

Premises for the Penetration of Eastern Thought in Bulgaria

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Abstract

There are many factors that facilitate the perception of Eastern thought in Bulgaria. In this paper, I will regard two groups of premises: spiritual heritage and political history. In the first part, I will discuss the peculiarities of Christianity in Bulgaria as well as some specific Bulgarian answers to the spiritual quests at the beginning of last century, especially the ideas of Dunovism with its ambivalent attitude to Eastern teachings. In the second part, I will regard the period of socialism in Bulgaria with the impact of atheistic education and the activity of Lyudmila Zhivkova. I regard the influence of Dunovism, which prepared the inner spiritual soil for accepting the Eastern ideas, and the activity of Lyudmila Zhivkova, who introduced these ideas as a state policy, as a unique combination that facilitated the wide spread of yoga, meditation and different kinds of Far East spiritual teachings after the changes at the end of 1980s.

Keywords: Eastern teachings, Dunovism, Lyudmila Zhivkova, yoga.

1. Introduction

In recent years in the world, there is a great interest towards Eastern practices and teachings. Buddhist meditation, yoga and martial arts become more and more a part of Western life. Researchers notice "Yoga today is a thoroughly globalized phenomenon. A profusion of yoga classes and workshops can be found in virtually every city in the Western world and (increasingly) throughout the Middle East, Asia, South and Central America and Australasia... yoga has taken the world by storm" (Singleton & Byrne, 2008: 1). Similar are observations about Buddhism: "... during the last two decades, Buddhist groups and centres have flourished and multiplied to an extent never before observed during Buddhism's 150 years of dissemination outside of Asia. For the first time in its history, Buddhism has become established virtually on every continent." (Baumann, 2001: 4).

While this spread of Eastern teachings is a global phenomenon that has global reasons, each country has its specificity in its manifestation and premises that influence it. Bulgaria is among the countries with durable and stable interest towards these teachings, especially to yoga. It is commonly recognized that during the period of socialism the attitude to yoga in Bulgaria was an exception among other socialist countries (see Tietke, 2011) and that now yoga in Bulgaria is developed very well and in ashrams in India groups from small Bulgaria are among the biggest ones (according to my responders from Ireland and Germany).

What are the reasons for this interest? In this paper, I outline some peculiarities that might have influence on the perception of Eastern thought in Bulgaria. They could be distinguished in two groups: spiritual heritage and political history.

1.1 Spiritual heritage

Historical peculiarities of Christianity in Bulgaria as well as specific Bulgarian answers to the spiritual quests at the beginning of last century are among the most important factors of the specific spiritual heritage in Bulgaria that have influence on the perception of Eastern teachings here.

2. Historical peculiarities of Christianity in Bulgaria include: The role of early spiritual teachings and peculiarities of Orthodox Christianity – the role of the church during the period of Ottoman rule

2.1 Early spiritual teachings

In the lands of contemporary Bulgaria, the primary Christianity was spread and special Christian teachings were developed. These are Bogomilism and Hesychasm.

Bogomilism is a special form of spiritual and social teaching, “extremely spiritualized Bulgarian Christian movement” (Vachkova, 2017: 10). It has ambiguous interpretations being “understood as yet another dualistic heresy, or else as a specific Bulgarian mission” (Vachkova, 2017: 7). Therefore, it is presented either as modification of “Eastern dualistic teachings”, or “as a unique Bulgarian conception” (Vachkova, 2017: 10).

Bogomilism proclaimed a strict distinction between matter and spirit. As Bulgarian historian Vesselina Vachkova points out “Parallel to this development, partly as a reaction against its manifest dualism, there emerged in the local Christian communities, and began to spread an equally austere and spiritualizing, while definitely non-dualistic at dogmatic level, doctrine, namely, Hesychasm. With its meditative ascetic practices Hesychasm was to try and fail to sanctify the body through the belief in human ability to overcome it even during one’s earthly existence and contemplate the divine light within one’s heart and mind” (Vachkova, 2017: 33-35).

Both Bogomilism and Hesychasm accentuated on spiritual practices and presented “tendency for overly-spiritual and mystical interpretation of divine matters” (Vachkova 2017: 32). The main characteristics of religious “was a marked penchant for mystical and overly-spiritual approach to faith” (Vachkova, 2017: 30-31), extremely ascetic (*Ibid*, 31), “seclusion and monasticism” (*Ibid*, 42), “meditative and intellectually-tuned monastic brotherhood” (*Ibid*, 39).

The influence of both teachings on the spiritual heritage could be sought in two directions. From one side, they have a strong accent on inner practices, a strive for spiritual development and taught that only the inner path could lead to God. From the other side, they are connected with original apostolic Christianity and keep the vision that there is such Christianity that is different from official institutions that were established later.

2.2 Peculiarities of Orthodox Christianity

Orthodox Christianity has some peculiarities that make it closer to Eastern traditions than Catholicism and Protestantism. Usually it is interpreted as more mystical while Catholicism is more interpreted as more rational, and Protestantism is more directed towards outward practice.

Mysticism of Orthodox Christianity is in several interconnected aspects:

- Its apophatism;
- In its basis on spiritual experience.

Orthodox Christianity claims that God could not be explained through rational methods and could not be grasped within rational categories. It denies possibilities to understand and express God's essence.

Apophatism of Orthodox Christianity is outlined as its most specific feature: "If Orthodox theology was characterized by a single stream, then this would surely be the apophatic orientation of the whole theological view. All the true Orthodox theology is apophatic in its root. Apophaticism is "a fundamental characteristic of the whole theological tradition of the Eastern Church". This negative (apophasis) view of non-knowledge (agnosia) or learned ignorance begins with the praise of God's mystery, not with a rational annihilation or explanation" (Clendenin, 2011).

In tune with the conviction that the essence of God could not be grasped, Orthodox Christianity underlines that it could not be explained neither as only transcendent nor as solely immanent. Immanence and transcendence lead to each other. According to the orthodox theologian V. N. Lossky, "In the immanence of Revelation, God affirms Himself as transcendental to creation" (Lossky, 1972: 133).

The idea of mutuality of these opposites is presented in the very important for Orthodox Christianity idea of Christ as a God-man. According to Orthodox Christianity in his personality, "the transcendental divine Truth has become immanent to the man, objectively immanent, and represents a direct, ever-living historical reality. In order to make it his own, subjectively immanent reality, man should through exercise of his God-man virtues to make the Lord Christ the soul of his soul, the heart of his heart, the life of his life" (Popovich, 2003).

The main aim of Orthodox Church is "to lead a person to theosis (or divinisation), to fellowship and union with God" (Ierofey, 2009), to transform man into a God-man. Fjodor Dostoevski, for example, sees a sin of Catholicism in its attempt to replace God-human with human-God shifting in this way the accent from divine to humanity. The strive for inner transformation in Orthodox Christianity is connected with the importance of practices for inner development. Because of the mystical approach, the inward practices are of great importance here. The main aim could not be achieved by reasoning but by real transformative life: "Orthodox spirituality is an experience of life in Christ, the atmosphere of a new person, revived by the grace of God. This is not about an abstract emotional and psychological state, but about the unity of man with God" (Ierofey, 2009). Spiritual transformation of man is its real salvation that "is not a problem of the mental perception of truth, but the transfiguration and divinization of man by grace" (*Ibid.*).

This transformation is interpreted as a "spiritual healing" that should be lived, not rationalized and it is seen as a main difference from the other Christian denominations that "do not have a tradition of spiritual healing" and "believe that rational faith in God is our salvation" (*Ibid.*). According to Orthodox Christianity "there is faith from hearing the Word and faith from contemplation – the vision of God. First, we accept faith from hearing in order to be healed, and then we gain faith from contemplation that saves a person" (*Ibid.*). The most important method for Orthodox Christianity is real constant spiritual practice. This practice consists of purification, enlightenment and divinization – processes that „do not mean the stages of anthropocentric activity, but the results of God's uncreated energy" (*Ibid.*).

Apophatism and inner development are interconnected: "At the moment they cross the line from a verbal prayer to a contemplation and gain a few faithful followers, Christian ascetics become mystics. They seek and find enlightenment not in the definitions of heresy or orthodoxy,

but in the depths of their souls, where they seem to discover the purpose of their escape from the world. For the mystics, God is no longer a Creator or the root cause of all things but a state of mind” (Glishev & Sharankova, 2010).

The aim of the mystical path and the mystical apophatic union that denies abilities of senses and intellect is described profoundly by Dionysius the Areopagite in his *Mystical Theology*: “... direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty...”

“... in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of yourself and of all things you may be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness”¹.

It is obvious that this mystical path has much in common with Eastern teachings that are based on mystical experience. Therefore, Eastern Christianity has common features with some Eastern teachings and in many aspects was directly influenced by them. According to many authors “the roots of Christian mysticism can probably be found outside Christianity itself... In cultural and historical terms, the traditions that most likely influenced early Christian mysticism are the Neo-Platonic and Mithraism, as well as some other Oriental cults” (Glishev & Sharankova, 2010).

So, in Orthodox Christianity there is a great theoretical and practical (in the sense of inner practices) propinquity with Eastern teachings and Eastern vision and approach to reality. This similarity is recognized: “In Eastern religions, of course, one can find a desire to purify the mind of images and thoughts” (Ierofey, 2009). This, however, is interpreted as very superficial likeness: “this is a movement to nowhere, into non-existence. There is no way that would lead to the divinization of man” (*Ibid.*). Therefore, Orthodox Christianity insists that “Orthodox spirituality and Eastern religions are divided by a vast abyss, despite some external similarity in terminology. For example, Eastern religions may use the terms ecstasy, impassivity, intuition, mind, enlightenment, and so on, but they are filled with completely different content than the corresponding terms of Orthodox spirituality” (Ierofey, 2009).

Besides, Orthodox Christianity is a religion that could be defined as closed and not inclined to discuss different traditions. It regards everything outside itself, including other Christian denominations, as a heresy.

2.3 Role of the church during the period of Ottoman rule

The role of the church during the period of Ottoman rule was ambivalent. From one side, during this period the Church was ruled by non-Bulgarian authority and was a subject of a critical attitude. From the other side, Christianity as well as the fight for independent Church was the most important factor for union and feeling of self-identity and belonging. It is a common knowledge that Christianity keep the Bulgarian self-identity during the centuries.

So, in Bulgaria, from one side, there is a heritage of strong mystical lineages that are in theoretical and practical kinship with Eastern teachings. From the other side, however, on the

¹ <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeII/MysticalTheology.html>.

level of Church as institution, there is a strict closeness and lack of disposition for discussion and dialogue.

3. Theosophical, mystical and occult quests at the beginning of last century

Along with the undoubtedly mystical and intrinsically orientated Christian tradition, in Bulgaria as elsewhere in Europe there was interest to theosophy and other “occult” teachings that facilitate the penetration of Eastern teachings in later time.

3.1 *Theosophical quests that are in accordance with the development abroad*

The period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a period of rapid development of occultism, religious and philosophical quests. Books of Elena Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, Ani Besant, and Charles Leadbeater were translated. In 1903 in Sofia the Theosophical Society in Bulgaria was established. It published journals: *Bulgarian Theosophical Review* (1904-1907), *The Road* (1907-1908), *Theosophy* (1912-1925), and *Anhira* (1921-1923), *Anhira* that was transformed in *Orpheus* (1923-1925). In these journals, texts of Blavatsky, Uspensky and Rudolf Steiner, as well as works of Nikolay Roerich, Geo Milev, Nikolay Raynov, Lev Tolstoy, Maurice Maeterlinck, August Strindberg, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Rabindranath Tagore were published.

Very important figure who made connection between different kinds of knowledge and perception of the world was Nikolay Raynov. He has many books: collections of fairy tales from all over the world (1930-1934) in 30 volumes; *Eternal in our Literature* in 9 volumes; *History of Plastic Arts* in 12 volumes, *Association Roerich* (1930), etc. Significant for rethinking of Bulgarian spiritual heritage was his book *Bogomil Legends*, where Bogomilism was presented as the heretical ferment of all reformist spiritual movements, the connecting link between Eastern and Western religious systems, a model of a syncretic religion, a core containing the world's esoteric knowledge.

Another important figure who made link between East and West in terms of art was the artist Boris Georgiev. He was named “an artist of the Spirit between East and West”. Boris Georgiev was famous with his journey to India, meetings with Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and travels to Himalayas. He admitted Nikolay Roerich as his the spiritual master and as we will see Roerich will play a special role in the opening towards mystery of Eastern culture.

3.2 *Original Bulgarian contribution to the spiritual quests of the last century*

The most important Bulgarian answer to the spiritual quests at the beginning of last century, however, was *Dunovism*.

Dunovism or the teaching of the Universal White Brotherhood was established in Bulgaria in the early 20th century. Dunovism was named after its founder Peter Dunov (1864-1944).

Peter Dunov received his higher education at the Faculty of Theology at the University of New Jersey and the Theological Faculty of Harvard University in Boston. He studied medicine as well. During his stay in the United States, he gained knowledge in theoretical, especially Protestant theology, was impressed by the ideas of Theosophy, occultism, and Eastern philosophy. The combination of all these ideas influenced the teaching he developed when returning in Bulgaria.

In many aspects, his teaching is original but it undoubtedly uses some concepts and ideas from Theosophy, Bogomilism, as well as by Eastern, especially Indian, teachings. It gives a

comprehensive and overall vision about the state and development of human being regarding human as a being evolving to his higher and divine spirituality and giving methods for this development.

Several features of this teaching facilitate or are in tune with Eastern teachings that came later.

First, it creates an atmosphere of rethinking the attitude toward Christianity and the church.

It defines itself as representing the true authentic Christianity as it was before being distorted by reasons that are not connected with spirituality. Christ is considered as a Teacher, not as a Son of God and God is perceived as an impersonal pantheistic or panentheistic (in Western interpretation) essence.

Dunovism claims also to be an authentic Bulgarian teaching, a crown of a spiritual triad that includes Orphism and Bogomilism. These three teaching are interpreted as three great spiritual waves that place Bulgaria at a very important place for spiritual culture of humanity. Dunovism underlines the significance of Bulgaria as a spiritual centre. According to it, a symbolic representative of the sacredness of the place is Rila Mountain, the highest mountain in the Balkan Peninsula. It is revealed as being as important for the spiritual heritage and development of humankind as are Himalayas in India. In such a way, a spiritual kinship between the Indian and Bulgarian cultures is outlined and these adds to the greater interest towards Indian culture and ideas.

In terms of structure and organization, in Dunovism there is no formal membership, the followers may belong to whatever church they want. Dunovism is organized on the model of free structures of friends or like-minded people who follow because of inner conviction the authority of a teacher and the charisma of a person rather than some established institutions or governing bodies. In this, it is also in tune with Eastern teachings that are structured in Europe because of personal not authoritative relations.

Second, many concepts and ideas of Dunovism have direct parallels to Eastern teachings. Dunov widely uses some important categories of Eastern philosophy, such as karma, reincarnation, prana, nirvana regarding them, however, not as belonging to one single culture but as belonging to the old authentic universal and forgotten knowledge.

The overall vision of Dunovism is in tune with many ideas of Indian thought, especially with the idea of unity and oneness. In the following words, for example, we can see parallels with Vedanta and Buddhism:

“There is unity in being. For example, you stand among a hundred mirrors and see yourself in a hundred places in different poses. Your reflection is in hundred places, but you are one. All those you see in the mirror of Being are shadows, and the One who is outside the mirror is real ... The humiliation of one person is the humiliation of others. The success of somebody is our success. The virtues of all people are our virtues. The mistakes of others are our mistakes. There is one life. Life in us and in all beings is the same. In some chosen moments of life, when you are in an uplifted state, the great truth about the unity of all flashes for a moment and then you return to your ordinary consciousness ...” (Dunov, 2019: 367)

Third, very important for Dunovism is the idea that the truth cannot be achieved through reasoning and intellectual speculation. The most important is inner spiritual path and spiritual practices.

“Contrary to the understanding of Western European philosophy in general, mainly in the face of German transcendental philosophy, that the truth could be achieved speculatively, that is, without experience, the Master shares the understanding that the great spiritual discoveries

and understanding of the truth could not be revealed without real moral uplifting and purification, without awakening the latent spiritual powers and abilities of human being. The emphasizing of practice and placing the experience in front of speculative knowledge (in this case, metaphysics) does not at all underestimate the latter. It, however, can only come to life after the results of lived experience or a specific spiritual practice are achieved” (Bachev, 2009).

Accentuating importance of practice, Dunovism is in tune with all Eastern teachings where it is the spiritual and moral practices that are the starting point and aims of all theoretical ideas and considerations.

In its practices Dunovism have many parallels with Eastern teachings as well. The main practices are based on meditation and breathing exercises. Even the names sometimes are with Indian origin as for example “Surya Yoga” or “Yoga of the Sun”. This meditation is practiced between the spring and autumn equinoxes at sunrise that is interpreted as a time of renewal. Just as the sun is the center of the solar system, through meditation practitioners should establish connection with the center of their being.

So, Dunovism has many similarities with Eastern teachings and share many common ideas with them.

Dunov explicitly states that “the philosophy of ancient India gives all these answers” that contemporary church fails to answer. As Dunovism, the Indian philosophy reveals that “the man is an immortal being, who is reborn by perfecting himself in order to attain ‘nirvana’, to merge with the Whole and to live in eternal bliss”. Peter Dunov uses the very term “yoga”. For him yoga is a person who had achieved the most essential core of his being and acquired many virtues: “every person must first work to achieve his essential core. Do not strive to achieve all virtues at once. It is enough for you to attain one virtue every year... If you achieve one virtue every year, in 25 years you will acquire 25 virtues, and a person with 25 virtues is already yoga. Becoming man of yoga it is enough just to raise his hand and the living nature will answer him. It knows him and therefore meets all his wishes” (Dunov, 1926). Yoga, however, is interpreted not in its concrete Indian realization but as a name for a high spiritual state of being.

Peter Dunov distinguishes his teaching and practices from the Eastern ones. Regarding yoga, he explicitly states: “Most of the people who practice yoga cannot understand the thinking of Indians at all. They view exercises and meditation techniques as some kind of healing and relaxation exercises. They do not realize that these are powerful weapons for building and displaying a certain type of consciousness and behavior. And that this awakened consciousness from the past will bring them back thousands of years, long before their already Christian definition”². Therefore, he insists that “Their methods involve great risks and they are not adapted to the physical body of the European. Remember this well” (*Ibid.*). According to him, Hinduist methods are “inapplicable to Europeans”. Explaining this inapplicability, he uses ideas that could be found in Indian cosmogony. According to this cosmogony, humankind periodically alternately passes through periods of entering of the spirit into matter and ascending of matter to the spirit. The first phase is interpreted as involution, the second as evolution. Peter Dunov insists that yoga practices were created in the previous period of involution while after the coming of Christ we are in a new period of evolution. Being created for a different period of the development of humankind yoga practices are in accordance with different vision of reality that is already not suitable for the new trend of development. After Christ who had brought the religion of love, mutual help and forgiveness, we need another type of exercises. Peter Dunov offered many kinds of physical, musical, and breathing exercises that could help for the physical, spiritual and mental growth of a person. The most important method is Paneurhythmy. Paneurhythmy is a circle dance in accordance with “the supreme cosmic rhythm”. Its most important features is that it is performed

² <https://spirituallight3.wordpress.com>.

in accordance with the rhythm of the sun in its day and annual cycles and it is performed not individually but in a group accentuating in such a way on the mutuality among human beings, from one side, and on mutuality of human beings and the cosmos, from the other side.

In the English version of Wikipedia Dunovism is defined as “New Age-oriented new religious movement”³. It, however, is different from the most amount of such movement and its difference is in the fact that it had a stable presence in the spiritual and cultural life of Bulgaria during two world wars, becoming the most influential occult-mystical teaching. A proof for its success in attracting people is the very negative reaction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church towards its ideas.

Dunovism has a great impact among the intellectuals and this is kept during the communist time as well, in spite of discrimination. After changes in 1989, it acquires a new popularity and rapid development.

It has complex relations with Eastern teachings. From one side – mutual respect and kinship, from the other – strict distinguishing from these “out-of-date” teachings. Nevertheless, in practice, there are many common contacts, initiatives, and performances with groups who are practicing Eastern teachings. Many followers of these teachings in one or other periods of their development have some contact with ideas of Dunovism and sometimes this Bulgarian teaching is their starting point to the Eastern teachings, milestone or even final stage on their spiritual journey.

4. The supposed kinship of the Bulgarians with the East

Among the spiritual heritage a specific premise for positive attitude to Eastern teachings, is the idea of the kinship between old Eastern cultures and Old Bulgarian culture.

There are many examples of this idea. Here I will cite the site of Bulgarian Yoga Federation where the presentation of the history of yoga in Bulgaria begins with the following affirmation:

“What is the connection between this ancient science and the Bulgarian people, whose roots also come from antiquity?

The studies of our historians P. Dobrev, Sl. Tonchev and others show that the origin of Bulgarians is in the Far East, in the Imeon Mountains, located in Tibet. According to other studies, the Bulgarians, called in those times “honuri”, lived at the border of contemporary China and India. The ancient Indian literary source, the Mahabharata, which contains one of the first historical accounts of Bulgarians, tells us about “bolhiki”, a people with their own way of life and culture... In the preserved stone inscriptions of the Proto-Bulgarians the most common (157 times) word is the word IYI – “yug”, which is the main root of the word “yoga”. Of particular interest is the seven-beam rosette found in Pliska, where this word is the main one in the inscriptions on its rays. The word “yug” or “yu” means “yoga, god, and union with god.” These inscriptions are interpreted by V. Luchanski as mantras (words with sacred sound) that correspond in sound to the seven chakras (according to yoga – energy centers – vortices of the human body). The inscriptions on the rosette were read and translated by Swami Chitananda, the head of the ashram in Rishikesh, North India. According to him, the inscriptions are in the ancient sacred language of the yogis, and in translation their content is the following: “Get rid of duality through yoga. Relive the suffering through yoga”.⁴

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_White_Brotherhood.

⁴ <https://yoga-bf.com>.

Many contemporary books of the so called “folk history” discuss the mutual influence of the Old Bulgarian culture and Eastern cultures and even the impact of the Bulgarian culture on the development of old Indian and Chinese cultures. Writers in this field find many proofs for this impact. They consider the Old Bulgarian calendar as the prototype of old Chinese calendar, regard Laozi as a Bulgarian thinker and so on.

Here I will not comment the validity of these assertions. I want only to accentuate that among some circles in Bulgaria there is a conviction of such kinship. Therefore, in these circles Eastern teachings are accepted as a return to the one’s own roots, as remembering of one’s own forgotten tradition.

5. Peculiarities of the socialist period

First substantial introduction of Eastern teachings in Europe was during the period of socialism. This was a time of openness of Europe towards teachings and spirituality that comes from India and Far East. In Bulgaria, this interest has specific reasons and manifestation.

5.1 *Consequences of atheistic education*

One of the most important specific of the period was strong atheistic education. Atheism has at least two important consequences regarding the issue of penetrating of Eastern spirituality in Bulgaria.

From one side, it creates specific spiritual vacuum and necessity to fill it with some alternative.

From the other side, the lack of attachment to a particular religious ideology combined with nurturing of a critical and curious attitude toward the unknown creates openness and ability to accept the new and unknown ideas without prejudices.

I would like to emphasize, based on my own observations and experience, that atheist education, paradoxically as it may sound, does not narrow the worldview. In Bulgaria, religious ideology has been replaced by the Marxist ideology. To a great extent, this ideology does not offer ready solutions to the problems. It is based on the laws of dialectics and one of its main goals is to search for the causes and roots of events, not to present ready information. It is true that these causes and roots are interpreted in terms of materialism. Even in this case, however, the ideology is based on elaborated philosophy. That is why education during this period is focused towards creating a curiosity to the unknown and developing a searching mind that is not satisfied with ready answers.

5.2 *Activity of Lyudmila Zhivkova*

Another important factor during this period was the activity of Lyudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of the communist leader of the country at that time and head of the Bulgarian Committee of culture (1975-1981). Being inspired by the ideas of esoteric Eastern spirituality as presented by the Russian artist and philosopher Nikolay Roerich, in a very short period she opened Bulgaria to intensive cultural and spiritual communication with India and the Far East.

As we mentioned the Russian painter, writer, archaeologist, theosophist, philosopher and public figure Nikolay Roerich has a special place in the spiritual life in Bulgaria at the first part of the last century. During the seventies Lyudmila Zhivkova accepted as her personal mission his ideas about evolution of human civilization, union of the cultures of East and West, new and ancient knowledge, science and religion as well as the vision of the high mission of art for

brotherhood among people in the name of universal harmony and beauty. Having high position at Bulgarian government, she was able to put the ideas that inspired her in practice.

Within several years, she performed great activities. After the ideas of Roerich, she developed long-term programs for “Harmonious Development of Human Personality” and “Peace through Culture”. She initiates “Decade of great personalities” and organized wide presentation of the ideas of Roerich, Leonardo da Vinci and Lenin. The list should be continued with Rabindranath Tagore but her sudden death prevented this.

The year 1978 was announced as the year of Nikolay Roerich. Lyudmila Zhivkova presented him as follows: “With his thought Roerich soars above the peaks of the Himalayas, rushes into the hidden world of legends, merges in an unstoppable creative impulse of the spirit with a monolithic in its integrity Universe” (Zhivkova, 1979: 22).

In accordance with the ideas of Nikolay Roerich she organized the Children’s Assembly “Banner of Peace” under the motto “Unity, Creativity, Beauty” initiating an attempt to educate the new generation in a completely new kind of thinking and consciousness. With the same aim, she tried to develop new sets of interdisciplinary laboratories and entire Institutes based on the unique experience of the Institute of Himalayan Studies “Uruswati”, created by the Roerich family in the Kulu Valley of India.

One of her realized project was building of the National Palace of Culture that has rich esoteric symbolism.

All these activities contribute to the informing of the wide lay audience with new ideas that have strong spiritual character and Eastern origin.

Ludmila Zhivkova herself was practicing yoga and meditation. She travelled several times to India and invited and welcomed in Bulgaria many Indian teachers. They gave lectures, performed workshops, initiated followers and for a relatively short time the interest towards Indian culture and spiritual heritage was an official Bulgarian policy.

Therefore, since the end of seventies of last century yoga teaching in Bulgaria has official history and state support. In 1978 a Yoga section in the Bulgarian Union for Physical Education and Sport was established.

Activity of Lyudmila Zhivkova as well as activity of the White Brotherhood are subject of many and contradictory assessments. Nevertheless, the influence of Dunovism, which prepared the inner spiritual soil for accepting the Eastern ideas, and the activity of Lyudmila Zhivkova, who introduced these ideas as a state policy, is a unique combination that facilitated the wide spread of yoga, meditation and different kinds of Far East spiritual teachings after the changes at the end of 1980s.

6. Conclusions

Bulgaria is at the border of East and West. It is “the East” for other parts of Europe. Its spiritual heritage is close to some Eastern theoretical ideas and practices especially of Indian origin. Bulgarians feel inner kinship with spiritual ideas of the East and some of them regard the land of Bulgaria with Rila Mountain as so sacred and spiritual place as India and Tibet with Himalaya mountains.

Bulgaria itself is recognized by spiritual gurus coming here as a country that still does not suffer greatly from the negative effects of globalization.

Atheistic education during communism combined with very good level of average education makes Bulgarians open and free to study and explore new ideas.

It is important to notice that Bulgaria has no colonial past and does not share the feeling of colonial sin that is particular for some West Europeans. In Bulgaria, there is no feeling of superiority of the white race. Other cultures are accepted as equal and attracting. At the same time, in terms of Orthodox Christianity, every other religion, even other Christian denominations, is heresy.

Unlike most West European countries, in Bulgaria there is no great number of immigrants from non-Islamic Asia who could want to establish their own religious organizations or institutions. Therefore, followers of Eastern teachings are predominantly Bulgarians.

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