

ROERICH PACT & BANNER OF PEACE.

FRIENDS!

Protection of the True, the Good and the Beautiful is the greatest sacred sign of a living culture. Protection of the cultural treasures has been, from time immemorial, regarded as the truest proof of Life while vandalism has been considered as the darkest sign of Death.

The history of human race reveals innumerable dark stories of Vandalism. How many cultural treasures have been exterminated, in all climes and times, by the cruel hands of Vandals!

But the world has seen some good vandals too, who were not philistines. It is said that Timur, who was the cruellest destroyer of life and light, had always spared the artists when he destroyed a city.

(India had witnessed countless dark aspects of vandalism and is still witnessing some aspects of the same destructive force.) The beastly thirst for blood has been exterminating numerous cultural treasures in addition to the damage of life.

The Banner of Peace created by venerable Professor Nicholas Roerich, undoubtedly one of the greatest cultural leaders of all times, stands for the protection and preservation of cultural treasures everywhere both in war and peace.

The Banner of Peace is the Red Cross of Culture. The Red Cross protects human body while the Banner of Peace protects human culture. The aim of the Banner of Peace is the same as that of the Red Cross with the distinction that the former is



more concerned with the cultural welfare whereas the latter with the physical welfare both of which are sine qua non for human life. Professor Roerich says "If humanity recognised the Red Cross as a protection to the physically wounded and ill, then it will recognise the Banner of Peace as the symbol of peaceful prosperity and health of spirit".

The Banner of Peace is an encircled triple-sphere in magenta colour on a white background. There have been many interpretations of this symbol. But let us be content with the following simplest interpretation, perhaps the most concrete of all the other abstract and mystic interpretations. The three spheres represent the True, the Good and the Beautiful which correspond to the intellectual, the moral and the aesthetic and which again culminate into Science, Faith and Art, the essential aspects of a perfect Culture. And the circle represents the thread of Unity among the three spheres of Science, Faith and Beauty. Because intrincically Science, Faith and Beauty are but the different phases of the same Reality. Moreover, Culture is the embodiment of these three.

The birth of the Red Cross and the Banner of Peace has been out of sheer compassion towards human misery - one, the physical misery and the other, the spiritual misery. In the battle of Solferino in Italy in 1859 a Swiss by the name of Henry Dunant witnessed the intolerable sorrow and suffering of the combatants and started the Red Cross movement which has now become an enormous international movement both in war and peace,

Similar has been the birth of the Banner of Peace. While in 1904 Professor Roerich was going on an archaeological trip



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through the ancient monasteries of Russia, he felt immensely grieved at the deplorable plight of the cultural treasures which had remained there as pitiable victims of vandalism in an unprotected state. At that very moment the idea for this movement and to fight for the protection and preservation of cultural treasures was born in the mind of Professor Roerich.

Professor Roerich made an appeal to the Society of Architects to start a movement for the protection and preservation of cultural treasures in the absence of which human life would lose its right to exist! He again made an effort to draw the heed of the Czar and Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia in 1915. But due to the World War I they could not do anything at that time.

Professor Roerich, after the World War, travelled extensively in Central Asia where he found that innumerable archaeological treasures were being destroyed by savages and travellers alike. After his return from Central Asia he formulated the Roerich Peace Pact, in 1929, to which many leaders of culture in U.S.A. as well as in Europe extended their hearty support. It was in Belgium that the first two meetings of the Roerich Pact were held. Later, the third convention was held in Washington in the distinguished presence of delegates from 35 nations.

The text of the Roerich Pact was drafted by Dr. Georges Chklaver, Doctor of International Law and Political Sciences of the Paris University. This pact consists of four Articles which should be respected by all the Governments who have ratified the Pact. The first Article of this International Treaty begins



with the following sentence: "The historical monuments, educational, artistic and scientific institutions, artistic and scientific missions, the personnel, the property and collections of such institutions and Missions, above mentioned shall be deemed neutral, and, as such, shall be protected and respected by belligerents."

In 1935, in Washington in the presence of President Roosevelt, the United States of America and the other twenty Latin American countries signed the Treaty of the Roerich Pact.

After the signing was over President Roosevelt broadcast the following address: "It is most appropriate that on this day, designated as Pan-American Day, by the Chief executives of all the republics of the American continent, the Governments - members of the Pan-American Union - should sign a Treaty which marks a step forward in the preservation of the cultural achievements of the nations of this hemisphere..... This Treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself."

Subsequently many more countries both in East and West extended their cordial support to the Roerich Pact and unfurled the Banner of Peace upon many cultural centres and scientific Institutions.

In our country, too, adherence to the Pact is expressed by such prominent personalities as the late Gurdev Rabindranath Tagore, Sir Radhakrishnan, Sir U.V.Raman, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Prof. Hymaun Kabir and a number of others.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, last year, opening an exhibition of paintings of Prof. Roerich said, "....So many of you may know about Roerich and which is very pertinent in India especially, is Roerich's conception of preserving artistic and cultural monuments



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and the like. He started a kind of Pact between nations, for the preservation of these cultural and artistic monuments. Many nations agreed to it. I do not know exactly what the value of their agreement was because we agree to many things which we forget in times of war and trouble. We have seen recently in the late war the destruction of so many great monuments of culture inspite of all the previous agreement." Panditji added, "Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is a tragedy for destruction to overtake these great Cultural monuments of the past. We, in India, have a great number of them and it should be our duty to respect them, honour them, learn from them, and imbibe their inspiration."

Indeed, the Banner of Peace could hardly be a protection against the long range guns. But, the Red Cross is not visible at long distance, yet no one could deny the great humanitarian expedience of the institution of the Red Cross. Of course, we must not forget that at the inception of the Red Cross, there were many soulless critics who argued against this highly humanitarian idea, but such ignorant condemnation is characterestic of each innovation. Let us not forget, that Edison's great intention of the phonograph was regarded as charlatanry by some academicians.

Wars may come and wars may go, but along with them our cultural treasures, which have been the outcome of the inspired life-endeavours of our artists, scientists and philosophers, should not vanish. Once a particular object of art is gone, it shall never again come into existence. It is therefore, one of the most sacred aims of humanity to try to protect their cultural treasures.

During the last two world wars many cultural treasures were destroyed by the both sides. The parties who were then fatal foes have now turned into fraternal friends. But the precious objects

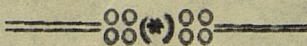


exterminated by them in those days of fiery furies cannot now come into existence in spite of the best efforts of the same persons. While we do not want to say on these deeds any words of hatred; let us simply say: "Destroyed by human ignorance; rebuilt by human hope."

It is only some weeks back, the Government of India has signified their approval to the Roerich Pact & Banner of Peace.

India particularly needs this Banner of Peace as she has so much to preserve and so much that she can lose.

Pax per Cultura. Peace through culture.



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