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THE ROERICH COLLECTION IN THE SRI CHITRALAYAM, TRIVANDRUM.

(By Tampy, K. P. Padmanabhan, B.A.)

.....

A TEMPLE OF ART.

One of the distinctive features of the present era of enlightenment in Travancore is an effort on the part of those in authority to stimulate interest and activity in the Arts. With this end in view two artistic institutions have recently been founded; <sup>one,</sup> The Sri Chitralayam ( Gallery of Asian Painting ) in the Public Gardens of Trivandrum ; the other , the Ranga Vilasom Palace Museum and Gallery , situated in the Fort. To these may be added the collection of Far Eastern objects of art in the annexe of the State Museum, the latter being itself a receptacle of the art-crafts of the State. Verily has the establishment of these Temples of Art been hailed as a great act of spiritual statesmanship on the part of those who have sponsored them.

The Sri Chitralayam, Trivandrum ~~is~~ opened by His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore on the 25th September ~~1935~~ 1935, is a veritable Temple of Art which enables those who worship at the altar of Truth and Beauty to become enlightened and liberated from the grip of the inartistic elements in life. The Sri Chitralayam enables the public both to enjoy the beautiful and realise the ~~is~~ essence of the soul. The Egyptians hailed artists as " Seenekh ", " Revivifiers ", " Resurrectors ". This profound concept is exemplified in the works on the walls of the Sri Chitralayam which exhorts humanity to cognise and respect the Beautiful. Plato <sup>said</sup> ~~said~~ :- " To regard the Beautiful means to improve ".

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housed in the Chitralayam is the group of five paintings, three by the eminent Artist-Philosopher Nicholas Roerich, and two by his talented son Svetoslav Roerich, all glorifying the Himalayas. Nicholas Roerich needs no introduction to the cultured and intelligentia of the world. Artist, Archaeologist, Pacifist, Educationist and Leader of Culture, he is one of the greatest Master Minds of our century. He is a modern Artist whose oeuvre is unique. - Nature becomes self-conscious in Roerich's Paintings of the Himalayas, the quiet beauty of which is suffused with mystery.

In a room of the Sree Chitralayam are exhibited these paintings of Nicholas Roerich and Svetoslav Rperich awaiting the provision of a more commodious home when the new University of Travancore builds its own Art Gallery. "Santana- The Stream of Life" is the most remarkable picture in the collection, and one of the most typical of Nicholas Roerich's genius in the expression of form and colour, and of profound yet clear idea. - This picture of the Himalayas can "raise a mortal to the skies" and it is surcharged with rich symbolism. The river of life winds its way from a maze of mountain. The painting dexterously conveys the impression that the river is full and rushing down with great fury and speed. A fragment of a rainbow symbolising evanescence is seen across the river. The snow-capped peaks in which the river rises stand silhouetted against the flaming sky. In the right foreground is the figure of a Yogi wrapt in meditation. In his right hand is a rosary; the other hand is raised heavenwards. The figure of the ~~Yogi~~ immobile Yogi is in sharp contrast with the swift-moving river which dashes past the ridge of rock where the Rishi sits in absolute meditation. Life flows in a stream from the High Ranges. The picture bespeaks the assertion of the will over nature. The mountain range serves only as a background, an inspiring and significant accessory. Dr. Cousins observes that the ultimate contrast in "Santana" is "between movement that cannot help itself and stability self achieved". \*

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The other paintings by Nicholas Roerich which adorn the "Sri Chitralayam" are "Snow Maiden" and "Sunrise in Tibet". The "Snow Maiden" is a legendary figure in the mountains. - "Sunrise in Tibet" is a beautiful painting depicting the glory of sunrise in the Himalayas. These powerful paintings executed in brilliant colours proclaim the genius of the artist in expressing the majesty and scenic grandeur of the vast mountain ranges.

The Ranga Vilas Palace Museum and Gallery ( opened in 1936 ) situated inside the Fort, is another Sancturay of Art. Fine specimens of gold and silver brocade work and silk weaving executed by master craftsmen of Travancore are ~~displayed~~ <sup>displayed</sup> in this Art Gallery. The cloths worn and the arms used by the former Maharajas of Travancore are exhibited here in imposing array. Some remarkable paintings executed in the Mughul or Persian Style of Princes and Princesses of Kolathunad in Travancore in the eighteenth century are preserved in the Gallery, which also contains a series of royal portraits and a valuable collection of Chinese porcelain and other objects of art.

Nicholas Roerich made a gift of "Fiery Thoughts" to this Art Gallery. This picture is hung at the end of a corridor where it is approached with increasing impressiveness. It was commenced in 1933 and completed in 1935. This magnificent work of imaginative art has been executed in tempera, the favourite ~~mk~~ medium of the Master Artist, because of the brilliancy and transparency of the tempera colours which, also, do not fade.

"Fiery Thoughts" depicts a Rishi doing penance on the lofty and inaccessible heights of the Himalayas and praying for the salvation of humanity in the face of approaching clouds. His heart burns for the protection of humanity and he sends forth protective fiery thoughts which in the form of gold winged birds fly off into space. The depths of valleys are enveloped by dark and heavy clouds, but in the distance the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas tower majestically. There is an epic grandeur in this painting.



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The lustre of spiritual insight, the transmission of an ageless spirit into his art, and the living expression of the radiant spirit, are the distinguishing features of Roerich's art, which "is jealous of its independence because it is great" as Rabindranath Tagore so beautifully summed it up. Maxim Gorkhi paid a tribute to Roerich as "the greatest intuitionist", and Leonard Andreyev declared that "to see a painting by Roerich means to perceive a new world". Roerich has been acclaimed as the founder of a new school of art which has been identified as "Cosmic Synthesis" or "Synthesis of Wisdom". He emphasises that "Art is the heart of the people, and knowledge the brain of the people, and that only through the heart and through wisdom can mankind arrive at union and mutual understanding".

Roerich's pictures interpret the life and soul of ~~Bharatavarsha~~ Bharatavarsha (India) as she appears in her full radiance and significance to a seer and artist of rare power and lofty sensibility. His works of art are symbolic and tend towards occult mysticism. He is essentially esoteric in his labours at the palette. --- Through his prophetic visions embodied in his paintings which speak to the heart of men, the Apostle Roerich leads humanity to the gates of Heaven. It has been truly said that "Roerich is to Art what Einstein <sup>is</sup> to Science and Ford to ~~Industry~~ Industry". - Roerich the Artist and Teacher asserts that "Art will unify ~~humanity~~ humanity" and that "the sign of Beauty will open all sacred gates". He dreams of an international Peace through Art and Beauty. This Master Artist has proclaimed that "Art is to create Beauty; through Beauty we gain victory; through Beauty we unite, and through Beauty we pray to God".

Svetoslav Roerich is a gifted artist. His painting "Malana Valley" hung in the "Sri Chitralayam" is a typical scene in the Himalayas, the most magnificent panorama the world possesses. Svetoslav is a born painter whose creative art carries with it a sense of the higher <sup>dimensions.</sup> ~~dimensions.~~ This picture is ~~so~~ splendid in its supreme harmony of resplendent colour. His other painting



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 " Man from Kangra " is a ~~powerful~~ study in ~~portraiture~~. The person-ality of the Man from Kangra is arresting and realistic. The picture depicts a typical inhabitant of the Kangra Valley in the Himalayas. The hill town background of the picture is most appropriate and revealing. Svetoslav's special line of work in which he excels is portraiture~~d~~, and he has achieved unique success in bringing to the surface the innermost expression of his subject and in providing for its background appropriate eastern motifs. Like every great artist he depicts the inner life of the subject, and does not get lost in the veneer of it. A masterful handling of technique and <sup>daring</sup> ~~distinguishing~~ originality distinguish his art. His landscapes are impressionistic. His portraiture is true to life. His art is dignified and full of subtle charm. His<sup>4</sup> two paintings in the " Sri Chitalayam " proclaim his genius both as a talented landscape and portrait painter.

Nicholas Roerich the Artist is resolutely leading the way towards a renaissance of the spirit, and his sacred art reveals the spirit of the cosmos. He has established an Empire of Art on Earth. He has captured the spirit of the sky and earth, and ranks with Turner in being one of the <sup>e</sup>greatest creators of landscape painting. Barnett D. Conlan <sup>\*\*</sup> ~~in~~ observes that like the great Chinese Masters, Roerich is " A Master of the Mountains ". Roerich is the greatest modern painter of matchless mountain scenery and along with AE of Ireland the most visionary painter the world has had since Blake.

The mighty concept of the Himalayas is ~~ex~~ forever linked ~~wixx~~ with the ~~resplendent~~ art of Roerich and Dr. Cousins rightly acclaim Roerich as " Himalayan in Soul ". The other paintings of the Himalay<sup>o</sup>s by Roerich are equally superb. His ~~back~~

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