



Emergence of new religious movements in Russia

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Abstract

This paper deals with the emergence of new religious movements in Russia after the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991. An attempt has been made to explain, about the genesis of new religious movements in Russia. Further it discusses the causes like socio-economic and political crises which led to dissolution of USSR, subsequently led to the emergence of these new movements. Next section deals with the constitutional framework regarding freedom of conscience guaranteed by the constitution. Further discuss the amendment made in constitution and the introduction of the law of 1997. At last this paper discusses the effects of new religious movements on Russian society.

Keywords: new religious movements, Russian federation, Soviet Union

Introduction

Dissolution of Soviet Union led to the end of well established socialist system, which gave a sharp blow to Russian identity. People lost their faith in state ideology. From then on the society has undergone radical transformation, which aims to make active, painful and controversial attempts to build a democratic, legal and humane society, which is trying to fill the vacuum that arose with the departure of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, whose leading place was enshrined by the Constitution.

New constitution was comparatively liberal and gave a new voice to common mass and their need. Further deep crisis in economic, political and ideological system contributed significantly to spread of new religious movements in Russia. Reasons for the popularity of many NRM are explained by the fact that they were in the fall of the totalitarian regime to adapt rapid enough to the social expectations of the Russian population.

Genesis

Since Russian philosophy by the end of 19th century and in beginning of 20th century gave a series of new ideas, which largely reflected the spiritual quest at the turn of the centuries. Russia gave the world a galaxy of leaders of the new religious movement such as I.V. Kargel, A.V Kare, I.C. Prohanov, who are known as preachers and persons of the highest culture and spirituality. However, during Soviet period, state's harsh policies toward religion practically mitigated emergence of new religious formations despite that NRMs in the 60's and 70's (of 19th century) appeared as a result of missionary activities. The literature of those years is indicative about the resolution of the CPSU Central Committee which repeatedly stressed that for the foreign centers, the propaganda of neo-mysticism became a means of manipulating mass consciousness and is seen as an effective tool in the ideological conflict (Devin, 1989) [2]. This was considered to be the beginning of arrival of new religious movements.

Among the first few were the representatives of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISCON). The ISCON arrived in the Soviet Union in 1971; Srila Prabhupada laid the foundations of Krishnaism in Russia. Simultaneously Russian native religious movements also began to take shape. Among them were community of P.K. Ivanova, followers of Roerich and others. New religious movements declared themselves openly in 90's, in the period of perestroika, glasnost.

Causes of emergence

With the collapse of USSR, country started facing along with major political, social, economical, ideological crises, the 'identity crises' of individuals, groups and communities became the major issues. Various historical, religious and ideological beliefs started influencing the minds of people. To varying degrees, these factors become sources of depressing sentiments: like pessimism, futility of life, psychological feelings of fragility of surrounding world etc. The crisis of humanism was also common to certain part of population which leads to destruction of human existence and culture. Russia, a great world power is at the crossroad from where there is no way back, but the final selection of the new has yet to be done. In a very short span of time, the country has moved from one transition period to another. Overview of that can be summarized as follows:

- Disappeared one great state, which represented the geopolitical picture of the world in last century.
- Radically changed government, institutions of government and its attributes.
- There is a rapid process of state-building and the formation of a new legal order. Thus destroying the old political system and ideology.
- An ideological vacuum was formed in the country which destroyed the soul of mass, system of patriotism and values. It was being replaced by Western values which was rapidly changing ratio of property in the Russian

Federation and the entire system of social mutual dependence. Very often these changes occur in acute conflict situations and prepare the ground for social explosion;

- By protecting inter-ethnic conflicts in Russia and the problems of relations with the former Soviet republics, Russia has radically changed its position in the international community and its relationship with other states.
- Russia experienced the deletion of its name from the list of the great powers and deprive from the former role of great power in global geopolitics. The major powers of world are not interested in Russia as an advanced, technologically developed, powerful state, they need a powerful competitor, and therefore the policy of isolationism against Russia started.
- But most importantly it weakened the moral potential of the nation, on which rested the power of old nation and the state. Today it only forms a national ideology, strategy for the development of man, society, nation, and rethought its role in human civilization (Russia Today, 1994)^[5].

Perhaps the phenomenon of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has strengthened the Russians hope for the revival of the moral potential of the nation. Unlike the above mentioned political crisis played a vital role in mushrooming of NRMs, in the same way social, ideological and economic crisis also played a critical role in prevailing of NRMs. The complex social problems, a sense of unperceptive life, inability to set a harmonious relationship in society, absence of humane ideals, are the main reasons which lead to create favorable conditions for the spread of new religious movements that promise every individual salvation, endless possibilities of moral self-improvement and self-expression.

Constitutional Framework

The law on "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" gave a new definition to the state's relationship with religion. According to the article 2 of Russian constitution "Legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations is made up of this law, *which establishes the fundamental guarantees of freedom of conscience in accordance with the USSR Constitution*, and the laws of the USSR and the union and autonomous republics published in accordance with it". And article 3 "In accordance with the law on freedom of conscience, each citizen independently decides his own attitude towards religion and enjoys the right of confessing any religion either alone or jointly with others, or not to confess any religion, and to express and spread convictions associated with his attitude towards religion" (Codevilla, 1990)^[1].

The adoption of law by the Russian Federation regarding 'Freedom of Religion' from 25th October 1990 opened the victory march for new religious movements throughout the country. People started coming out openly, expressed their faith to particular religion of their choice. General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the first and the last president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev was

the one who passed this law and gave much-needed breathing space to the practice of other religions in Russia. Mikhail Gorbachev not only demonstrated the unconditional respect and acceptance of all religions but also facilitated their safety in Russia. Now gradually one by one new religious movements started entering in society.

Government had no prior experience to monitor religious activities at mass scale. Lack of rules and regulations were the first and main reasons of uncontrolled activities such as hypnosis, dianetics of non-traditional religious mysticism and occultism in the last years of the Soviet Union, such a situation prior to the collapse later led to the adoption of the new 1997 'Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations' during the tenure of the President Boris Yeltsin in the New Russian Federation. However the law retained the basic provisions for freedom of religion and non-establishment, but introduced different statuses for different religious associations. It introduced discriminatory system in terms of favoring certain religious associations and restricting others. Law favored the role of Russia's historical faiths, in particular Eastern Orthodoxy which, received quasi-establishment status. The 1997 law made a distinction between religious organizations that enjoyed the full rights of a legal entity, and groups whose rights were seriously restricted. It also limited the rights of foreigners to proselytize (Shterin Marat, 2001)^[11].

Effects on society

D.M. Ugrinovich analyzes "meditation as a functional psychological system and notes that non-traditional movements carried out psycho-therapeutically function". Psychotherapy through meditation and yoga relieves from negative emotions, remove troubling problems from the sphere of consciousness. Announcement of the world of real illusory events and establishment of psychotherapeutic techniques which use to disconnect from reality become means to a new religion (Ugrinovich, 1986)^[7].

While on the other hand mantra, meditation and other techniques are necessary steps for the Jain-Buddhist "enlightenment," and Hare Krishna "expansion of consciousness", to achieve the status of the individual, in which the possible rejection of all wants and desires create a psychological conditions in order to "escape" from the world and to break up with it. New Religions isolate a person from the world and try to seek faith in all spiritual needs. They tend to form illusory offset requirements in contact, communication, togetherness through specific way of life in religious commune which increased family breakdown, decline of parental authority, lack of love give an alternative to the creation of the cult of a charismatic leader in the boundless reverence and unquestioning acceptance of its authority. They believe that a person should be guided by divine principles and it is necessary for once and all.

Therefore religious conversion is the result of a complex means including group pressure, total isolation from the

¹ For a detailed discussion of the 1997 law, see C. Durham, Jr., and L. Homer, "Russia's 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations: An Analytical Appraisal," *Emory Law Review* 12 (1998): 101-246.

effects of the outside world and series of physiological constraints. Complete submission, worship of a charismatic leader, dependence on the religious group in isolation from other authorities, and transform the religious world in the social, moral and epistemological ideal, which defines the behavior, thoughts and feelings of the young man. These circumstances determined the path to fanaticism, followed by the representatives of cults. These effects are because of thoughts control, a sharp break in lifestyle and isolationism. The consequences of these effects are transforming social passivity and indifference. Regulatory function of new religiosity is manifested in controlling over all aspects of the lives of its followers, the psychotherapeutic movement of the "Transcendental Meditation", aimed at making the human being socially passive, this activity is quite visible in the community.

Followers of Krishnaism, The White Brotherhood, the Unification Church, and other are considered to be the highest value of the worship of the god Krishna, Swami Yuoannu, Moon, Berg, etc. Religious norms cover the scope of religious behavior and all forms of social behavior, for family and private life. There is a whole system of prohibitions and regulations, governing the behavior of young followers and creating a wall of alienation between religious group and society. The integrative function of the new religion

contributes to the preservation of the system of social relations in community itself, compensates for the lost ties with the community, family, team, thereby creating new values and norms of behavior.

Conclusion

Thus, the most common reasons for the emergence and spread of new cults in Russia are political, social, ideological, epistemological, psychological factors, among which the most important, in scholars opinion are social, political, spiritual and ideological conditions "of human life, the realization of their political and civil rights, on the one hand, and on the other - activity of international centers of new cults, which use imperfect existent rules of Russian Federation to secure their missions in the Russian territory. However the widespread of these religious movements contribute to the separation of traditional social structures in society, the corresponding transformation of the system of ideological orientations and the reaction to these changes in various social strata. Mass secularization splits the traditional religions that generate distrust and frustration of ordinary believers who are forced to seek answers to their spiritual questions in new religious movements. Varied division of society into rich and poor - all this gives the opportunity for new religious movements to replenish their ranks.

Table 1: The number of religious organizations registered in the Russian Federation, 1 January, 2012.

	Registered religious organization	Types of Organizations				
		Centralized religious organizations	Local religious organizations	Spirituality educational institutions	Monasteries and church	Religious institutions
All Religious organizations	24624	464	23246	202	440	272
Russian Orthodox Church	13943	100	13119	59	429	236
Islam	4317	78	4132	106	-	1
Buddhism	221	11	207	3	-	-
Hinduism	276	9	263	1	-	3
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)	55	1	54	-	-	-
Unification Church (Moonies)	6	1	5	-	-	-
Church of mother of God	19	1	18	-	-	-
Church of last statement	5	1	4	-	-	-
Church of Christ	20	1	19	-	-	-
Church of scientology	1	-	1	-	-	-
Hinduism	1	-	1	-	-	-
Krishna conscience (ISKCON)	75	2	73	-	-	-
Bahai faith	16	1	15	-	-	-

Source: (Russian Federation, Federal State statistics services)

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