impress and attract must be a <sup>true</sup> ~~love~~ devotee, a Bhakt. A true artist activates the <sup>t</sup>sensiments and emotions which lay <sup>o</sup>dormant in the human heart and it is possible <sup>only</sup> ~~out~~ then <sup>penebrates</sup> when the artist himself in the inner depths of the soul.

Bidding me Good Bye he said " I had heard in Russia that when Jesus was leaving this world he said that I will leave behind mountains of gold, <sup>r</sup>ivers of silver and beautiful gardens for my followers but St John exclaimed ' No sir, donot give them <sup>s</sup>these things, <sup>s</sup>Some powerful monarch will deprive them from these gifts. Instead of this give them thy name and thy music. So that when they go forward <sup>w</sup>through the gates of death with thy <sup>name</sup> ~~name~~ and music on their lips the doors of Heaven may be wide open for them. Jesus agreed and said that who soever will sing my music will derive <sup>i</sup>immortal joy. My pictures are the creation of that very name and that very music. The Vedanta, Upamishads, Bible and Quran, every religious book ~~a~~ repeats and echoes that name, that music."

( Translated in to English from all Urdu article of Mr. Samat Prakash 'Shauq' published in The 'Tej' weekly, Delhi).