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## SVETOSLAV ROERICH

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Sparkling eyes, imaginative face and silvery beard, adding to the attraction - a man of dignity - these were my thoughts when I saw Svetoslav Roerich - an artist immortalised by his world famous paintings.

"We have known and understood you through your pictures and it is now a great pleasure to know you personally." With this introduction we acquainted ourselves and within a few minutes of our conversation my first impressions were confirmed.

Born in Russia Svetoslav Roerich had his education in England, Sweden and America and like his Great Father chose India as his second home. The natural beauty of the Kulu Valley attracted his father and it continued to attract the next generation. Whilst his father's paintings hold out in bold relief the grandeur and beauty of the Great Himalayas, Svetoslav drawing his imagination from the Great Himalayas and keeping Himalayas as the basis, widened his scope as an artist.

Having given the pride of place to Kulu Valley, the next best place liked by Roerich was Kerala, the birth-place of Ravi Varma.

Born as the son of Prof. Nicholas Roerich Svetoslav had his higher education in Art in Russia. He strongly believed that a knowledge of the fundamentals alone was not enough. If art has to be progressed on the basis of a wider view, it was essential for the artist to have a deep knowledge of the various branches of art. He seemed to claim a fair knowledge of philosophy, when he said that his father and grand father were philosophers.

Svetoslav married Devika Rani. He was attracted by the famous film star of India and she in turn was attracted by the talents of Roerich and instead of being adorned by many fans, she herself became a fan and followed the pursuits of her husband.

### The Great Father

First we talked about the great artist and Roerich's father the late Prof. Nicholas Roerich. If it is suggested that Roerich inherited the talents of his great father, he would not contradict it. He believes that his education in art has helped to raise his status. When his father had concentrated on nature, the son was developing a taste for figures and both showed their individuality in different spheres.

Also The paintings of modern artists headed by Pissarro only depicts the frontage of urban life and do not touch the life of people in the rural areas. Roerich's paintings depicts the actual life of the people. He believes that art should remain among



the people and in Truth.

The art should help to raise the cultural life of the people and the people should be able to appreciate it. He cited the example of his own paintings "Eternal Life" and "Fruits of Earth" which did go into the hearts of the people and were highly appreciated. The ideal man - Shri Ramachandra is considered as an incarnation. But man can always aspire for an ideal life and the artist has a duty in helping the mankind to reach that goal.

Roerich does not want to confine himself to the framework of any religion. He believes that there are many things worth knowing in all the religions. If there is life in the space it is necessary that the same should be corporate and the artist should endeavour to translate it on the canvas.

As an artist he has his own habits and peculiarities. He does not drink and he has no vices. He does not believe that alcohol could do good to mankind. He, of course, has no quarrel with those who drink. He believes that when nature affords sufficient stimulant, no artificial stimulant was necessary.

Roerich has many times travelled from one end of the Himalayas to the other end and the many facets of Himalayas has given him different emotions and these emotions were reflected in his works.

Whilst we were talking Devika Rani said "For him Himalayas is everything. There we are as if in Heaven."

One thing however beautiful it might be, is no good to be looked at all times, so said Mr. Roerich. The moment we see a beautiful thing it carves out a niche for itself in our minds. Divert your attention from that and let it take shape in the sub-conscious. The same thing would be better appreciated thereafter. It is this conviction of Roerich which has added more elegance to his pictures of the peaks of Himalayas.

#### Colour

Mr. Roerich uses deep colours for his paintings. When asked about this, he said that red and orange easily attracted the attention of people. As if replying to this question Mrs. Roerich told us of an incident which happened the previous day and which she said he could not forget. A child asked her for a deep coloured picture and when the little one was asked why he wanted a deep coloured picture, he said that if it was kept before him he would grow into a nice boy. "the feeling of an innocent" - she exclaimed. The boy thought that Roerich's paintings were illuminated by electric lights from behind, so were they shining.



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It is necessary for man to search for beauty and to find it out. Beauty has its own tempos. Nature has its own beauty. In life, in love beauty is an integrated thing which cannot be dispensed with. This is Roerich's ideal when he faces the canvas.

Roerich does not sell even one of his paintings. There are customers to buy them at fabulous prices. He wants his paintings to be public property - a trust. If they are sold they will remain in one corner and get damaged. In olden days the churches and temples helped to preserve the artists' creations and they remained as public property. Now there is no such thing and he therefore wants to turn his house in Kulu into Museum.

When asked which was the picture he liked the best, with a face lit up by a radiant smile he said that that picture was yet to be painted and added that it was not known whether it was possible to be drawn.

We met the Roerichs in their residence. Roerich expressed great joy in receiving us and perhaps it was due to his liking for Kerala or it might be his nature to be always courteous. He remembered the days he spent in Kerala in 1943. Some paintings of his father were kept in the Trivandrum Museum and when he came to know that some damage had been caused to them he ~~wrote~~ wrote to the authorities of the museum ~~to~~ with a view to repair them and still he has not received a reply from them. This he said with feelings. Perhaps the authorities who were callous about the upkeep of the precious paintings, did not realise that such callousness did cause distress in the mind of the artist.

After the conversation when we were about to leave Devika Rani asked my friend "Have you children?" When replied "Yes - two years old," a feeling of depression could be seen on her face. She then said: "He may be brought up through beauty".

Whilst getting out of the house Devika Rani gave some some sweet smelling screw pine flowers and even now I feel that the smell is still lurking with us.

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"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

SVETOSLAV ROERICH

The paintings of Svetoslav Roerich have roots in many traditions and yet do not belong to any movement of our time, but represent a very personal style of their own. Svetoslav Roerich is the son of the famous Russian painter Nicholas Roerich, of the old aristocratic stock and yet in his time a revolutionary in art, and a champion of international understanding and collaboration. After the revolution, the family had lived in Sweden, America, and at last India where they found a new home in the Himalayas. Thus Svetoslav's background became very international, in the special sense of an occidental-oriental synthesis.

Svetoslav's world is the present, the landscape and the people of India; and the Christian mystery or the dharma of the East, though consummated beyond time and space, fulfil themselves here and now amongst and around us. The divine has not revealed itself in the past. It is always and everywhere present, immanent in and transcending the visible reality. Where Svetoslav Roerich resorts to traditional imagery, he does so with a purpose.

Normally he tries to convey his ideas by purely pictorial means, by a structure imperceptively evoking symbols, by a musical Rhythm, by a colour not only intense, but in its selection appealing to our emotions.

Here also are light effects which most people ignore, but which are real and which immerse those responsive to them in a realisation of the ineffable grandeur of the universe, the omnipresence of



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the life divine, of the enrapturing love of God. Such experiences are not preached. They are evoked in the on-looker just by the manner in which the subject is interpreted. They are felt no less in apparently ordinary scenes, a peasant in the field, a herdsman in the South Indian mountains, villagers going to a fair, a hut in a garden, or just some flowers. There are always new approaches, new experiments.

Whenever we meet a great artist, it is this vision luring us beyond our normal life, this realisation of the cosmos as a living whole, which reshapes our life. His technical achievements are no more than means to this purpose, instruments without which he would not be able to convey his message, but nevertheless just instruments.

Svetoslav Roerich is a painter after the grand manner of his father, a painter of mountains and their moods, a revealer in form and colour of the mysteries of nature and a daring explorer from the devaic world, where colours take their birth and have their being in all their pristine purity.

There is something more than mere Roerich tradition and style in Svetoslav's art; there is his individual uniqueness no less great than his father's. He, too, is a mystic-dreamer. Some do not sense any mysticism in his life or in his art but see only a humanitarian with an artist's impulse and craftsman's skill. He is abundantly all these, but he is also a born mystic, if there is one. HIS ART REVEALS IT.



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Great as the pictorial merits are, it is not for these that one would like to appraise his pictures as great works of art, but for their inherent mystic elements which, in the words of Carlisle, "take you to the brink of a precipice and let you gaze into Infinity".

Svetoslav Roerich's paintings, like his father's, have this indefinable "something" which gives them their immortal character. In other words, his art is a kind of Yoga, the Yoga of BEAUTY, another pathway to Moksha or Liberation.

That, according to the ancient scriptures of India, is the real purpose of all art; and the true test of all great art is this: that it should not only please the sense, satisfy the emotions and the mind but also lift one to a realm of spiritual ecstasy and experience.

(The above are excerpts by commentators on Svetoslav Roerich's art



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I feel very hesitant to call Mr.  
Svestov Roerich ~~as~~ a Russian. He  
may be Russian by blood, but  
in the eyes of his and nature he  
is absolutely what an Indian can be.  
He is here I want to say about  
his art and particularly about his painting.  
Thinking of his paintings, I am  
suddenly reminded of my trip to  
Kulu which I happen to take a  
few years back. I went to Nagar  
after seeing the Trout Farm. Nagar  
is the capital of Kulu. This is very  
picturesquely situated.