

INTERVIEW WITH SMT. DEVIKA RANI ROERICH

&  
SMT. SUDHA V. REDDI

Madam,

Question 1. You had reached the top of a very scintillating star-studded career. Life in those days must have been to you, very full, rushed and if I may say, Bohemian! How did you adjust yourself to the peace that was prevalent in the Himalayan abode of the Roerich's, especially so of Nicholas Roerich, who was an embodiment of peace and tranquility? Did it not contrast with your dynamism and your earlier manner of living?

Answer: Not really, when I worked in the Bombay Talkies our work was strictly regulated and very exacting. All our time and also leisure was absorbed in trying to carry out our responsibilities to the best of our ability. The great ideals set and formulated by Himansu Rai when founding the Bombay Talkies were our guide lines and we tried to live up to these lofty standards and really try our best to give our country the best we could in each phase of production. One never ceases to learn for the film is a fine art and covers so many aspects of art. It is or rather can be a yoga of its own.

Life in Kulu was a life of concentrated activity, although under different surroundings. The days were full from early morning and everyone of us worked in his or her own respective field. In those days we had large number of visitors from India and all over the world - scholars, writers, artists, scientists - learned monks and students of Philosophy. Like all truly great men Nicholas Roerich was the embodiment of kindness and thoughtfulness, yet his day was strictly regulated. How else could he have achieved so much?

Question 2. Did you not find it difficult to subjugate yourself to a new routine, after having renounced a career, where you had reached the top and ruled as the Heroine of many hearts? What particular persuasion of the Roerich's brought you into consonance with the pendulum of their Home?

Answer: Well, my husband asked me to marry him and so I went to Kulu.

As you know the family I came to was most unusual in the sense that every member was a person of special merit

and achievement. Thus, Madame Roerich was a great student of Philosophy and a prolific writer. My Brother-in-Law Dr. Georges Roerich was a leading oriental scholar and explorer. I shall not speak of my husband since he is well known to you all as an artist and a man of many achievements. It was a joy to be associated with each one of them.

One of the hall-mark of greatness is humaneness and this pervaded and filled my Father-in-Law's being. The two years that I had known him were the closing years of his great life, which was really many lives concentrated into one. In life Nicholas Roerich was most orderly, most organised, most considerate. He was relaxed and would joke and laugh freely and take an active part in our conversations and work. He was a strict vegetarian, never smoked and never took any alcohol whatever. He never forced his views on anyone and accepted everyone just as they were.

Question: 3. What, in your opinion, was Nicholas Roerich's greatest achievement, not merely as an Artist, but as a Saint?

Answer: Self integration and realisation -

Nicholas Roerich was the embodiment, and the example of a great life. He lived all his lofty teachings and was an epitome of tolerance, understanding, sympathy and kindness, free and liberated through strict disciplines of his life. When these qualities are combined with prodigious talent and vast knowledge something very remarkable is achieved.

Question: 4. What, in your opinion, would be Nicholas Roerich's contribution to the field of art, be it Universal? What did you think of the particular dimension that he introduced into Himalayan Art?

Answer: Yes, his art was universal because of its vast range. Throughout his life Prof. Roerich strove towards something much higher, more perfect, and all his paintings are filled with that inexpressible something which is the embodiment of these strivings. Hence his art is the art of the future, where every painting is a joy and feast for the eyes and heart of an expanding and striving spirit. He believed in Beauty in everything and his paintings hold the key to his inner life. The Himalayas were to him a multiple concept for they meant for him not only an embodiment of sublime

beauty but a repository and synthesis of spirit and of lofty strivings realised, a sacred symbol of man's ultimate aspirations. No one has painted the Himalayas as he has, nor will anyone else do so unless he can raise himself to a higher state of spiritual enlightenment. In Prof. Roerich's paintings we not only admire great art, but we contact great thought and the inner radiation of spiritual fulfilment.

Question:

5. Did you never experience the urge to try out a brush, surrounded as you were, by painters?

Answer:

I have always painted since childhood as a pastime and a happy hobby and have studied art in various schools abroad. During my film career I used to relax sketching flowers and designing costumes for our films which was also one of my responsibilities at the studio. I always felt happy in this expression. But in Kulu I had the opportunity to study those things which I had no time to learn before which absorbed all my time.

We were a very happy family and I was taken as a real daughter of the house. Welcomed and much loved and I must say those few years I spent with them remain as treasured memories of inner peace and beauty never to be forgotten.

Bangalore  
25th September 1974.

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Bangalore,  
9th October 1974  
at 9.15 P.M.