

Given bellow is the thanks-giving speech of Ambassador Alexander.M.Kadakin, at the award presentation ceremony, at the RCNC, New Delhi, on July 11, 2014.



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International Nicholas Roerich Award for Ambassador Alexander M. Kadakin

The award was launched on the 300th Anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg and is conferred upon people of eminence who excel in their profession and vocation in the world.

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Today I am deeply honoured indeed to be awarded the International Nicholas Roerich Award for Roerich Heritage Saving. Roerichs' legacy since long has inadvertently become one of the main aims of my personal life and professional career long time ago.

For the first time I got acquainted with Svyatoslav Roerich and his superstar wife Devika Rani in 1971 when I was interpreting at a luncheon meeting between the couple and the Soviet Ambassador. A very intimate friendship evolved between the elderly couple and me, who, after passing away of my parents, considered me their adopted son. Whenever they came to Moscow, we would spend hours together, the same happened in Delhi where they usually stayed at the Imperial Hotel. I was a young diplomat, an attache at that time. When they grew old and moved to Ashoka Hotel in Bangalore, Svyatoslav and Devika called me every week, and on weekends I was flying there to meet them. They were rather lonesome, surrounded by such wonderful people as Aditi Vashistha and Gopinath and, unfortunately, by such shady personages as their former maid, the notorious Mary Joyce Punacha.

Svyatoslav understood that something had to be done about the Roerich family's Kullu Estate because it was in a dilapidated condition. They had not visited it for fifteen years. Once in 1991, he



Alexey Bondarenko pinning the medal on the collar of Ambassador Kadakin

invited me to Bangalore and I saw a document on the table which he presented to me. It was the General Power of Attorney, wherein he instructed me to start the International Roerich Memorial Trust - IRMT. He also empowered me to take charge of all movable and immovable properties in Kullu Estate. That is how along with Svyatoslav and Devika, I became the founder, a life trustee and now an Ambassador for the second time, the Vice-President of the IRMT.

Naturally, it was an important event, but rather unusual for a diplomat to get involved in a Trust. At that time I was Minister-Counsellor and DCM of the Embassy. We started the Trust immediately in 1992 under Svyatoslav's direct guidance. He summoned an elderly German lady friend of the family, sister Ursula Eichstaedt to

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supervise the Estate. We started visiting that place regularly. Almost every month there were working expeditions from the Embassy.

During the first few years of the Trust's functions no money at all came from official sources. The government was nowhere to be seen – either Central or State. Everything was done on voluntary basis and on donations from Russian companies working in India and from our own purses. We brought to Ursula in Naggar refrigerators, our engineers were repairing wires. Wives of Russian diplomats swept and washed floors in the house, tidied up the gardens, did menial job to resurrect the Estate to life. Ursula at times, even did not have enough money to buy food. We were bringing food for her and gave her some money. Once I gave her Rs. 30,000/- from my own pocket to tidy up the flowerbeds and the cherry and apple orchards. For me it was a very personal thing. Russia and Russians have invested so much heart, so much soul and so many funds and efforts into making the Roerich Estate a real gem! And we did it.

It was only around 2000 that the Government of India came into picture. Ex-Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee was the first who actually understood the importance of the place. He visited Naggar several times and said that "a Russian rishi was lying there". He gave a big donation to the Trust, which has not been fully utilized up to now.

Two years before passing away Ursula was joined by Dr. Alena Adamkova, a noted Indologist, a doctor of sciences and a talented and energetic lady. She was working in the Estate as Executive Director/Curator of the IRMT for ten years. Largely due to Dr. Adamkova's efforts the Estate has turned into a well-established international cultural and art centre bustling with multifaceted activities. Public functions and celebrations to spread the Roerichs' ideas and to commemorate events in their lives were regularly held here. Art exhibitions attracted well-known and young

artists from Himachal Pradesh and other Indian states as well as from foreign countries, like Russia, USA, Ukraine, Austria, Brazil, Germany and UK. Artistic and cultural activities were pursued by the Helena Roerich Art College. The IRTM published numerous books on the Roerichs' legacy, posters and post cards with reproduction of Nicholas and Svyatoslav Roerichs' paintings.

As a result, the museum complex and the Roerich art gallery was included in the list of Himachal's Kullu Valley's major attractions. They are visited annually by over 100 thousand tourists, art lovers and followers of the Roerich philosophy from India and overseas. Moreover, it helps to promote tourism and provides employment to the residents of Naggar.

Now, the representative of the International Roerich Centre (Moscow), Dr. Larisa Surgina, together with her Russian and Indian colleagues took the baton to continue this mission. Indian and Russian scholars conduct scientific work to revive the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute and preserve the Roerich Museum in the Memorial Estate.

It is heartening to see that the great deed by Svyatoslav Roerich more than two decades ago is yielding a rich harvest today. Once neglected and dilapidated Estate in a quiet corner of the legendary Valley of the Gods, known only to a handful of educated Indians, Russian and foreign intellectuals, has now blossomed into one of the most appealing tourist spots in Northern India. It has also become an attraction for true connoisseurs and lovers of creative, cultural, historic, scientific and spiritual heritage of the Roerichs. Before our eyes the Hill Estate is also transforming into a source of knowledge, education and learning by bringing to local children the joy of mastering the mysteries of fine arts, unfading traditions of classical Indian dance and music and original folk crafts.