Universal Sufism and the Cultic Milieu in Russia at Turn of the XX Century

Oleg Yarosh[1]

Present paper focuses on a little-known period of the Inayati Movement development, namely on Inayat Khan's stay in Russia in October 1913 – May 1914. This short but very intense period was filled with musical performances by Inayat Khan and his brothers and multiple encounters with the emblematic representatives of Russian creative intelligentsia and esoteric circles of that time, as well as with the local Muslim elite. I would argue that reception of Inayat Khan's mystical and aesthetic concepts in Russian cultic milieu was informed by its interest in the Theosophical doctrines, through prism of which they appropriated exotic ideas of «Sufi Wisdom».

Keywords: Cultic milieu, Silver Age, Theosophy, Theurgy, Universal Sufism

In the beginning of XXth century before the WWI and the Revolutionary turmoil of 1917 Russian Empire still was a predominantly Orthodox Christian country with a significant Muslim population in Volga Region, Northern Caucasus and Central Asia where Sufism was a mainstream Islamic trend. The most popular among local Muslims were different offshoots of the *Naqhsbandiyya* Sufi order (*tariqa*). Even Islamic modernism (*jadidism*) at that time still was closely connected to Sufism and many prominent Sufis pave the way for Islamic educational reforms in these lands (Kemper and Shikhaliev 2015: 604-605).

Nevertheless, Sufism has little impact on the cultic milieu in Russian Empire. Despite the wide spread of Islam, Muslims

[1] Oleg Yarosh is Head of Oriental Philosophy Department at the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. His main research interests include: Islam in Central and Eastern Europe, Western Sufism, Anthropology of Religion and Comparative Philosophy. Present paper has been written during his research stay at the Polish Institute of Advanced Studies in October 2018 - February 2019.

Mondi 1-2019 (April 2019): 101-120 – ISSN 2533-1450 // ISBN 978-88-6496-463-8

were regarded here as aliens (*inorodcy*) and were largely stigmatized in the discourse of metropolitan intelligentsia, and Sufism was virtually unknown outside its historical regions, i.e. Central Asia, Caucasus and Volga region.

Late XIXth and early XXth centuries or «Fin-de-siècle» in Russia were marked by the resurgence of mystical currents both in the Orthodox Church and extra-confessional. In many regions of Russia in countryside, regional cities and even in the metropolitan capitals Moscow and Sankt-Petersburg authority of the official Orthodox Church was challenged by the widespread mystical movements an sects like «*Khlysty*» and «*Skoptsy*» (Etkind 1998).

Apart of popular mystical movements cultural milieu also known as «Silver Age» of Russian culture was deeply imbued with mystical imagery expressed in poetry, literature, music and art. Artistic salons in the metropolitan capitals hosted activities of Theosophical Society founded by Helena Blavatsky (1831 – 1891) (Carlson 1993), of followers of the artist and religious thinker Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947) and the composer and spiritual teacher Georges Gurdjieff (1866/1874–1949) who became emblematic figures of Western Esotericism.

Orientalist imagery found aesthetic expressions in poems of Nikolay Gumilev (1886–1921) and Sergei Yesenin (1895–1925). The Russian artist Vasily Vereshchagin (1842–1904) left a series of paintings depicting the Central Asian dervishes. Also late Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) was deeply influenced by Indian religious thought (Burba 2006).

1. *Cultic milieu of the Imperial capitals at turn of the century*

The Russian imperial cosmopolitanism was facilitated with orientalistic expressions in the fine arts, literature and alternative religiosity, that was consistent with the socio-cultural currents in Europe and North America of that time. Thus, fascination with «imagined Orient» also inspired interest to «Oriental» religious doctrines and practices.

The late XIXth – early XXth century accounts for the «Silver Age» or modernism period in Russian culture. This was a complex period of artistic and intellectual revival and social activism. It was imbued with passion for mysticism and alternative religiosity that had by then already won hearts and minds of the Euro-

pean «creative intelligentsia». Maria Carlson points out that «by the eve of the First World War St. Petersburg alone had more than thirty-five officially registered and chartered occult circles; there were also hundreds of unofficial and informal circles» (Carlson 1993: 5). The alternative religious circles also raised in Moscow and other major cities and spread to the remote provinces.

The two most important new religious movements in Russia were Theosophy and Spiritualism. The key figure in Russian Spiritualism who spread it among the Russian aristocratic circles and upper middle class was Aleksander Aksakov (1823–1903), the nephew of the writer Sergei Aksakov (1791–1859) and a cousin of poet Ivan Aksakov (1823–1886) and major ideologist of Slavainophils Konstantin Aksakov (1817–1860). He founded a journal *Psychische Studien* in Leipzig in 1874 and published materials on spiritualism and animal magnetism to promote ideas of Spiritualism (Carlson 1997: 137). Spiritualism was quite popular among the Fin-de-siècle creative intelligentsia in Russia including the Symbolist writers and poets Valery Briusov (1873–1924) and Andrei Bely (1880–1934), historical novelist Vsevolod Soloviev (1849–1903) among the others. Later some of them had switched to Theosophy.

It was predominantly theosophy that paves the way for the Eastern Religious traditions in Fin-de-siècle Russia and mediated their reception among Russian followers. The begetters of Theosophy was Russian born Elena Blavatsky and her friend practicing Spiritualism Colonel Henry Olcott (1832 – 1907) who founded Theosophical Society on November 17, 1875 in New York City.

Theosophy was spread in Russia long before the Russian Theosophical Society was officially established in St. Petersburg in 1908. Blavatky's younger sister novelist Vera Zhelikhovsky (1835-1896) played an important role in the dissemination of theosophical doctrines in Russia. Many Russians who traveled abroad became members of the national sections of the society in England, Belgium, Germany, and France (Carlson 1997: 139-141).

Vsevolod Soloviev who was interested in Spiritualism associated himself with Elena Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Theosophical Society in Paris. In 1886 he broke with Theosophical Society and published a critical book *Contemporary Priestess of Isis* (1893) where he refuted Theosophy and its adepts. He blamed success of the Theosophical Society on the tendency that he called after Max Nordau (1849–1923) «social degeneration»:

> Such a success of a this kind of thing could be ripen only on the ground, saturated with pathogenic evaporation, in the midst of precisely «degenerating» and at the same time unconsciously languishing in deep, painful disbelief milieu. When faith disappears in human society, superstitions of every kind are in its place. The languor of unbelief, that loosening degenerate organism fatally attracts to fanaticism of superstition, to the most cruel, insane and gloomy kind of fanaticism — for it marks the existence of a serious, rapidly taking root infection in society. (Soloviev 1893: 326)

At that time Soloviev became close to the influential conservative Orthodox religious leader and spiritual mentor John of Kronstadt (1829–1908), canonized in 1963. He presents quite ambiguous image of Elena Blavatsky in his biographical book written from the perspective conservative Orthodoxy.

> After all, if all these phenomena, everything is a mere deception – what is Elena Petrovna [Blavatsky]? In this case, she is a terrible and dangerous soul thief! And she, obviously, wants by all means to try to spread her web as far as possible, she wants to extend it to Russia. ... Then I had one more thought, or rather, another feeling: I, like Mrs. Y., was sorry for Elena Petrovna, this talented woman, who, despite everything, as I already noticed and sensed have not completely lost her soul yet. (Soloviev 1893: 66)

Meanwhile growing criticism of Theosophy in Russian magazines and newspapers wasn't able to prevent its dissemination and popularity in Fin-de-siècle cultural and cultic milieu and educated women played a major role in this process. Educational reforms in Russian Empire in the late XIXth century in Russian Empire pawed the way for women's education allowing middle-class women partial access to the public schools, including universities. The higher women's courses affiliated with the universities were established in major cities in the Russian Empire by 1880s. The educational reforms gave birth to the educated urban middle-class women known as «*kursistki*» (female courses' students) who facilitated feminist movement in Russia.

The urban middle-class *émancipé* and noblewomen have been playing an active role in the theosophist and spiritualist circles and were regulars at spiritualists and theosophists meetings that took place in artistic salons and private houses.

Carlson argues that the Russian Theosophists were involved in women's rights movement: «This connection of Theosophy and feminism was not at all unusual; such movements were attractive to an emerging class of professional and financially independent women» (Carlson 1997: 141).

Among the leadership of Russian Theosophist circles women were also predominant. Anna Kamenskaia (1867–1952), a prominent figure among the Russian mainstream Theosophists was elected president of the Russian Section of Theosophical Society in 1908 and her colleagues Elena Pisareva (1853–1944) and Anna Filosofova (1837–1912) as vise-presidents. Filosofova was a prominent Russian suffragette and a founder of the first women's association in Russia «Women's mutual charitable society». She was elected a deputy head of the «International Council of Women» in 1899.

The rival Theosophical circle inspired by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) and his Anthroposophy also had a female leadership. This influential group was associated with Anna Mintslova (1865–1910) a disciple of Steiner. His Christian-Theosophical synthesis, ideas of mystical Christianity, Rosicrucianism and his vision of Russian sacredness and its special mission had been especially appealing to the hearts and minds of the Russian creative intelligentsia. In his letter to Mintslova from March 23, 1908 Steiner points out that in Russian people «great theosophical treasure» (*der grossen theosophischen Schatz*) is hidden and what exactly is the substance of the people's souls (*Volks-Seelen-Inhalt*) of the East will lead to the well-being of all mankind (Obatnin 2000: 124).

A number of leading members of Russian creative intelligentsia were involved in Theosophical movement, applying its ideas and symbols in their work, as Carlson expresses it: «using its worldview to inform their own, and finding in its cosmogony the roots of their own creative process» (Carlson 1997: 143). This circle included late Andrei Bely, composer Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915), poets Konstantin Balmont (1867–1942), Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), Maks Voloshin (1877–1932) and his wife, painter Margarita Sabashnikova (1882–1973), painter Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), writers and philosophers Peter D. Ouspensky (1878–1947) and Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) who later became a steadfast critic of Occultism and Theosophy and upheld a very negative vision of Mintslova's role in the cultural circles (Carlson 1997: 143).

This bricolage of mystical and occult ideas informed the new artistic and literary movements that developed in Fin-de-siècle Russia such as Symbolism and Futurism:

> For the Symbolists, occult symbols had intrinsic meaning and religious, philosophical, and sociopolitical ramifications. Occult doctrines reinforced the Symbolists' rejection of rationalism and positivism, inspired mythopoiesis, and sustained their exaltation of imagination over reason, of art over science, of the subjective over the objective, and of the «inner man» over material well-being and legal rights. They regarded art as a theurgy ... The Futurists sought direct contact with reality (unmediated by symbols), but they shared the Symbolists' belief that the Word was a palpable entity with theurgical properties. (Rosenthal 1997: 17-20)

2. *Beginnings of Inayat Khan's mission in Russia*

As it was mentioned above, Sufism was practically unknown among intelligentsia, artistic circles and cultic milieu of the metropolitan capitals until young Indian musician, grandson of the great Indian musician Maula Bakhsh Khan (1833-1896), founder of the Baroda Musical Academy (now the Faculty of Performing Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda), Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927) came from Paris to Russia on October 3, 1913 accompanied by his two brothers and British-born wife Ora Ray Baker and spent seven month in Moscow and Sankt-Petersburg. His daughter Nur Inayat Khan (1914–1944) a heroic martyr of the French Resistance during the WWII was born in Moscow. Hazrat Inayat Khan also belonged to the *Nizami* sub-branch of the *Chishti tariqa* that dates back to Nasir ad-Din Chiragh-i Dihli (d. 1356) (Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 107-118, 140-143). Inayat's father, Rahmat Khan (1843-1910), was from a family of musicians, poets and mystics. His mother, Khatidja Bibi (d. 1900), was the second of Maula Bakhsh's three daughters.

He was warmly received by artistic circles and established close relations and even friendship ties with prominent cultural personalities like Count Leo Tolstoy's elder son Sergey (1863–1947) who was composer and ethno-musicologist, Viacheslav Ivanov, one of the most prominent poets of the «Silver Age», famous composer Alexander Scriabin, and others.

Inayat Khan performed and lectured at various places and stages of Moscow and St. Petersburg including famous *café chantant* «Maxim», at ethnographic concerts in the Polytechnic Museum organized by the Ethnographic Department and the Musical Ethnographic Commission, Moscow Conservatory, private music and poetry salons.

Eugenia Spasskaya who was a frequenter at artistic salons and theosophical meetings in her unpublished memoirs describes her first meeting with Inayat Khan whom she addresses as «Hindu» and his ensemble as follows:

> Teacher arrived to Moscow – a Hindu Inayat Khan with several of his followers who played stringed instruments and sang sacred songs, but instead of meeting the theosophists of Moscow immediately, they fell into the hands of some dishonest entrepreneur ... Theosophists, having learned about this terrible fact, were alarmed and decided to «buy out» the naive «Teacher» and his followers from the tavern hell, to break the contract. But the «Teacher» decided differently, in his Hindu way, since the fate brought them to the den, obviously, they have to go through that too! Of course, they will not demonstrate here their sacred chants and music, with the help of which he will preach his teachings, but they will perform with simple folk songs. (Zagorodnikova and Shastitko 1999: 425)

Inayat Khan seemed also being upset by the *café chantant's* atmosphere, but perceived this a life lesson about the destructive power of earthly pleasures and human's passions:

> It was somewhat troublesome for me to stay up all night, and yet it was an opportunity of studying all the different classes of Russia, all the wealthy classes, and it showed me how the dream of life had absorbed so many of them, and where it would lead Russia in the end. (Khan, I. 1979)

He also in some way inspired director Aleksander Tairov (1885–1950) and composer Vladimir Pohl (1875-1962) to stage the ballet-mystery *Shakuntala* by Indian classical playwright Kalidasa. Its premiere was scheduled on July 1914 but took place later on 12 December 1914. Inayat Kahn mentions that he «wrote a play during my stay in Russia, called *Shiva*. My friend Serge Tolstoi collaborated with me in rendering the music which I wrote for

that play in Western harmony» (Khan, I. 1979). Meanwhile poet and art critic Sergey Makovsky (1877–1962) in his memoirs about artistic elite of «Silver Age» reports that «This music [Shakuntala] on themes inspired by Inayat Khan was composed by Pohl on the request of Tairov» (Makovsky 2000: 368).

But his activities in Russia weren't limited to performance only and he also acted as a spiritual teacher delivering Sufi messages and teachings to his followers. Later Inayat Khan established a circle which among others included Sergey Tolstoy, singer Olga Takke and Andrei Balakin (Khan, I. 1979), who was an officer of military intelligence assigned to Inayat Khan for surveillance, a graduate of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow. Balakin translated from English and published for the first time Inayat Khan's book *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* (Khan, I. 1914a), providing it with a brief introduction. This circle gave birth to the Russian section of the Sufi Order. In May1914 Inayat Khan left Russia for France to attend the International Music Congress in Paris, where he was supposed to represent Indian music.

The outbreak of the WWI that was followed by Revolutions and Civil War in Russia put an end to the Sufi Order activities in Russia. Andrei Balakin who served as a serviceman of the anti-Bolshevik «White Army» left Russia for Italy when they lost the Civil War. Inayat Khan was corresponding with his followers in particular with Sergey Tolstoy, but shortly the correspondence ends, since the letters no longer pass due to the War and the Revolution calamities.

3. *Inventing Universal Sufism*

Inayat Khan's younger brother Musharaff Moulamia Khan (1895–1967) in his biographic work reports about an incident that took place during their stay in Moscow. He accompanied his brother to the house of an anonymous «English orientalist», whom he described as a specialist in language and history of Persia. Inayat Kanh's own memoirs allows us to identify this person as Professor Fedor Korsh (1843–1915), prominent Russian philologist, orientalist and poet, translator of Rumi's poetry: «Professor Corsh [Korsh], the great linguist of Moscow, became a great friend of mine, and at his house I met some Persians» (Khan, I. 1979).

There we also several Tatar mullahs present in this place who were interested in communicating with Inayat Khan about Sufism. This was probably the first encounter of Indian musician and spiritual teacher with the local Muslim elders who undoubtedly were adherents of Sufism as it was historically practiced in the Russian Empire.

Inayat Khan argued that Sufism preceded Islam in some way:

> The Prophet Mohamet [Muhammad] recognized the Sufis, and called them the knights of purity. We believe, however, that Sufism didn't begin then. There are some who say that the Sufi point of view originated in the Jewish sect of Essence [Essenes]. Others trace the origins of this point of view in the ancient Egyptian religion. (Khan, M. 1932: 122)

These ideas were critically received by the local mullahs who insisted firmly, that «Sufism belongs to the teachings of Islam» (Khan, M. 1932: 121).

Inayat Khan himself was more optimistic about his encounters with Russian Muslims. He reports about his meetings with the representative of Amir of Bukhara in Moscow who invited him to his court and with «Bey Beg, the leader of the Moslims in Moscow» (Khan, I 1979)[2]. He delivered a «lecture on brotherhood» and preformed his music in the audience of local Muslim community.

The first work of Inayat Khan *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* was published in Sank-Petersburg in Russian translation (Inayat Biography) as well as London[3] in 1914. Inayat Khan mentions that manuscript of his book already existed in 1913 when he was in Paris before his travel to Russia (Khan, I. 1979). It can be assumed that it has been completed during his stay in England in 1912–1913.

Both editions have on a front page a kind of subtitle or epigraph, briefly explaining Khan's vision of Sufism: «Sufism is the Religious Philosophy of Love, Harmony and Beauty» (Khan, I. 1914a, b). These short treaties obviously aimed at promoting Inayat Khan, who was already well-known oriental performer, as a bearer of an ancient sacred knowledge and spiritual teacher.

---

[2] I can assume that Inayat Khan mean influential Tatar merchant and philanthropist Hasan Baybekov (Khayretdinov 2001).

[3] The quotations from this edition preserve original orthography.

In both editions Inayat Khan was portrayed as a «professor»[4], and in the Russian edition he was also present as Sufi teacher «*pir-o-murshid*» and sitar virtuous «*tansen*»[5]. Balakin depicts Inayat Kahn as a charismatic person, Western educated and a brilliant English speaker (Khan, I. 1914a: 7-8). The Russian edition begins with a Muslim invocation in Arabic: «Allah is The Great, Allah is the Great, there is no God except Allah, Allah is the Great, to Allah belongs all praise, there is no God except Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah».

Introductory part of the English edition include short preface and Inayat Khan's biography, while in the Russian edition it is preceded by the translator's note were Andrei Balakin, who was a trained orientalist, presented basic information about Sufism. He aimed at familiarizing Russian readers with «spiritual life in the East»:

> It is so strange and it is a pity that we, the closest neighbors, of this East, know so little about its religious quest, its spiritual life. We have many educated people completely conscientiously merge Sufis and Sophists, and most of the reading public never heard of them. And here is the Hindu philosopher, mystic and pantheist, member of the Sufi order – Inayat Khan comes to us and he is coming to preach ideas of Sufi pantheism and worship by the means of music. He left his homeland and went to the West to «unite East and West», disseminating his Hindu wisdom and preaching harmony, peace and perfect love with the help of his «vina»[6]. In order to in some way acquaint the Russian audience with the basics of his pantheistic philosophy, he wrote this «Sufi message of Spiritual Liberty. (Khan, I. 1914a: 3-4)

Balakin points out that Khan belong to the eastern «Persian-Indian» branch of Sufism: «where the powerful power of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Brahmanism is noticeable, and where the Vedanta overlaps with the Quran, while Western, Ar-

[4] Inayat Khan positioned himself as a professor at the Baroda Music Academy in British India.

[5] The title given him by Nizam of Hyderabad Asaf Jah VI (1866-1911) was named after an emblematic figure in North Indian classic music (Hindustani) Tansen (1500–1586), who was a court musician of the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great (1542–1605).

[6] «Vina» or «veena» is a plucked string musical instrument that has been used in classical Hindustani music also known as «stick zither».

abic, Sufism more closely approaches Quranic legalist deism» (Khan, I. 1914a: ii). He portrays Sufism as based on love in a literary and mystical sense, arguing that love was brought here by women Sufis, and tells some stories about emblematic Sufi Saint Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (717 – 801) who was an epitome of pure love of God (Khan, I. 1914a: 4-5).

Balakin recommends further reading on the subject, namely works of Agatangel Krymskij (Krymskij 1909-1917). It worth mentioning that Russian readers at that time were already able to get knowledge about Sufism through the works of Valentin Zhukovskij (1895) and books of Petr Pozdnev (Pozdnev 1886) Konstantin Kazanskij (Kazanskij 1906) designed for a wide audience.

Further parts of the English and Russian editions are identical. In the introduction Inayat Khan portray Sufism as «Religious Philosophy of Love, Harmony and Beauty, which is as old as the beginning of human creation. ... Sufism combines the Eastern qualities of faith and devotion with reason and logic, the characteristics of the West» (Khan, I. 1914b: 3). He also pretended to be a first authorized initiate of Sufism, who wrote a book on this subject in English (Khan, I. 1914b: 3).

The biography of Inayat Khan tells about his noble origin, presents his famous ancestors such as «Moula Bux, a very holy man and the greatest musician of his age» (Khan, I. 1914b: 5). Inayat Khan himself is portrayed as an open-minded person: being a devote Muslim he had a deep respect to the Hinduism. The biography reports that he «composed a prayer to Ganesh, in Sanskrit, which he sang before the Court of the Gaekwar» (Khan, I. 1914b: 7). He was not satisfied with the ritualistic side of Islam only, searching for a genuine experience of the Divine Presence (Khan, I. 1914: 8), visiting Hindu and Sufi sages (Khan, I. 1914: 10-11) and finally advised in a dream to join *Chishti tariqa* (Khan, I. 1914b: 12-14). It emphasizes his traditional Sufi training under the guidance of *Chishti murshid* (mentor) Seyyid Muhammad Madani who later sent his with the mission: «Go, my child, into the world, harmonize the East and the West with the harmony of thy music; spread the wisdom of Sufism, for thou art gifted by Allah, the most Merciful and Compassionate» (Khan, I. 1914b: 15). Therefore, in this biographical sketch Inayat Khan is presented to a wide audience as an initiated Sufi, connected to the great Sufi tradition of Hindustan and authorized by his mentor to spread Sufi message in the West as well as a virtuous musician and performer.

Khan's work outlines a broad scope of traditional metaphysical, cosmological, psychological and mystical concepts of Sufism. Even the idea of religious universalism expressed here in terms that refer to traditional Sufi idea of difference and unity of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) and *Haqiqa* (Truth, Reality):

> A wise man realises that the fundamental basis of all religions and beliefs is one — *Hakk* (Truth). The truth has always been covered with two garments: a turban on the head, and a robe over the body. The turban is made of mystery known as Mysticism, and the robe is made of morality, which is called Religion. It has been covered so, by most of the prophets and saints, in order to hide it from ignorant eyes, as yet too undeveloped to bear the truth in its naked form. (Khan, I. 1914b: 24 – 25)

He also interprets Sufi concept of «*baqa bi-llah*» (persistence in Allah) by drawing parallels between this idea and some other concepts as *najat* (salvation) in Islam, *nirvana* in Buddism, *mukti* (liberation) in Hinduism and Christian salvation (Khan, I. 1914b: 31). This obvious overgeneralization aimed at presenting Sufi concepts as similar to the basic ideas of the other world religions and portraying Sufism as a most perfect expression of the universal truths that underpin these religions:

> Strictly speaking, Sufism is neither a religion nor a philosophy; it is neither Theism nor Atheism; hut stands between the two and fills the gap ... The idea that Sufism sprang from Islam or from any other religion, is not necessarily true; yet it may rightly be called the spirit of Islam, as well as the pure essence of all religions and philosophies. (Khan, I. 1914b: 38)

Inayat Khan argues that Islam finds its perfection in Sufism, that is pantheism in its essence, which creates «the spirit of democracy in religion» (Khan, I. 1914b: 34) fulfilling the aim of prophetic mission. He formulates here the mission of the Sufi Order that he was planning to establish as spreading Sufism as «a religious philosophy of love, harmony and beauty, aims to expand the soul of man until the beauty of all creation enables him to become as perfect an expression of Divine harmony as possible» in the West (Khan, I. 1914b: 37).

As it was already mentioned, the Theosophical Society played an important role in the process of transmission of «Ori-

ental» doctrines (specifically Hindu and Buddhist) to the «mystically-minded» audience in the West. Mark Sedgwick argues that Sufism was basically excluded from the theosophical narratives (Sedgwick 2017: 144). However some individuals initially connected to theosophy like Ivan Aguéli (1869–1917) and Carl Henrik Bjerregard (1845–1922) later became engaged with Sufism. Bjerregard later took a part in the development of Inayati movement in United States. Mark Sedgwick argues that Inayat's exposition of Universal Sufism «followed the older understandings of Jones and Graham, which fitted with the Theosophy of the time» (Sedgwick 2017: 161) with which he got acquainted at the New York Public Library assisted by Bjerregard.

4. *Universal Sufism and the Russian cultic milieu*

The first emblematic figure of Russian Fin-de-siècle cultic milieu with whom Inayat Khan struck up a close acquaintance was poet-Symbolist, critic and religious philosopher Vjacheslav Ivanov. He was a devoted follower of Anna Mintslova, especially during 1906–1907. This proximity to Rudolf Steiner's representative in Russia informed his creative activities and inspired yearning for personal religious experiences.

However, Ivanov was critical about Thesophical Society and Elena Blavatsky:

> Religion is higher, nobler than theosophy, because theosophy risks nothing, every founder of a religion says: *alea jacta est*, by choosing his way, he rejects every kind of knowledge. Theosophy serves that one, which is inevitably accomplished, religion serves the impossible. Therefore, for religion every person is a mystery and divine impossibilities are in him. Occultism knows and despises people … All theosophy is spiritual Americanism … Not in India and not in Europe, but in America Americanized Blavatsky founded it. Her books are just a pile of mechanically selected knowledge – no spirit, fire, religion, mystics in them – not a trace … (Obatnin 2000: 109–110)

Gennady Obatnin argues that relations between Ivanov and Mintslova after the summer of 1909 were already far from idyllic (Obatnin 2000: 211) until she disappeared in 1910, while he was still deeply committed to the person and works of Rudolf Steiner (Obatnin 2000: 115).

Certainly, Ivanov was interested in Sufism and his poetry and prose has been informed by Sufi symbolism. Evidence of this, in particular, are the notes found in his Roman archives where Ivanov records key Arabic-Persian Sufi terminology necessary for understanding of Persian poetry, like soul (*nafs*), love (*eshq*), attraction (*jazb*), union (*wasl*) and others, providing a brief explanation of their meaning (Roman Archive, Inventory 2, cardboard 32).

In one of his essays, *Anima* (1935), Ivanov addresses a question of: «How is the knowledge of the absolute transcendence of God through inner experience possible?» (Ivanov 1979: 283). He appeals here to Sufi concept of love that overcomes the distance between creation and God, quoting great Persian Sufi poet Jalaladdin Rumi (1207-1273): «"Only God-intoxicated knows how love kills". This is the deadly lightning arrow of the loving one above the opposite between the Creator and the creature, raising the loved one through the gates of death to a higher life.» (Ivanov 1979: 287).

To Rumi Ivanov dedicated his poem *El-Rumi* written in 1918, that resembles Sufi *dhikr*. It invokes his name together with name of Allah (*Allahon*)[7]. Also in his poem *Elders at Hafiz's fest* (1918) (Ivanov 1987: 78) introduces a figure of most prominent Persian poet Hafiz Shirazi (1325-1390) (Ivanov 1987: 78). His poetry collection *Evening light* compiled by him in 1946–1949 shortly before his death includes poem *Sufi Singer* that imbedded with Sufi imagery (Ivanov 1987: 492-494).

During his stay in Russia Hazrat Inayat Khan was close with another prominent figure of Russian cultural and cultic milieu Aleksander Scriabin. His close friend Leonid Sabaneev (1881-1968) composer and musical critic in his memoirs of Scriabin characterizes him as a «mystical romanticist» (Sabaneev 2000: 6) and emphasize eclectic and ephemeral character of his ideas: «Scriabin's mysticism doesn't represent a comprehensive system, it is rather a fragmentary views and bitty ideas, that also did not apparently display great steadfastness» (Sabaneev 2000: 7).

Marina Lobanova in her seminal book on Scriabin's mystical thought argues that Scriabin wasn't original in his ideas that are derived mainly from Theosophy (Lobanova 2012: 20), but

[7] Incorrect transliteration of popular Sufi invocation formula «Allah-Hu» that means «Allah just He» and refers to God «as He is in Himself» or Divine Essence.

gave them unique aesthetic expression in his music (Lobanova 2012: 7) regarded as a kind of mystical cognition and «way of revelation» (Lobanova 2012: 22). He was fascinated by the idea of «Theurgy» that he understood as a magical transformation of man and the world by the means of sacred power of art, above all by music (Lobanova 2012: 94). Scriabin understands artistic creativity as a power of differentiation of one into many giving birth to multiplicity in the World (Scriabin 1919: 147, 149).

These ideas resemble Neoplatonic concept of emanation and closely related idea of Self-Manifestation of Divine Being (*tajalli*) in Sufism. As Inayat Khan exposes it:

> The universe is the manifestation of Allah, where He has involved variety from unity, into the state of various names and forms, thereby distinguished as Allah, worthy of all praise and worship. ... According to Sufic tenets, the two aspects of the Supreme Being are termed Zat and Sifat – Knower and the Known. The former is Allah, and the latter, Mohammed. The ascending and descending forces of Zat and Sifat form the circle of the Absolute. These two forces are called Nazool and Urooj, which mean involution and evolution. (Inayat 1914b: 22)

Notably, these and other similar ideas were expressed by Scriabin in early 1900s, long before his meeting with Inayat Khan.

Sabaneev reports that Scriabin was dreaming about pilgrimage to India to meet with Mahatmas and receive an initiation (Sabaneev 2000: 95). As far as he became disillusioned with Theosophy, Scriabin turned to the Eastern religions and musical traditions (Sabaneev 2000: 199). In this period he meets Inayat Khan at his concert in the Polytechnic Museum. Sabaneev, who himself portrays Inayat Khan a «crafty wandering artist» and satirize his «eastern majesty» as a «production tool», relates that Scriabin was deeply impressed by his personal charisma, but argued that he wasn't satisfied enough with Inayat's music (Sabaneev 2000: 201). All the same we can assume that Scriabin, who developed theory of color symbolism in music into practical usage, giving it mystical meaning, as a theurgical power, could positively receive Inayat's concept of correspondence between sound and color as kinds of mystical vibration, where sound stands for outer and color for inner manifestations.

Inayat Khan himself had a better impression of his meetings with Scriabin:

> At the house of the poet Ivanov I met Skriabin, who is so well-known in the West. I found his personality not only that of a fine artist, but of a thinker and of a mystic. He seemed dissatisfied with the Western music and thought that there was much in the East which could be introduced in the music of the West, in order to enrich it. I agreed with him, I thought if this idea was ever carried out, although it would be most difficult in the beginning, yet in the end such music would become a world music. And what could be a better means for uniting humanity in a universal brotherhood than the harmony of music, which is loved everywhere in the East or West? (Khan, I. 1979)

According to Sabaneev, Scriabin hold Islam in contempt, therefore his opinion about Inayat Khan was quite ambiguous, he wasn't that one that Scriabin really need, not an authentic Brahman: «I have to see real Brahman-occultist – then I will get acquainted with India. But for this I need to go there» (Sabaneev 2000: 201). Nevertheless he was fascinated with *Shakuntala* staged by Tairov (Lobanova 2012: 121). Tairov in his memoirs portrayed *Shakuntala* as a «mystery»:

> As a result of the rehearsals, we managed to achieve a completely exclusive, almost religious trembling of the mystery, which in some places, especially in the scene of Shakuntala's farewell, was even able to be transferred to the stage, transfusing it into a rhythmically theatrical plan and overcoming a naturalistic experience. (Tairov 1970: 97)

Remarkably, Tairov didn't mention an impact of Inayat Khan impact on *Shakuntala* staging.

Inayat Khan also reports about his contact with Edvard Wilhelm Lybeck (1864–1919) physician and mystical philosopher of Swedish origin. He was invaded by Dr. Lybeck to speak before a mysterious audience who looked for him as priests or monks.

> They were interested by the idea, and the only wonder to them was, how the truth could exist in such a perfect form, as I did present, outside their Church, which alone they had so far believed to be the center of all truth. They were wise people, with awakened sympathy, with the love of Christ and appreciation of truth. To me their contact was a wonderful experience. No end of questions were cast at me, but politely and the answers to those questions, gently given, went straight to their hearts and sank into their souls. (Khan, I. 1979)

Dr. Lybeck was an important figure in the Russian cultic milieu of that time. Famous Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, who was largely critical about Russian theosophical and occultist circles, at the same time, describes him as a «mystic and mystically gifted», possessing «real clairvoyance», who has predicted WWI (Berdyaev 2014: 207). According to Berdyaev, his friend famous Russian religious philosopher Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) compared Lybeck to Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772).

I would argue that circle of Khan's followers included just a few persons and he mentions only two initiated disciples (*murids*), i.e. Andrei Balakin and Olga Takke (Khan, I. 1979). Inayat Khan underlines the «Eastern type» of discipleship among his Russian followers «which is natural to the nation where religion and self-sacrifice are still in existence, although the bigotry of the Orthodox Church stands in the way of the highest spiritual awakening» (Bloch 1915). He also characterizes Russians as

> hospitable and affectionate people with a tendency to appreciate and enjoy all beauty, they are gifted in art, inclined to mysticism, seekers of philosophy, ready to become friends and minded to let friendship last... (Khan, I. 1979)

Later after his departure Inayat Khan in his letter to Sergey Tolstoy from August 8, 2014 addresses him as a «representative of our music in Russia» and complains that the later is not responding his previous letters (Zagorodnikova and Shastitko 1999: 423). I would argue that it demonstrates an importance Inayat Khan attached to his mission in Russia, because since May 1914 when he left Russia to France for the musical congress he had send a number of letters to Count Tolstoy.

5. *Conclusions*

Despite its roots in the South-Asian Sufi tradition the Inayati Sufi Movement and Universal Sufism should be regarded in the context of Western Esotericism as a part of cultic milieu of Europe and America. At the same time Sufism wasn't a mainstream current in the Thesophical Movement.

Boris Falikov points out that creative elite of the Fin-de-siècle Russia, Continental Europe and Anglo-American World took

the East «from the theosophical hands», and this helped them to solve their own artistic and philosophical problems: «As a result arose the occult-oriental synthesis, which inspired new artists throughout almost the entire past century» (Falikov 2017: 11).

Reception of Inayat Khan's mystical and aesthetic concepts by Russian creative intelligentsia and esoteric circles of «Silver Age» was informed by their interest in the Theosophical doctrines, through prism of which they appropriated exotic «Eastern Wisdom», and his Universal Sufism doesn't have considerable direct impact on their artistic creativity and minds. Therefore his spiritual outreach was pretty limited by a few devoted disciples. As a performer and classical Indian musician Inayat Khan was far more celebrated in these circles, obsessed with Blavatsky's «Mahatmas» and «Brahmans», than as a spiritual teacher.

However, importance of the «Russian period» for development of the Inayati Sufi movements shouldn't be underestimated. For the first time Inayat Khan got an opportunity to deliver his message to the Muslim, predominantly Turkic-speaking, audience beyond India and esoteric circles outside the Western countries. The first printed exposition of his Universal Sufism teaching almost simultaneously appeared in Russian and English language increasing its outreach and making Inayat Khan a leading figure of Western Sufism for the next decades.

References

Burba, D. (2006). *Zerkalo russkogo induizma. Neizvestnyy Lev Tolstoy*. Kiev: Sofiya.

Carson, M. (1993). *No religion higher than truth: a history of the Theosophical movement in Russia, 1875-1922*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

— (1997). «Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermetidsm in Fin-de-Siecle Russia». In: Rosenthal, B. (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. New York: Cornell University Press. 135-152.

Etkind, A. (1998). *Khlyst. Sekty, literatura i revolyutsiya*. Moskva: Novoye lit. obozreniye.

Falikov B. *Velichina kachestva. Okkultizm, Religii Vostoka i Iskusstvo XX vieka.* Moskva: OOO «Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie».

Ivanov V. (1979). *Sobranie sochinenij*, vol. 3. Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chretiem.

— (1987). *Sobranie sochinenij*, vol. 4. Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chretien
Khan, I. (1914a). *Sufijskoe poslanie o svobode ducha*. Moskva: Tipografia M.O. Attaja i Co.
— (1914b). *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*. London: The Theosophical Publishing Society.
— (1979). *Biography, Autobiography, Journal and Anecdotes.* Scarborough East-West Publications. https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/bio/Autobiography_4.htm. Accessed 10 March 2019.
Kazanskij, K. (1906). *Misticism v Islame*. Samarkand: Tipo-Litografia «Trud».
Khan, M. (1932). *Pages in the Life of a Sufi*. London: Rider & Co., Paternoster House E.C.
Kemper, Michael – Shikhaliev, Shamil (2015). «Qadimism and Jadidism in Twentieth-Century Daghestan». *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*, 69 (3): 593 – 624.
Khayretdinov D. (2001). «Muslumnanskaya obshina Moskvy vo vtoroj polvinie XIX – nachale XX veka».*Vestnik Eurasii*, 2001, 1: 47 – 70.
Krymskij, A. (1909 – 1917). *Istoriya Persii, yeyo literatury i dervishskoy teosofii*, vol. 1-3. Moskva: Tipografiya Kh. Ulitskogo, A. Golovanevskogo.
Makovsky S. (2000). *Na Parnasie Serebrianogo Vieka*. Moskva: Nash Dom – L'Age d'Homme.
Obatnin, G. (2000). *Ivanov-mistik (Okkultnyye motivy v poezii i proze Vyacheslava Ivanova (1907-1919))*. Moskva: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye.
Pozdnev, P. (1886). *Dervishi v musulmanskom mire: Istoriya, ucheniye, povsednevnaya zhizn*. Orenburg: Tipografia B. Breslina.
Rosenthal, B. (1997). «Introduction». In: Rosenthal, B. (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. New York: Cornell University Press. 1-34.
Sciabin, Aleksander (1919). «Zapisi A.N. Scriabina». In: Gershenzon M. (ed.), *Russkie Propilei*, vol. 6. Moskva: Izdanie M. I S. Sabashnikovych. 120 – 247.
Sedgwick, M. (2017). *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Soloviov, V. (1893). *Sovremennaya zrica Izidy. Mojo znakomstvo s E.P. Blavatskoj i «teosofocheskim obshestvom»*. Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografia tovarishestva «Obshestvennaya Polza».
Tairov A. (1970). *O teatre.* Moskva: BTO.

Zagorodnikova, T. - Shastitko, P. (1997). *Russko-indiyskiye otnosheniya v XIX v. Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov i materialov*. Moskwa.: Izdatelskaya firma «Vostochnaya literatura» RAN.
Zhukovskij V. (1895). *Chelovek i poznanie u persidskich mistikov*. Sankt-Peterburg: Tipo-Litografia B.M. Wolfa.