

**Documentation policy in relation to Nicholas Roerich's legacy in India:
problems and challenges.**

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According to the Archaeological Survey of India - in 1979 the works of Russian artist Nicholas Roerich are recognized by the Government as a part of the National art treasure.

It is indeed a remarkable fact that the works of contemporary foreign artist were appreciated to the highest degree along with the works of *eight Indian masters* such as Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, Sailoz Mookherjea and Tagores.

Paintings of N. Roerich are found in collections of major museums, art galleries and institutes of the country and were formed in two following stages: *Pre-Independence and Post-Independence Periods*. The first period: 1924-1948 was marked with strong national and cultural movement, revival of the national heritage and striving towards freedom and independent artistic expression. This is an important period in analyzing Roerich's art in India - collections of his paintings built up during these years were occasionally patronized by the ruling families of the State like Maharajas of Baroda, Trivandrum, Mysore and others, besides in many cases individuals supported by municipal authorities, university or institution initiated collection of Russian artist's works.

During the Post-Independence period the major collections of Nicholas Roerich's paintings were formed in Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi, Birla Academy of Art and Culture in Kolkata, N. Roerich Art Gallery in Naggar, Kulu, Indian Agricultural Research Institute(PUSA) and in Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad Gallery in Bangalore, altogether comprising a few hundred art works.

In both periods Roerich's works were acquired by private collectors and organizations; in the early part of 2000-s , with emerging art market in India some of the artist's paintings appeared on national art auctions.

For the last two decades several exhibitions of Nicholas Roerich's paintings were organized in New Delhi – this indeed were a major contributions made on behalf the Government of India, Museum Galleries, Institutes and some private collectors which shared the works from their collections as well as their expertise.

In December 2002 a retrospective show "Nicholas Roerich: A Himalayan Saga" was organized by the National Museum and the Department of Culture featuring 76 paintings from collections of Indian Museums. On 13 March 2010, commemorating the State Visit of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation to India another exhibition was opened – "Nicholas Roerich. An Eternal Quest" which was the joint project of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the Embassy of Russian Federation in India, the International Centre of Roerichs, Moscow and National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

As it was stated in the Exhibition's catalogue:

'The legacy of Roerich is a joint Russian-Indian cultural heritage.'

A wide variety of prints, portfolios and memorabilia had been specially created towards this exhibition. Special films on the life and work of Nicholas Roerich were screened daily in the Gallery's hall.

Despite the fact that N.Roerich's art is widely presented in India, and references about major Museums and Galleries collections are found in various written and digital sources, nevertheless until this date - ***a complete data or catalogue of artist's works in the country is not available.***

As it was found during research - the problem of documentation of Master's works is becoming a matter of concern in less known collections, particularly in museums or institutes which had only *one or two works* of the artist ('*shadow paintings*'). Many of these valuable art works remained in the dark from the public eye and till recently were completely unknown.

This is a case of '**Santana**' painting from 1928, which is a part of large art collection of Jagadish Bose Memorial Trust in Kolkata.

The painting "Santana" is one of the first works of N.Roerich executed under this title during his early period in India, and was completed in Darjeeling in 1928. This year commenced artist's return from Central Asian Expedition conducted during 1924-1928. The latest variants of this painting are known in collections of Trivandrum Art Gallery and Museum(Kerala) and State Museum in Novosibirsk(Russia).

The painting donated by Roerich to eminent Bengali scholar was 'rediscovered' by the newspaper correspondent in 2013 in a very neglected, almost critical condition along with other rare artifacts and evoked a wide public resonance.

Within period of few months, thank to efforts from media and specialists from INTACH Art Conservation Centre in Kolkata, the painting was restored.

The lack of professional assistance and documentation is being witnessed in episode of painting "Panacea. Two Chalices" from collection of Maha-Bodhi Society Memorial Library, in Sarnath.

The art work was donated to the Society during lifetime of the artist, and appeared only once in the review published by the Society's in its Journal (JMBS, 1939,vol.47p.247) and, since then it never been recorded, exhibited or reproduced.

In the early 2000-s this painting was photographed and documented by visiting Russian scholar P.Krilov and by the end of 2010 due to staff negligence, or *intentional actions* this canvas had disappeared from the premises of the Society's Library.

Years following after India's Independence, some of these 'lonely', **single masterpieces** of the artist, usually donated by Nicholas Roerich during his lifetime, with a time had completely disappeared from the *art world's* scene, being locked in the premises of the institution or society they are hardly exhibited, reproduced or presented in proper environment. Moreover, with the change of political system, dismantling of colonial standards in museology, with approval of new laws intended to protect national cultural monuments and objects of art and, change in museum administrative policy –some of these paintings as it appears from their *documentation records* did not undergo any *revising or updating process*, in some cases even records turned to be absent. Only selected art historians or scholars are aware of painting 'Glory of Himalayas' from collection of Asiatic Society in Kolkata, or *Tibetan Monastery* from collection of College of Art in Delhi. Till recently, representative collection of 13 paintings by Nicholas Roerich from the PUSA Agricultural Institute in Delhi came to light and draw public attention due to unfortunate circumstances – the theft of two landscapes with mountain scenery which as it was found out later, re-appeared in one of the auction houses in London. At present the investigation about missing works is still in the process.

Roerich's paintings from PUSA are the ones which were exhibited in the Institute in the years following India's Independence and, earlier were under direct care of Dr. Pal. With his retirement from the Institute, the paintings some of which were displayed in the Reading Room of Library were gradually concealed in the storage of the Institute. During the research work one couldn't find any publication or reference that works from this collection ever been exhibited outside of the Institute's premises, never been reproduced or exposed in one or another form to the public, in a way they became '*imprisoned objects*'.

Nevertheless, there are a few exceptions, a painting "Morning Prayer" which is now in the Institute's collection was reproduced in the Journal of Maha Bodhi Society, in volume 48, in 1940 under the title "Asanga". A missing painting "Sunset. Ladakh" (in some sources quoted as "Sunset.Kashmir") was also reproduced in a several Russian periodicals in 1990-s as well as in

collection of postcards reproduced on behalf of International Roerich Memorial Trust, Naggar, Kulu in 1996. The title of this work also found in a list of two page-catalogue published by Lalit Kala Academy and All India Fine Art and Craft Society(AIFACS), in 1974 on occasion of 100 Anniversary of N. Roerich. Unfortunately, this small publication did not have any illustrations of exhibited paintings.

There are few paintings from this collection like “The Land of Snowmen”, “Himalayas. Lahul” which also were reproduced in the Russian press.

Another interesting fact about PUSA Institute’s collection is that – some works by the world renowned artist were included only once in N. Roerich’s exhibition of 1974, and were completely missed out during large commemorative exhibitions in 2002, at the National Museum and in 2010, at the National Gallery of Modern Art, both held in the national capital.

Nevertheless, the most tragic fact is that – these paintings were not documented in the Institute *Register book*, in *Inventory list*, or acquirement papers, pictures from collection were also found absent. The Library staff who was working in the time of accident was not aware of the material and aesthetic value of the Institute’s collection until the whole drama was highlighted by the media. ¹

The significant *observations* made in this paper is that:

-Absence or lack of sufficient documentation on art objects, in our case paintings of Nicholas Roerich, in Museums, Galleries or Institutions in the form of Register or Catalogue records leads first of all, to lack of proper attention, care and maintenance.

This ‘bridge of duty care’ results frequently in the damage of the artifact or its disappearance due to negligence of security/safety measures. In some cases, using the moment of ‘forgetfulness’ of the art work in the records of Museum or Institute the criminals may replace artifact with a forgery or steal

valuable artifact;

-Training and professional competence of the Museum's or Institute's staff is absolutely essential for the proper maintenance and safety of valuable artifacts;

-The security and safety measures(like protected with iron grill windows and doors of exhibition hall, installed video cameras ,alarm, and all other preventive measures prescribed by Museum's rules) should not be neglected, even if the artifact is exhibited in the premises of the Institute, Trust or any other Public establishment.

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