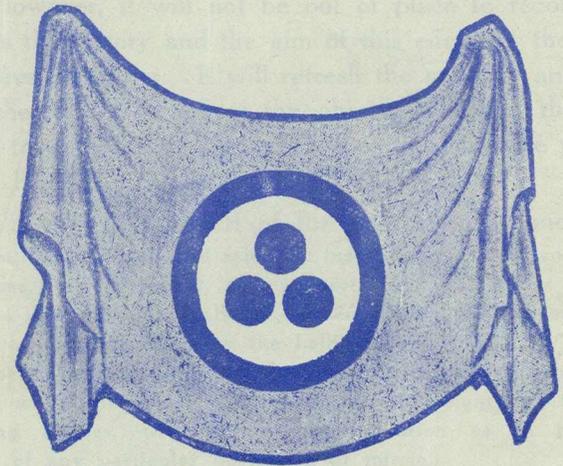


# ROERICH PACT

By

HIRALAL AMRITALAL SHAH



*Reprinted from*

THE MAHA BODHI, Vol. 44, No. 11

2480  
1936

## THE ROERICH PACT

BY HIRALAL AMRITLAL SHAH, B.A.

The readers of Mahabodhi are perhaps familiar with the subject of the Roerich "Peace Pact" and the Roerich "Banner of Peace" through their frequent notices in this magazine (cf. issues of Oct. 1933, May/June, 1934, Aug. 1935 etc.). However, it will not be out of place to recount in a few lines the history and the aim of this effort for the benefit of the present reader. It will refresh the memory and it will enable the reader to follow the observations that the writer ventures to offer for the furtherance of this laudable proposal of Prof. Roerich.

**Aim :—**Article I and II of the pact state as under :

"Educational, artistic and scientific institutions, artistic and scientific missions, the personnel and property and collections of such institutions and missions shall be deemed neutral and as such shall be protected and respected by the belligerents.

"Protection and respect shall be due to the aforesaid institutions and missions in all places, subject to the sovereignty of the High Contracting Parties, without any discrimination as to the state allegiance of any particular institution or mission.

"The Institutions, Collections and Missions thus registered may display a distinctive flag, which will entitle them to special protection and respect on the part of the belligerents, of governments and peoples of all the High Contracting Parties."

**HISTORY :—**It was as early as 1904 that Prof. Nicholas de Roerich (then in Russia) first conceived ideas for the preservation of the treasures of art and culture from frequent embroilments. He persisted in the advocacy of these ideas ; they did not gain ground even in the atmosphere of the great world war which witnessed the destruction of such treasures on an extensive scale. We may mention the damage done to the cathedral at Rheim as one of the several instances. In 1929



in New York, Prof. Roerich's ideas ultimately gained definite shape when the legal and the diplomatic brains also supported them, embodying them into concrete proposals. In 1930 the Roerich Pact received further wide attention and in the autumn of 1931-32, it came within the orbit of practical consideration of several American governments. At the same time, it received wide approval of cultural bodies and from prominent people. In 1933, twenty one American governments formally adopted the Pact and the Banner of Peace. That list includes the government of the United States of America under President Roosevelt.

The Pact still knocks at the doors of nations of Europe and Asia.

The reader will see from this history that the Pact has yet to make its way into the centres where it is most needed. The writer proposes to show in this article the different ways of approach for the fulfilment of the above purpose and towards which, he feels, some clarification in thought is required. The suggestions given herein should not be considered belated if they are found to smoothe the way for the furtherance of this Pact. The main purpose of the Pact is the preservation of monuments and this should be kept always in the forefront in designating both the Pact and the Banner. The present designation of 'Peace' requires greater clarification in thought on the subject of peace and over the steps to achieve the same if "peace" is to become a realistic objective over and above "preservation".

All honour to the harbinger of this idea of the Pact and to all the pioneers who have laboured for it till to-day. Looking at the aims and objects, the purpose will be served early and best if the Pact and Banner are styled.

#### IMMUNITY PACT: IMMUNITY BANNER.

The display of the immunity banner will indicate that the objects under this banner are prized by humanity for the sake of humanity, past, present and to come, since they are a

heritage for all ; and therefore, even if they are in possession of the enemy, they are immune from defilement, damage or destruction. They cannot be a target ; neither can they be utilized as a cover for defence, nor as a cover for offence. The Red Cross 'provides for the physical suffering of man'. This banner will grant safety to the possession without reference to its actual possessor.

Possession is like that of ideas. With sane people and saints, their ideas mean much. The same with ordinary folks mean less. The same with depraved minds mean little or nothing. Thus the merits and demerits of the possessor transfer themselves to their possession. That will just be the case in the possession of the treasures of art and culture. The possessor who enters into this pact has to forego his right of possession for any abuse of the same (possession) he might be tempted to make in even trying conditions. If he fails herein, his possession gets damaged through his own fault and not through the want of consideration of humanity on the part of the opponent. If the signatory or the signatories to this pact fail to respect the obligations they themselves have undertaken in the sense narrated above, then they are not worthy of their possession of art and culture. Their progress is slow and the possession may disappear. By that loss, they are reduced to the natural level that they occupy.

The "Bombay Chronicle" of 27-8-1936 reproduced a photo (on p. 7) of the Spanish loyalists firing at the Rebels *from the Cathedral Walls*. If this is true (we may hope that it is not) it is a case of sheer abuse of the possession of the cathedral which should have found safety under the Immunity Banner. As it was used as a cover, the cathedral ceased to represent humanity ; and if such had been the case at Rheim, it was the false nature of the possessor that contributed to the damage. Art and culture cannot long survive the low standard of the possessor. So it is the attainment in actual life that eventually decides the fate of such treasures and hence

our efforts should be concentrated in raising the living value. Once we realise this fact, we can see the propriety and effectiveness of what the emperor Asoka did in this direction in his own times. He raised the level of humanity : the reader will understand this from what is stated later on.

Conversion of the cathedral, above mentioned, for purposes of either offence or defence has invited the 'evil eye' to it ; it has become an easy target for attack. It has ceased to represent humanity under all circumstances. Hence according to the Pact, the first obligation arises with the possessor of the monument ; next with the rest of the signatories to such a pact.

Conditions in Europe show that the immunity pact and the immunity ensign are required very badly. If the nations want these the possessor must co-operate first and others will follow him. Just as the red cross indicates that those under its protection do not belong to the fighting element, so the immunity ensign should indicate the sites, where no fighting or taking cover is intended.

Once the obligations that accompany a desire for immunity are well understood, the approach to the Pact is clear. The question should be addressed to the possessors as to whether they are agreeable that the sacred monuments shall not be made of any strategic use and that they (possessors) would like their treasures of art and culture to enjoy immunity. A near date may be proposed for such an inquiry ; if the immunity is desired by any nation, the fact should be demonstrated by a celebration, by the adoption of the pact, by the registration of such treasures for immunity and by a display of the immunity ensign over those places during the period of celebration. The adoption of the pact can be made at any time in the year but a week in the month of November may be assigned to foster these ideas. Successive years of concrete proposals and concrete expressions of resolve will pave the way for those who may have not adhered to the pact to decide in favour of it.

Some Government has to initiate this task and the best fitted one seems to be the Government of the U. S. A. The writer would suggest that a request be made to the government to employ its diplomatic officers to lay proposals before the various nations and their governments for the adoption of the immunity pact and its ensign, inviting the desirability of their individual and collective agreement on the *immunity* platform for preserving the treasures of art and culture. This will perhaps readily evoke a sympathetic and early response. When this course takes effect, the next step can be taken up by common deliberation and consent on the following lines.

Humanity has always prized the *living* treasure of its hopes and achievements in its children. If the signatories to the Pact are agreed, the scope of immunity should be extended to the schools and the boarding houses of children who are not of military age and where military training is not given. This will constitute one more step towards humanity. In this way much can be done for world peace through this Pact and its ensign. The writer now ventures to place his observations regarding "peace" and the conditions that naturally attend it.

Real efforts towards peace can be made only when we have achieved immunity. The real work of *peace* is possible thereafter, in the way emperor Asoka had established it, toning down animosities, ill-will, discomforts ; encouraging goodwill and broadmindedness. Since we are in the twentieth century (an era of commerce rather than religion), it will also require something real to be done to emphasise the economic life by agreeing to *allow opportunities for equal economic life and commerce* to all irrespective of possessions. Asoka had to emphasise the heart, home, kins and family along with the dependents and animals. Soviet Russia had to emphasise afresh the minimum common (required) level of individuals and home. The value of all these efforts lie in the hard fact that they lay the foundations and the sustenance of art, culture, life and religion for humanity that is *to be heralded*.

Without these preliminaries, the advance we think we have made is an illusion ; and as we witness it, it turns out to be of a more or less short lived duration. Therefore, much as we wish an early era of peace, peace is far-off pending huge efforts on our part in the economic as well as other directions pointed out already. The present Pact and Ensign will very well represent a call for immunity but it will not be able to evoke or represent peace with equal force. Linking of peace to the immunity objective will retard the progress of the latter over which agreement is much easier.

We saw that "collectivity" (for peace or for sanctions) was absent in the League of Nations for want of a foundation based upon opportunities for equal economic life and commerce. This question did crop up there and Sir Samuel Hoare could only then invite more customers for the empire raw products ; but he could not leave open to the other colleagues of the league the empire markets of the various units of the league for their (colleagues) finished goods ; and the result was a number of face-saving measures and a spectacle of ineffective performances. *The fruit of peace is commerce* and the efforts for peace without unhindered opportunities for commerce do not bear tangible results. Economic outlets shall have to be kept open for all units with equal opportunity *if* peace is to be the desired objective. Without that, the situation will naturally develop into a sort of tug of war for possessions among the nations and even amongst the different groups of one nation itself, from whence, the bird of peace will fly away. Looking to the international effect of the preferential tariffs and of currency manipulations, the writer feels that peace is not within the range of practical thought there being a negation of equal opportunities for commerce. It would therefore be advisable to suggest for an emphasis on the Immunity ideals of this pact and the ensign ; and later on make the efforts that are necessary to ensure peace in the varied directions pointed out in these and the following observations.

In the days of Buddha (B. C. 534) and Mahavira (B. C. 527) we find several systems of philosophy and religion with an amount of discussions and controversy, at times ranged against the old Hindu thoughts and practices. About 220 years thereafter, we find the first available epigraphic record in the edicts of emperor Asoka which are unique in character.

His XIIIth edict refers to the massacres and horrors of the war in Kalinga (an eastern province) and it recounts the feeling of revulsion and reaction that came about in the emperor's mind. Therein, he realises that what was victory was no victory where it was death or destruction or damage to society. He, therefore, turns to the essence of victory—to Dharmavijaya—which takes the form of the *consolidation of home, of life and of society*. In that way, he makes a lasting contribution to the progress of individuals as well as of society and religion. That victory opens up room for charity in outlook, mutual help, an atmosphere of broad-mindedness, service to the aged, to those in distress, to subordinates, to the helpless and to less fortunate ones etc. (edicts III, IV, V and VII) embracing entire society (which therefore includes even animals and birds—edicts I, II), which extends to all communities and countries and to all schools of thought (edicts II, V, XII and XIII). He hammered these facts and ways with all the force of a preacher, with all the vigour of his personal example and persistency, and with the agency of his state ; and he did achieve his purpose to a certain extent as noted by him in edict IV. The false urge was replaced by the right one *rooted in service and humanity* and in the ever extending goodwill. The edicts reveal broadly the very basis of life and religion (cf. edict XIII).

The veil of oblivion over the current of life of this land is lifted up about 430 years after those edicts by another epigraphic record. Epigraphica Indica gives an account of the rock-cave inscriptions at Karlé (Vol. VII, pp. 56-57 ff.) and at Nasik Vol. VIII, pp. 59 ff.) in Western India which also witnessed the following phenomena.

Ushavadata, the son-in-law of the Kshatrapa king Nahapana, the suzerain of the western Indian provinces, evidently a non-Indian tribal man as we may judge from his name and from his relations, endows a village for the benefit of the Buddhist monks who may happen to pass their term of the monsoon retirement at the caves. Recording this gift, he narrates his previous ones which embraced lacs of cows, gifts of villages to deities and to Brahmins, marrying some pairs of the latter and of construction of flights of steps on the banks of a river of some holy pilgrimage. He also caused a cave to be excavated and equipped, purchased a field of good dimensions and an estate of cocoanut trees for the upkeep of the place and for the maintenance of the monsoon occupants (Buddhist monks—E. I. VIII, p. 78, cave no. 10): and by that time, his list included gifts of numerous rest houses, reservoirs, arrangements of ferry services at several rivers and other gifts of the types already stated.

By the time that field was purchased, the fortunes of the empire of Nahapana changed. Nahapana was routed and destroyed by the victorious Andhra king Gautamiputra who avowed himself to be a great religious Brahmin king, exulting over the fate of his Saka, Yavana and Pahlava adversaries, entirely uprooting the family of Khakharāta (of Nahapana). The field seemed to have become a problem but then it took practically no time in finding a reasonable solution (cf. E. I. VIII, pp. 60 ff. and 71 ff., Nasik, cave No. 3).

From the battle-field, from his camp of victory, this victorious (Brahmin) king Gautamiputra issued a decree to his officer to extend all the benefits of the gift to the Buddhist monks for whom one of the principal relatives of his great enemy, Ushavadāta of 'Khakharāta' had purchased and reserved that field. The decree was then ratified on the spot, the monsoon perhaps drawing near the monks to that place. What did it matter even if the empire changed hands? It was later found that this field did not give a proper yield. The inscription then continues and mentions that the royal

(Brahmin) dowager queen mother (the king is perhaps dead by that time) orders the field to be exchanged for one of the several royal fields.

Asoka had preached broadly that the good acts must embrace all with no distinctions or differentiations and that they should continue for ever. These records indicate how that had become the vein of the society. The good acts enjoyed immunity and uninterrupted support. This development cannot be sudden, and to understand its secret, we must turn again and again to the edicts and listen to what that "Priyadarshi" emperor Asoka implored all and enjoined upon all with such sweet reasonableness. That way opens up the avenues for the consolidation of home, society, religion and peace.

---

