Alternative Social Projects of New Age Cults

Western sources on issues connected with sects have consistently defined the variety of mystical cults of recent period New Age (NA). It is noteworthy that the notion of NA is all too often equated with a wide range of phenomena that bear no resemblance to religious undertones. One of the most widespread concepts prevalent in authentic literature is “new thinking” which implies a definite kind of a person’s of “new age” mentality and a purported “new research methodology” alike. The 60-s of the XX century are considered to be the birth and development of NA although mass movements that developed a conception under identical title took place in the XIX century.

As a result of elaborative study of background sources dedicated to the social phenomenon in question the following trends of research into NA phenomenon can be traced: type and nature of human activity, peculiarities of creed; theological criteria. However, researchers, as we believe, deviated from the initial meaning of this concept, i.e. a «new» period in human history, which is called by the adherents of NA “the era of Aquarius”, “satti-yuga”, the humanity of the 6-th race. NA adherents look upon themselves as founders and bearers of religion of this new time. In this connection we found it imperative to analyze models of this “new time” drawing on their numerous apologetic publications.

As we suppose, the understanding of NA phenomena is made possible through their examination in the light of social and psychological aspects. This approach was exercised to analysis of authentic NA sources and as the outcome of our research the following criteria of

NA as a religious phenomenon were put forward: 1) contemporary man and society as the objects of criticism in NA cults; 2) specific traits of the person of era to come which are consistent with NA creed; 3) features that a person and community are purported to possess during the transition period according to NA; 4) requirements to future community.

It is common knowledge that models of ideal social set-up and ideal man have been created throughout history. In fact, these models are perpetuated in the dogmas of every religious cult. What makes NA cults stand out from the rest is their inclination to globalization. In modern NA cults these criteria are materialized into the following content.

1. The reason for negative development of the world is a man who developed one’s mind without consideration for divine command and to the detriment of one’s own spirituality and who created a destructive civilization which is doomed to perish. The emerged civilization makes the situation even worse and impedes human evolution in the proper direction. More often than not criticism in NA is assailed on the following components of the modern world: science, technical progress, culture, religion, peculiarities of mentality and inner world of a person. Ideologists of NA declare the following way out of this predicament. They claim that God (High mind, the Universe or any high energy of the same meaning) from time to time send a messenger to Earth (Christ, Buddha, Confucius, Lao-Dzy, Zaroastr, etc.) But they came too early and humanity was not mature enough to adopt “the high truth” and therefore religions that were modeled after them proved to be “wrong”. But isolated sages assimilated “the truth” and handed it out to selected followers. In connection with the fact that humanity with its civilization drew to a deadlock they found it necessary to enlighten people and deliver this knowledge to them. This is what is known to be by new ageists esoteric knowledge or religion of New Age.

2. According to NA ideology the mind of a “new” person should be all-embracing, that is “natural”, “planetary”, “cosmic”. On the one hand, such mode of consciousness suggests care for the whole Earth and space, on the other hand, a specific mode of transcendentalism (or even mode of life), which rules out any reasoning, attachment of mind to body but incorporates a hypothetic “cosmic” or “natural” fullness. This “new” man of “the 6-th race” must be blessed, to NA ideologists, with supernatural abilities.

3. To become an evolutionary basis of a person of “the 6-th race” a modern man must be an ardent follower of NA, choose the way of «conscious evolution», and take a “mentor” who “knows the way”. The role of “mentors” in spiritual perfection of a person is emphasized in all NA trends. They are considered to be endowed with “high knowledge” transcended to them from the mentors of “high order”. The information on management and
activity of the organization and its members is received by the “mentor” via contact with and “messages” from “high forces”.

4. The ideal social community of the future is perceived by NA ideology as a terrestrial “spiritual unity” or brotherhood that embodies a hierarchy of “mentors” who supervise the conduct and inner world of every person since the cradle.5.

The same social and psychological aspects of NA cults reverberate in masonry. To give a definite example they are examined in the works of A. Pyke (1809-1891) – «The State Great Commander» (330) «Ancient and Adopted Scottish Statute of Masons» the USA6.

The aforesaid ideas are typical of occult and mystical trends of NA which can be summarized as theosophical. But at present NA ideas are circulating in physicality version of occult and mystical trend and new pagan and Oriental NA trends.

In “theosophical” the highest sacral structure of the world represents a hierarchy suggested by E. Blavatskaya and named as «Cosmic Hierarchy of Mentors» or «Great White Brotherhood», aimed at creating an “ideal” society. The so-called “earth level” reflects the hierarchy of present mentors called to bring into life messages of “mentors of humanity”7.

Physicality version of modern occult and mystical trend has no evident hierarchy. The highest force here is “High Mind” that embodies a materialistic substance. It manages the world and people with a help of different material “forces” and “energies”. The popular idea remains that of existence of special physical fields («biological field», «soliton», «lepton», «torsion» and «energy-informational» field, etc.) which work all “miracles”8. Scientifically-biased organizations of this kind speak of themselves as scientific teams. Organizations of this kind have their own “interacademic assessment commission”, granting

7 See: Чистые зерна (Послания из Мира Светлинаты). –М., 1999; Уведомление Майтрейи. –М., 1999 ( Издания Братства Майтрейи)
“scientific” degrees to its followers. They have their body registering “scientific” discoveries in NA sphere⁹.

In contemporary Oriental versions there are social ideas. For example, Shri Schri Ravi Shankar declares that “New age” is renaissance of Golden Age of Ancient India. So his technique of meditation contributes to creating new man and society.¹⁰ According to supporters of Sahadz Yoga salvation of the world and creation of a new type of civilization depends on ideology and yoga exercises by Shri Matagi Nirmala Devi¹¹.

A new pagan movement can be categorized into three trends: national paganism, nature-oriented paganism and paganism based on cult practices of the Orient and Ancient Egypt.

The ideology of national paganism draws on arbitrary reconstruction of ancient Slavonic pagan denominations and social set-up. To apologists view at prehistoric time in Eurasia there was a Slavonic civilization which was later destroyed by “Christian expansion”¹². Social projects of the future of “Slavonic world” as viewed by this trend of NA are connected with renewal of this ancient religion and hierarchal structure of society. At the same time there are extreme groups and organizations in national paganism.

The ideas of modeling society after the framework of Ancient Egyptian civilization are brought to the surface of the conception of “Dead Water” of Russian party¹³. According to this conception the power should be concentrated not in the hands of secular governor (Pharaoh), but priests, who keep the mystery of structure of the universe.

The most utopian models of social set-up are inherent in nature-oriented versions of new paganism practicing veneration and worshipping nature. According to these models a man ought to live not in civilian but natural conditions. He or she can obtain everything for survival and spiritual development¹⁴.

---

¹⁰ Шанкар Рави, Шри Шри Мудрость нового тысячелетия. – СПб. Международный фонд «Искусство Жизни»; Крита, 2003. – 176 p..
¹⁴ See works of V. Megre of the series “Anastasia”, Л.Стаховцов «Tales, stories, instructions, riddles and other texts» (materials of the so-called Scherbovskoe brotherhood.)
In modern world we are witnesses of polarizing religions of the world. Polarization manifests itself in participation of religious figures in politics, using religious motives in political and economical competition. At present NA movement is a new political reality. “Spiritual practices” it suggests have social undertones. Neglecting conceptions of a new society and new man which are being elaborated within its framework is fraught with new social cataclysms.