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EASTERN RELIGIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE: THREE CASES FROM LITHUANIA

Michael Strmiska

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This article provides both historical and ethnographic views of Eastern religion in Lithuania. The historical component is an examination of the evolution of Lithuanian interest in Eastern religions from nineteenth-century studies of Indo-European comparative linguistics and mythology, which linked pre-Christian Lithuanian religion with India and Hinduism, to increasing literary, scholarly and popular interest in India and Asia in the twentieth century, before, during and after Soviet occupation. The ethnographic aspect utilizes fieldwork and interviews to examine three Eastern-inspired religious movements, (Pagan) Romuva, (Hindu) Krishna Consciousness, and (Buddhist) Diamond Way, demonstrating three different adaptations of Eastern religion in Lithuania.

Keywords: new religious movements (NRMs); Eastern religion; Lithuania; Buddhism; Hinduism; Hare Krishna; Paganism; Romuva; New Age

The opening of Lithuanian society to Western influence in the post-Soviet era has also brought with it a certain amount of Eastern influence. Various versions of Asian-based or Asian-derived religious movements that have flourished in Western nations have also become established in Lithuania since the early 1990s, or even earlier, as in other Eastern European societies (Barker 1997). This development had already begun to receive attention from scholars and ethnographers of religion by the late 1990s, including scholars of Eastern religious movements in Poland like Przemysław Jaźwiński (1997) and Tadeusz Doktór (1997) and in Hungary like Istvan Kamaras (1997). In Lithuania, Ministry of Justice official Donatas Glodenis helped to establish the New Religions Research and Information Center in 2001. He presented a series of conference papers on New Religious Movements (NRMs), including some examination of Eastern-inspired movements, that are now available online at http://en.religia.lt (2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d). Glodenis also completed a Master's thesis on Sivananda

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Yoga in Lithuania (2004). More recent publications include discussions of the Hindu-inspired Art of Living Foundation in Lithuania by Milda Ališauskienė (2009), the evolution of the syncretic Theosophy movement in Latvia by Anita Stašulāne and Janis Priede (2009), and a number of different Hindu-inspired or neo-Hindu religious movements in Slovakia by Dušan Deák (2009). Tensions between NRMs, including Krishna Consciousness and other Eastern-religion-inspired movements, and anti-cult and Catholic opposition groups in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, and Hungary are explored in a recent collection edited by Dorota Hall and Rafał Smoczyński. It charts a gradual trend of diminishing hostility and growing acceptance in these countries toward the Krishnas and other such NRMs (2010). This article will survey the genesis of interest in Eastern religions in Lithuania from the nineteenth century to the present, and then examine three particular New Religious Movements (NRMs) with varying relationships to the Eastern religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

I came to this topic somewhat circuitously. Arriving in Lithuania in August of 2004 as a visiting American lecturer at Šiauliai University through the Fulbright Fellowship program, I expected to devote my scholarly energies to continuing research I had begun in earlier years on the Lithuanian Pagan revival religious movement Romuva, but several chance events turned my attention in a different direction. Assisting with an English class at the Saulės Užeiga community center in downtown Šiauliai, I came to know a middle-aged local resident named Romas Beinorius, who at one point disclosed that he had been involved with the ISKCON (International Society for Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) Consciousness, often called 'Hare Krishna') movement since 1979. At about the same time, a university colleague mentioned a Tibetan Buddhist organization in Šiauliai called Karma Kagyu, also known as 'Diamond Way', with affiliates in several other Lithuanian cities as well.

A gradually dawning realization that Eastern-inspired NRMs were taking root and indeed thriving across Lithuania prompted me to embark on an ethnographic investigation of these two movements (Strmiska 2009 & 2010). I was also inspired to re-examine certain connections that I had previously noted between the Pagan movement Romuva and the Indian religion of Hinduism (Strmiska 2005; Strmiska & Dundzila 2005). This article investigates how ISKCON-Krishna Consciousness, Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu and Romuva represent three different adaptations of Eastern religions to the Lithuanian social and cultural context; the first two as imported Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the third in a more indirect manner, as a source of inspiration and validation for a distinctly Lithuanian religious identity.

While these religious movements, all of which offer new forms of old religions tailored to the needs and tastes of the modern population, may at first glance seem to be part of the broader phenomenon of postmodern, 'New Age' spirituality, there are important differences that argue against categorizing the three movements in this manner. New Age movements tend to be extremely eclectic, freely mixing and altering elements of belief and practice from diverse sources, and to eschew traditional forms of religious authority and community, with a focus on individual spiritual fulfillment and self-realization (Diem & Lewis 1992; Heelas 1996; Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Kemp & Lewis 2007). Krishna Consciousness, Diamond Way, and Romuva all proclaim their fidelity to specific religious traditions – respectively to the

Hindu, the Buddhist, and the Baltic Pagan – and they emphasize communal and traditional elements of religious life over the individualized, do-it-yourself-for-yourself pursuits and perspectives characteristic of New Age spirituality. This is not to say that the three Lithuanian religious movements are totally devoid of such self-centric elements, but that these are grounded to varying degrees in communal, traditional contexts that tend to transcend a merely individual locus of religiosity.

Interviews with members of the Krishna Consciousness and Diamond Way movements were conducted in May and June of 2005, March of 2009 and June of 2011, while interviews with Romuva leaders Jonas Trinkūnas and Inija Trinkūnienė took place over a wider span of time. These in-person interviews were supplemented by email discussions with these and other members of these groups.

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Historical Background

A number of important intellectual and cultural developments in nineteenth-century Lithuania paved the way for the positive reception of Eastern religions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the same time as the nineteenth-century European trend of intensive interest in native folklore facilitated the development of Lithuanian ethnic pride and national identity, the emerging science of comparative linguistics shed light on Indo-European linguistic links between Europe and India. Pioneering linguistic scholars like Franz Bopp (1791–1867), Rasmus Rask (1787–1832), August Schleicher (1821–1868), Karl Brugmann (1849–1919), and Kazimieras Būga (1879–1924). revealed the Lithuanian language to be the closest European counterpart to Sanskrit, the classical language of ancient India (Pedersen 1962, pp. 64–67). As the linguist Philip Baldi comments,

> The Baltic sub-group of Indo-European has played a significant role in comparative Indo-European linguistics from the beginning .... The conservative and archaic character of Lithuanian in particular has even been the source of popular fantasy, with some accounts maintaining that native speakers of Lithuanian were capable of conversing with Brahmin speakers of Sanskrit, each in his own language, with almost complete intelligibility. Such an assertion is, of course, wildly untrue, but it does underscore the conservative nature of the Baltic languages. (Baldi 1983, p. 84 see also Baldi 2004)

Though there might seem to be a certain discordance between nineteenth-century ethno-national romanticism emphasizing Lithuania's distinctiveness from other peoples and cultures and comparative Indo-European linguistic research highlighting transnational commonalities between Lithuanian and other languages, the two trends did in fact converge in the period of 'national awakening'. As the Lithuanian philosopher Antanas Andrijauskas observes, 'Lithuanians were encouraged to take a deeper interest in the countries of the East not only by the growing ideology of national rebirth but also by widespread theories about the origin of the Lithuanian nation in India and about the closeness of Lithuanian to Sanskrit' (Andrijauskas 2007, p. 57). Pride in Lithuania's distinctive identity and lineage was paradoxically bolstered by knowledge of Lithuania's linguistic kinship with ancient India, as this appeared

to grant Lithuania a special primordial status within the European family of nations, on a par with ancient Greece or Rome.

This sense of ancient Lithuanian affinity with India was further deepened by research into comparative Indo-European mythology. Such nineteenth-century scholars as Max Müller and Wilhelm Mannhardt (1875, 1936) established correspondences across the spectrum of Indo-European pantheons, thereby linking the Baltic and Vedic (early Hindu) gods. twentieth-century scholars such as Jaan Puhvel (1974, 1987a, 1987b), Marija Gimbutas (1963, 1982, 1997, 2001) and J.P. Mallory (1989 & 2006). continued to explore these parallels with more exacting philological and historical methods.

In the late nineteenth centuries and first decades of the twentieth, multi-talented Lithuanian men of letters like Vilius Storosta (1868–1953), better known by his *nom de plume* of Vydūnas, an influential author of dramatic, philosophical, mystical and historical works alike in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius (1882–1954), a historian, linguist, folklorist, and playwright, helped to popularize the Indo-Baltic, and in particular Indo-Lithuanian, connections established by earlier scholars. This helped secure a distinctive position in the Lithuanian popular imagination for positive representations of Asian, particularly Indian, culture and religion (Bagdonavičius 2000; Zalatorius 1997).

Translating the key Hindu text the *Bhagavad Gītā* from Sanskrit to Lithuanian, living as a vegetarian in accordance with Hindu norms, and drawing on the late-nineteenth-century, syncretic-esoteric religious movement known as Theosophy to develop his own notions of East-West religious fusion, Vydūnas played an especially important role in opening the way for future Lithuanian interest in Hinduism and other Eastern religious traditions. He was also a champion of native Lithuanian Paganism, supporting the revival of summer solstice celebrations and eulogizing the religious practices of the pre-Christian past in his dramatic trilogy *Amžina Ugnis* (The Eternal Fire), the title of which refers to the fire altars of the Pagan Prussians. Vydūnas's dual devotion to both pre-Christian Lithuanian ethnic religion and Indian spirituality prefigures the attitude of appreciation toward Hindu traditions of the Lithuanian Pagan revival movement Romuva, as I explore later in this article and also elsewhere (Strmiska 2012a).

Lithuania's continuing experiences of foreign domination, whether by Tsarist Russia, Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union, created a longing for an imaginary space of refuge comfortably removed from European turmoil. For some, Asia filled this need, serving as an idealized, exoticized zone of cultural refinement and spirituality. Artists such as M. K. Čurlionis wove Asian motifs into their art, and academic studies of Oriental languages and cultures flourished in Lithuanian colleges and universities. The first Lithuanian department of Asian languages was established at the University of Vilnius in the early nineteenth century, only to be closed down by Tsarist authorities in the harsh crackdowns on Lithuanian cultural life that followed the 1830–1831 and 1863–1864 uprisings. Meanwhile, Russian scholars at universities in St. Petersburg and elsewhere were undertaking pioneering Asian and Buddhist studies that drew on the Russian Empire's expansion into the central Asian states of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. These activities would continue until the late 1930s, when many of the

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leading researchers were brutally repressed, and then reappear in the post-Stalin era with the rise of a new generation of scholars (Ostravskaya 2004).

Asian studies in Lithuania revived during the interwar period of independence at the University of Lithuania in Kaunas, which received its current name of Vytautas Magnus University (Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas) in 1930. Vytautas Magnus professor Ričardas Mirona dedicated himself to translating Indian texts from Sanskrit to Lithuanian while his colleague Marija Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė published a series of studies of Asian civilization. The horrors of World War II and the succeeding period of brutal Soviet occupation did nothing to diminish Lithuanian interest in Asia, with Soviet-era Lithuanian scholars eventually gaining access to Asian Studies institutes in Moscow, St. Petersburg (Leningrad) and Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia. Andrijauskas reminisces,

> In Lithuania, as in the rest of the Soviet Empire, during 1960–1990 Orientalism became an important manifestation of opposition to, and alienation from, Marxist ideology. In those days, interest in the philosophy, religions, and the art of Eastern nations became for intellectuals and artists an increasingly popular way of fleeing from a gloomy and unacceptable reality. (2007, p. 66)

For Andrijauskas, summer studies in Ulan-Ude became the next best thing to traveling to Tibet for a young Soviet Lithuanian interested in the very un-Soviet philosophy of Buddhism. Soviet disapproval aside, information on Eastern religion and philosophy and other Asian topics circulated both through official channels such as inter-library exchanges and through surreptitious means such as *samizdat* publications, demonstrating a continually growing level of interest as well as a constantly expanding network of underground spiritual seekers from the 1960s onwards (Andrijauskas 2007, p. 67).

The interest in Eastern religions generated by the hippie subculture in America and western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s also reached Soviet states like Lithuania through such means as the Eastern-tinged music of the Beatles (Baumann, 2002). Centers for Eastern Studies were established at Lithuania's three largest universities, Vilnius University, Vytautas Magnus University, and Klaipėda University, with the final years of Soviet domination witnessing a steady stream of scholarly publications exploring various aspects of Asian culture, art and philosophy. Vilnius University held a ground-breaking conference on comparative philosophy in 1984 entitled 'The Problem of Man in the History of Philosophy: An Encounter between West and East', which was sufficiently successful and popular to justify a second conference in 1988 on 'The Interaction of Eastern and Western Culture'.

Therefore, when Eastern-derived or inspired New Religious Movements began to arrive in Lithuania in the late 1970s, a certain Asian-friendly foundation had already been laid for a positive reception of these movements despite, if not indeed because of, the anti-religious character of the Communist regime then in place.

Religion in Post-Soviet Lithuania

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Lithuania's achievement of full independence in 1991, the principle of freedom of religion was reestablished in

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Articles 26 and 42 of the 1992 Lithuanian Constitution.[1] The 1995 Law on Religion further empowered the government to provide varying degrees of recognition and support to different religious communities (Glodenis 2005b). Perry Glanzer (2008) calls this approach 'managed pluralism'. It differs from the stance of church-state separation and government neutrality toward all religious groups, as is to some extent practiced in the USA, and differs as well from the establishment of official state churches in such countries as England and Greece and the careful neutrality of the state toward all religious groups as is found in the Netherlands and Germany, which some have called 'structural pluralism'.

The 'managed pluralism' of Lithuania stands somewhere in between official neutrality and state establishment in that the state upholds the general principle of religious freedom and tolerates a broad diversity of faiths but provides direct support to a limited number of religious communities of the government's choosing. The 2005 'Law on Religious Communities and Associations' (LRCA) draws a distinction between 'traditional' religious communities and 'non-traditional' but 'recognized' religious communities, with traditional religious communities receiving a substantial level of preferential treatment from the government.[2] This includes financial assistance for religious education and the maintenance of churches and other religious buildings, and the right to perform marriages and provide religious education in public institutions. The merely 'registered' religious communities, accepted as legitimate but not supported by the government, find themselves at a considerable disadvantage when compared to the 'traditional' religious communities (Glodenis 2005b, interview March 2009). There are nine forms of religion recognized as traditional communities: the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic (Uniate) churches, the Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Reformed churches, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Old Believers, Sunni Islam, Judaism, and the religious community of the Karaites, a distinctive sect that embraces much of Jewish religious heritage but rejects the Talmud.

It is virtually impossible for newer religious communities to obtain traditional status, as the law requires a religion to have been established in Lithuania for at least 300 years to be considered 'traditional'. Even to obtain the lesser level of recognition as a non-traditional religious community, the law requires such religious associations to be active in Lithuania for 25 years after first registering with the government. A religious community applying for recognition as a non-traditional religion must also demonstrate to the government that its activities are in harmony with Lithuanian cultural heritage and social mores, and that it is well regarded and supported by the public. Taken together, these various requirements constitute a substantial, if not insurmountable, hurdle for any registered religious community ever to obtain non-traditional let alone traditional status. The law also provides for the right of the government to withdraw recognition from religious communities judged to be antisocial, disruptive or dangerous.

Concerns expressed by officials within the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Justice regarding the problems of the unequal legal statuses and privileges assigned to traditional versus non-traditional religious communities by the Constitution and the LRCA were essentially dismissed by the Lithuanian Republic Constitutional Court in a ruling of 6 December 2007.[3] As a result, the religious

landscape in Lithuania is heavily tilted in favor of long-established 'traditional' religious communities, above all the Catholic Church. Newer religious communities such as Krishna Consciousness, Karma Kagyu, or Romuva face nearly insurmountable obstacles in seeking any kind of official recognition or support from the government. It seems a worrisome sign that, while the Lithuanian government published information from the 2001 census about all religious groups in Lithuania – including the nine communities recognized as 'traditional', the 'non-traditional', and the merely 'registered', whose ranks include the three religious movements examined here – in recent years, the government has only provided information about the nine 'traditional' religious communities, suggesting a desire to ignore and discourage the development of new and minority religions in Lithuania.

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The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

The International Society for Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) Consciousness (ISKCON), more commonly known as the 'Hare Krishna' movement and its members as 'Hare Krishnas' or still more simply 'Krishnas', will be here mainly referred to as the Krishna Consciousness movement.[4] It was founded in New York City in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedānta Prabhupāda (1896–1977), an Indian Hindu born Abhay Caran De in Calcutta. Abhay followed a conventional course up through his mid-twenties, studying in a local Bengali college, marrying, and taking employment with a pharmaceutical company, until his meeting with a Hindu *sādhu*, or holy man, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvati (1874–1937) set Abhay on a spiritual path that would lead him to become a *sādhu* as well (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004, pp. 3–5).

Abhay became initiated into Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism (Vaishnavism), a sect of Bhakti devotional Hinduism centered on the worship of the god Viṣṇu (Vishnu), originally founded by the Bengali Vaishnava saint Caitanya Mahāprabhu in the sixteenth century. Krishna Consciousness would eventually emerge as a modern variant of the Gaudīya tradition. Though Vishnu has many different incarnations or avatars, including both the righteous, war-waging god-king Rāma and the beguiling, flute-playing Krishna (Bhattacharji 1988), Gaudīya Vaishnavism and Krishna Consciousness focus exclusively on Krishna as the ultimate divine reality. The individual souls or *jīvas* of the human race are seen as longing for reunion with the divine presence of Krishna. The relationship between Rādhā, the god's mythical consort, and Krishna himself, with its dramatic emotional vicissitudes swinging between ecstatic erotic union and painful periods of separation and longing, is a key motif in Krishnaite mythology and spirituality. In the Gaudīya school of Vaishnavism, devotees are encouraged to imagine themselves as associates of Rādhā and Krishna.

A religious practice of Gaudīya Vaishnavism that would become the defining feature of the Krishna Consciousness movement is *kīrtan*, the chanting of the names of the deity, particularly the *mahā mantra* (sacred refrain) '*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare*'. When enthusiastically performed in public spaces by dancing and swaying groups of devotees to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as cymbals, drums, and flutes, *kīrtan* provides an unavoidable spectacle that also serves as a very effective method

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of proselytization. It is this practice with its characteristic refrain that would cause Krishna Consciousness to be labeled the 'Hare Krishna' movement.

In the 1950s, Abhay Caran De progressively withdrew from his mundane life, finally severing ties with his wife, family, and business, then taking formal vows as a Hindu renunciant in 1959, earning the spiritual name of A. C. Bhaktivedānta. Seeking to spread Krishna devotion to the world beyond India, he began to publish English-language books and pamphlets, including English translations of key Krishna scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In August of 1965, Bhaktivedānta journeyed to America, hoping to create a truly international Krishna movement. After nearly a year of failed proselytizing in various locations, he settled into the Lower East Side of Manhattan in June of 1966, where he finally succeeded in finding a way to attract people to his movement. The secret to his success was Indian food, prepared in traditional Hindu manner as *prasāda*, vegetarian food that is offered first to the gods, and then served to human worshippers. Combining his discourses on Krishna devotion with free Bengali vegetarian meals, Bhaktivedānta found that the culturally and spiritually curious young people of 1960s' America would come for the food and then stay, at least some of them, for the religion. The musical side of Krishna practice, from the mesmerizing, repetitive chanting of *kīrtan* to the singing of *bhajans* (devotional songs) accompanied by Indian instruments, also captivated his young curiosity seekers, as did Bhaktivedānta's clothes and appearance as a Hindu holy man. From this experience, Bhaktivedānta realized that the Indian cultural background of Krishna devotion was something that should be brought to the foreground and highlighted as much as possible as one of the most impressive and compelling aspects that could be presented to a non-Indian public.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness was registered with the American government in July of 1966, featuring free Indian meals and colorful public performances of Indian music and chanting as key methods of public outreach. Bhaktivedānta's publishing venture continued to produce hard-bound volumes of his writings and translations, as well as the *Back to Godhead* magazine. Profits from Krishna literature, aggressively promoted in public places from street corners to airport lounges by Hare Krishnas in Indian garb simultaneously seeking donations, became one of the primary fundraising mechanisms for the Krishna movement.

From the late 1960s onward, Krishna Consciousness enjoyed explosive growth from the USA to Europe and beyond. Bhaktivedānta took the new spiritual title of Śrila Prabhupāda, which is how he is now known in most ISKCON discourse and publications. The embrace of Krishna Consciousness by the guitarist and singer George Harrison (1943–2001) of the British rock band The Beatles further added to the appeal of the Krishna movement. Harrison produced hit recordings of 'Hare Krishna Mantra', a pop arrangement of the basic Krishna chant, and 'Govinda', a Krishna *bhajan*, in 1969, both featuring devotees from the London Rādhā-Krishna temple. In 1970, Harrison had even greater popular success with his own composition 'My Sweet Lord', which playfully interlaces the Hare Krishna chant with the Christian refrain of 'Hallelujah' (Greene 2007). Prabhupāda also made a triumphant return to India, establishing a huge ISKCON headquarters and temple in the town of Vṛndāvana (Vrindavan), a locale of particular importance as the site of Krishna's early years in the mythology of the god (Brooks 1989).

Prabhupāda passed away in 1977, but Krishna Consciousness has continued to flourish. The movement has suffered a series of wrenching scandals and crises of leadership along the way, notably the abuse of Krishna Consciousness children in poorly run *gurukula* boarding schools in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to the eventual shuttering of these flawed institutions. A radical reorganization of the movement's leadership structure was effected in the 1980s and 1990s to guard against further disasters (Rochford 2007, pp. 74–96).

From its beginnings, the Krishna Consciousness movement has had to manage two categories of religious participants, an inner circle of celibate, monastic followers who renounce ordinary life to live in the gender-segregated religious and community centers known as temples, and an outer circle of lay believers living conventional lives with jobs, marriages, families and so forth, while also participating in worship services and other activities at the temples. Despite the sacredness conferred on the erotic union of Krishna and Rādhā, Krishna Consciousness is rather strict and puritanical about sexuality among its devotees, with the official stance being that only married devotees should engage in sexual intercourse, only for the purpose of producing children, and only once a month. The extent to which individual devotees and devotee couples follow these precepts is an open question, but sexuality is clearly viewed as a potentially dangerous distraction that must be tightly controlled if not avoided altogether (Rochford 2007, pp. 55–56). It is therefore not at all surprising that from the 1960s through the early 1980s, the movement favored renunciant temple dwellers as the closest approximation of Prabhupāda's vision of the ideal religious community, with married devotees and their families much less of a priority.

Since the 1980s, tables have turned. As more and more devotees have married and had children, it is the outer circle of devotees more involved with mainstream society that has assumed priority in the movement, with pious householders replacing monastic renunciants as the demographic foundation of Hare Krishna life. E. Burke Rochford, one of the foremost scholars of the Krishna movement, describes this as a transition from a 'communal', temple-dwelling, mainstream-shunning form of organization to a 'congregational' one that accommodates rather than renounces conventional society, and accepts devotees and their families living independent of temples and deciding for themselves the extent to which they wish to participate in Krishna Consciousness activities (2007, pp. 67–73). The same holds true for the Hare Krishna movement in Lithuania.

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The Hare Krishnas in Lithuania

Krishna Consciousness had established itself in Poland by the mid-1970s (Jaźwiński 1997) and has been present in Lithuania and other (former) Soviet republics since the late 1970s. The previously noted Šiauliai resident and Hare Krishna follower Romas Beneiris first encountered the religion in Tallinn, capital of Estonia, in 1979 (Beinorius interview June 2005).[5] On his way to a local bar, he was startled and intrigued by the sight of a Krishna devotee in Indian clothing sitting on the street, chanting *kīrtan*. Romas learned more about the religion by attending meetings conducted in a necessarily clandestine manner, as detection and persecution by Soviet authorities was

an omnipresent threat. Romas reports that a number of Krishna followers that he knew were arrested and imprisoned. Describing the similar conditions that prevailed across eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, Hall and Smoczyński observe, 'Even though some movements, such as the Hare Krishna, established their branches in countries under the Soviet domination before the 1990s, groups of their devotees functioned in deep social niches and could not freely proselytize' (2010, p. 11). In the more tolerant atmosphere of the *glasnost* period of the late 1980s, however, the Krishnas in Lithuania were able to register as a religious community and thereafter functioned with little state interference.

According to Romas as well as Saulius Domarkas, a leading member of the Krishna temple in Vilnius, the first temple communities were established in Vilnius, the capital, and Kaunas, the second largest Lithuanian city, in 1980, well before the collapse of the Soviet order. Another temple community established in Šiauliai shortly after Lithuanian independence in the early 1990s thrived for a while, but was shut down because of a decision by the ISKCON Governing Body Commission (GBC) in Lithuania to limit temples to Kaunas and Vilnius. The devotees who had been residing in the now-defunct Šiauliai temple were invited to relocate to either the Vilnius or Kaunas temples, and Saulius was offered a position as ISKCON Communications Director for Lithuania. The temples in Kaunas and Vilnius remain today the mainstay of the Krishna Consciousness movement in Lithuania, though smaller cities and towns have their own places for gathering if not official temples.

The Kaunas and Vilnius Krishna temples are not purpose-built religious structures, but converted apartment buildings with different sections dedicated to different purposes. There are large, open, first-floor rooms colorfully decorated with numerous Indian items from tapestries to Hindu statues. These are used for public gatherings, especially the weekly Sunday meetings that combine worship and feasts. Upstairs there are rooms for visiting and resident devotees to dwell in, though the vast majority of participants in temple activities are congregational devotees, both married and single, who live and work outside the temple and come and go from the temple for various events and functions. Money for the temples is raised by donations solicited by devotees performing *kīrtan* and distributing Hare Krishna literature, along with the sale of other items such as incense and soap.

When I visited the Vilnius temple in June of 2005, temple leader Saulius Domarkas estimated the number of people who occasionally participate in temple events to be between 200 and 300, with regular weekly participants numbering about 50, and with full-time, live-in devotees numbering about 15. The Kaunas temple has similar organization and numbers. The Ministry of Justice Census of religious affiliation from 2001 claims a total of 265 Krishna believers across all of Lithuania, but this figure is somewhat dubious, as the census has no way of accounting for the more casual and occasional participants (Lithuanian census 2001). The lack of a separate count of casual participants may account for the larger numbers of total participants cited by the leaders of the Hare Krishna temples themselves.

Unfortunately, the 2011 census has proven even less informative, as the published version does not include statistics for any minority religions in Lithuania, neither Krishna Consciousness nor Karma Kagyu-Diamond Way nor Romuva-Baltic Faith, nor any other. Statistics are only provided for the nine officially recognized 'traditional'

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religious communities.[6] What would seem to constitute an intentional erasure of minority religious communities is difficult to understand, since the published version of the 2001 census did include statistics on such smaller religious groups. The statistical office is therefore demonstrably capable of collecting data on such minority communities, but for some reason chose not to do so in 2011. The fact that only one religious community is discussed at length in the census report, this being the Catholic Church, while others are not even mentioned raises the suspicion that the census has been affected by a pro-Catholic religious bias.

Many of the individuals I interviewed first became aware of the Krishna movement through books or other ISKCON publications given to friends or family that they came across accidentally, showing the effectiveness of Hare Krishna literature distribution. They reported that they had felt themselves to be searching for new or deeper spiritual truth in their lives for some time. The literature answered this need, and resulted in a decision to visit the temple and become involved. Others became intrigued after seeing Krishna devotees in Indian clothing engaged in *kīrtan*, chanting, and dancing on the streets. Visits to the temple exposed them to a colorful tableau of Indian culture as well as Hindu spirituality, with Indian music, religious decorations and other Indian accoutrements further stimulating their curiosity.

Food also played a role in attracting devotees, as much in post-Soviet Lithuania as in 1960s America. Free Indian-style, vegetarian meals were offered at the Krishna temples through an ISKCON charity program called 'Food for Life'. Inspired by a statement of Prabhupāda that 'no one within ten miles of a temple should go hungry', the program was open to anyone regardless of their religious affiliation, serving a public need while also garnering good will toward the Krishna movement. 'Food for Life' proved popular with the public, particularly in the hard times of the early 1990s when Lithuania was struggling to establish a functioning market economy after decades of Soviet control. Some municipal governments in Lithuania helped to fund 'Food for Life', becoming in effect the partners of the Krishna movement and thus further legitimizing ISKCON in Lithuania (Domarkas interview June 2005). Arūnas Katauskas, in recent times a leader of the Kaunas temple community, told me that the food was initially his primary reason for visiting the temple, as he was in desperate financial straits in the early 1990s and greatly appreciative of the free meals (Katauskas interview June 2005). The food had a further effect as well. Arūnas and other devotees that I spoke with eventually became firm advocates of vegetarianism as part of their new religious lifestyle. It cannot be overstated how radical a choice this is in Lithuania, where traditional cuisine is completely meat-centered, and vegetarian restaurants are few and far between. The 'Food for Life' program still continues today in Lithuania as in many other countries.

It is evident from my interviews that both spiritual and cultural factors have served as pathways leading Lithuanians to the Hare Krishna movement. Some interviewees comment on a hunger for spiritual meaning that first brought them to ISKCON, while others were initially attracted by the exotic cultural ambience of the Krishna movement. Over time, these two pathways have converged. For the more intellectually inclined individuals, the ideas and concepts first encountered in books and pamphlets eventually take on Indian colors, sounds and scents in the setting of the temple, and for those initially more impressed by the sensually arresting display

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of Indian culture, the first encounter with the 'smells and bells' of Hindu India gives way to experiences of deeper spiritual meaning and the contemplation of increasingly sophisticated religious ideas. The movement's success in attracting differently oriented devotees along these two pathways validates the utility of the approach first developed by Prabhupāda in Greenwich Village in the 1960s, offering cultural and culinary delights along with spiritual teachings.

The satisfactions that devotees derive from the Krishna movement seem to fall into three categories. Some find a new sense of meaning and spiritual purpose through the philosophy of Krishna devotion, which they see as an antidote to the rising tide of materialism flooding the country since 1991. Others speak of the comfort derived from becoming a member of a warm, loving community, a relief from the sometimes bleak, dog-eat-dog conditions of life in post-Soviet Lithuania. Serving god through serving humanity, as in the 'Food for Life' program, is a core principle which many devotees clearly find meaningful and rewarding. A third satisfaction was a sense of inner peace that devotees feel they obtain through participation in *kīrtan* and other devotional practices and temple activities.

The life-stories of several devotees illustrate these patterns with greater vividness. The aforementioned Kaunas temple leader Arūnas Katauskas (b. 1975) was a young man in serious trouble in the early 1990s (interview June 2005). Growing up in the small Lithuanian town of Kelmė, he went through a downward spiral of drinking and gambling in the early to mid-1990s, with vague and never-realized plans to open a casino. Arūnas initially came to the Krishna temple in Kaunas less out of spiritual motivation than a desire to take advantage of free food and temporary housing. However, he had done some reading in Eastern philosophy in his early teens, notably an esoteric newspaper of the late 1980s called *Žvilgsnis* (Glance), and the sight of Krishna devotees chanting and singing on the streets of Riga during a visit to Latvia in 1990 had left a lasting impression on him. Arūnas's time in the Kaunas temple with other devotees revived his earlier curiosity about esoteric and Eastern philosophy and sparked an interest in Krishna Consciousness that continued to grow through turbulent years of uncertain employment and failed business ventures. Arūnas kept coming back to the temple, not only for shelter and guidance, but also for a growing sense of spiritual kinship. His interest gradually turned from intellectual curiosity to devotional practice, the experience of which Arūnas emphasizes as the key to a true understanding of Krishna Consciousness.

Arūnas's involvement in the Krishna movement gradually progressed to the point of joining other Lithuanian devotees in a pilgrimage into the Krishna movement's most sacred site, the Indian village of Vrindavan, the presumed birth place of Krishna and final resting place of Prabhupāda, in 1999. Arūnas had a very emotional religious experience in Vrindavan in which he perceived the loving presence of Krishna as a vivid and immediate reality, a numinous moment which he spoke of with great feeling in our interview, some six years after the experience. The deepening of Arūnas's devotion to Krishna has also propelled him to a leadership position in the Kaunas temple. Arūnas considers his journey to Vrindavan a highlight of his life and muses that he might like to one day marry an Indian woman.

Saulius Domarkas (b. 1969), who also has the spiritual, Krishna Consciousness name of Shatakula Das, has been involved with the movement since 1990 (interview

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June 2005). A native of the city of Šiauliai, he recalls first learning about the Krishna Consciousness movement through a newspaper article in 1987. Though the article gave a rather unfavorable report on the movement, Saulius found himself intrigued by the notion of chanting as a spiritual discipline. A few years later, a *samizdat* book on the Krishna movement caught his attention with a discussion of George Harrison's Krishna-related activities. Music would play a major role in drawing Saulius to the movement. After a concert in 1990 by the Indian music group *Svara*, a pioneering Indian classical ensemble led by the Lithuanian sitarist Anatolij Lomonosov that is still active today, Saulius was invited to a party where he met a Krishna devotee from the city of Panevėžys. Discussion of Indian music and the Krishna movement soon led to singing and chanting, and Saulius was fired up with enthusiasm. He dropped out of the Šiauliai branch of the Kaunas Polytechnical Institute, where he had been studying industrial electronics, and joined the temple community in Šiauliai.

Saulius became temple president in late 1993, only to see the Šiauliai temple closed the following year due to the decision of the ISKCON Governing Body Commission (GBC) to consolidate Lithuanian Krishna activities in Vilnius and Kaunas. The closing of the Šiauliai temple was bitterly opposed by local devotees, and Saulius found himself blamed for the closure even though he had fought to preserve the temple. He eventually relocated to Vilnius, where he continued his studies and developed a career in computer programming, while also living in the temple. Saulius served for many years on the temple council of the Vilnius temple while also pursuing a professional career in the business world, crossing back and forth between the spiritual and mundane spheres of activity on a daily basis. He resigned from the temple council in 2010 but remains active in temple affairs, particularly community outreach.

As noted earlier, Saulius's interest in Krishna Consciousness was originally sparked by music. He has continued to be active in incorporating music and other art forms into temple activities in Vilnius, helping organize cultural evenings featuring music, dance and poetry, either in public spaces or in a courtyard adjoining the temple. In addition to such musical and artistic activities, Saulius has become a passionate and thoughtful advocate of the values and philosophy of the religious movement. In our discussions, Saulius presented the Krishna religion as one of 'simple living, high thinking', directing human energy away from addictive and destructive distractions, such as the pursuit of material wealth, social status, sensual pleasure and chemical intoxication, toward the higher purpose of universal love for all mankind, as epitomized by the 'Food for Life' program, and joyful union with god, in the form of Krishna. According to Saulius, the Krishna Consciousness injunction to 'chant Hare Krishna and be happy' does not mean, as is sometimes assumed by detractors, that chanting is guaranteed to automatically produce a perpetual state of mindless bliss, but that each person should strive to be content and cheerful with their lot in life, while remaining ever-mindful of Krishna as the supreme reality.

Jūratė Skapienė (b. 1968) is a married devotee with two daughters who were 14 and 16 at the time of our interview (June 2005). She first became interested in Krishna Consciousness in 1991 after finding some ISKCON books on her brother's bookshelf. A Prabhupāda text entitled *A Higher Taste* on the spiritual and health benefits of vegetarianism convinced her to put her family on a meatless diet (Prabhupāda 1991). After Jūratė and her husband witnessed a group of devotees

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performing *kīrtan* in Vilnius, she began attending temple lectures and activities, gradually becoming a steadfast devotee while also maintaining her family life. Jūratė speaks with gratitude of cultivating inner calm and steadiness through the practice of chanting, and reports that her spiritual understanding continues to develop, offering the analogy, 'As you go deeper into the forest, there are more and more trees'. However, Jūratė feels that the single greatest benefit of her involvement in the Krishna movement has been the sense of warm community that she continues to enjoy with her fellow devotees. She sees the Krishna lifestyle offering a positive alternative to drug and alcohol abuse and the unhappiness fostered by rising materialism and licentiousness.

Romas (Romoualdas) Beinorius (b. 1955) was, as noted earlier, the first of my interviewees to become involved with the Krishna movement in Lithuania (interview June 2005). He was active in the Šiauliai temple during its brief existence in the early 1990s. Its closure left him cut off from regular participation in any temple community, though he and other Šiauliai devotees continued to meet and practice the religion informally. Romas showed me an extensive photo album of festivals and events he has attended over the years. He also faced an obstacle within his own immediate family as his wife and daughter did not share his enthusiasm for Krishna activities. Romas therefore stands out from the others interviewed for this article for having maintained a strong personal devotion to Krishna Consciousness without the benefit of a nearby temple community. He feels that the main benefits he has derived from Krishna Consciousness are a feeling of joy that he attains through chanting as well as an ability to shift his consciousness to a more productive wavelength during turbulent times. Like others I interviewed, he sees the lifestyle and values of the religion providing a valuable counterbalance to negative tendencies in contemporary Lithuanian life. Romas also spoke with feeling about the music and life of George Harrison as an influence on his own spiritual development.

The official status of the Krishna movement today illustrates the inherent difficulties and even absurdities of the state of religion in Lithuania. Both the Vilnius and Kaunas temples registered with the government as religious communities in the twilight of the Soviet era, in 1989 and 1990 respectively. However, their papers were lost in the turmoil of the formation of the new government of independent Lithuania. This required the Vilnius and Kaunas communities to start the registration process over again in 1996, after the new Law on Religious Communities and Associations had been established, with its 25 year waiting period for registered communities to be officially recognized.

According to Donatas Glodenis, if proposed amendments to the Law on Religious Communities and Associations following the previously noted court case of December 2006 are passed by the Seimas, this 25 year period could become as long as 50 years (email March 2009 and December 2011). It therefore may take until 2021 or even 2046 for the Krishna movement to be officially recognized by the government, even though local governments have seen Krishna Consciousness as sufficiently valid and trustworthy to provide it with government funding for the 'Food for Life' program as far back as the early 1990s. While these matters remain to be decided, the Krishna movement in Lithuania has continued to comply with the law as faithfully as possible.

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In addition to the Vilnius and Kaunas temples, several other Krishna facilities have been registered with the government, these being the Kaunas Bhaktivedanta Community and Center of Vedic Culture, the Klaipėda Vaishnava Culture Center and the Kėdainiai Gaudīya Vaishnava religious community. The different Krishna communities have also applied together to be recognized as an 'association' of religious communities and strengthened their governance system through establishing a National Council for Krishna Consciousness for the better coordination of activities and adjudication of internal conflicts and grievances (Domarkas email June 2011).

Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu

The Buddhist organization known as Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu is Tibetan in origin, with a long lineage of Tibetan Buddhist masters known as *Karmapa* extending back in time to the twelfth century, making Karma Kagyu one of the four main Tibetan Buddhist lineages, predating that of the Dalai Lama, the Gelugpa, by some 400 years (Powers 2007, pp. 399–431; Scherer 2009, Webb,1996, pp. 21–23). As a result of the Tibetan Buddhist exodus after the Chinese Communist occupation of Tibet in 1959 and the subsequent succession crisis in the 1990s, the leadership of the Karma Kagyu lineage is now divided between the city of Dharamsala in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, where the Tibetan government-in-exile also has its headquarters, and New Delhi, the Indian capital.

The Diamond Way Buddhism that found its way to Lithuania and other European countries could be called a Danish import insofar as its presence in Europe is primarily the result of the activities of a charismatic and controversial Danish Buddhist leader, Ole Nydahl (1941–) (*Buddhism Today* 1998 interview). Nydahl first became acquainted with Karma Kagyu Buddhism while traveling in Asia with his wife Hannah (1946–2007) in the late 1960s. As Nydahl (1999) recounts in the autobiographical *Entering the Diamond Way: Tibetan Buddhism Meets the West*, he had originally come to India and Nepal out of hippie subculture interest in Asian spirituality along with the decidedly unspiritual purpose of smuggling hashish back to Denmark. A number of harsh experiences, from the deaths of friends to his own arrest and imprisonment in Denmark, gradually turned Nydahl away from drugs, at the same time as encounters with Tibetan Buddhists introduced the thrill-seeking Dane to new horizons of experience that he found far superior to those induced by hashish and LSD (Børup 2008, p. 30; Nydahl 1999, p. 3).

In Kathmandu in 1969, Nydahl and his wife met Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, the sixteenth Karmapa, spiritual leader of the Kagyu lineage at that time, who took an immediate interest in Ole and Hannah. This led to a three-year period of intensive training in Tibetan Buddhist meditation techniques and religious practices for the couple, culminating in 1973 with the Karmapa bestowing on both Nydahl and his wife the titles of *Lama* (Buddhist spiritual teacher) and charged them with the task of promoting Diamond Way to the larger world outside Asia (Lopez, 1995). Nydahl applied himself to his missionary task with great energy and success, traveling worldwide, lecturing and leading meditation workshops nearly nonstop from 1973 to the present, helping to establish hundreds of Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu centers

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across Europe and around the world from the 1970s to the present. His wife Hannah played a more low-key role as a translator and interpreter until she passed away in 2007. Nydahl remained in close contact with the sixteenth Karmapa until his death in 1981, viewing his efforts on behalf of Karma Kagyu as an extension of the will of the Karmapa.

Nydahl's relationship with the subsequent seventeenth Karmapa has been a rather more complicated matter. In Karma Kagyu tradition, each dying Karmapa is understood to consciously choose his own future reincarnation, in which form he assumes the mantle of the next Karmapa. He leaves behind a document with clues to the person and location of his future reincarnation, so that his followers will be able to find the chosen youth and raise him to assume the role of Karmapa. In the early 1990s, some ten years after the death of the sixteenth Karmapa, two candidates for seventeenth Karmapa were put forward by opposing factions within the Karma Kagyu community (Bearak 2000; Waterhouse 1995). The third-ranking Karma Kagyu lama, Tai Situ Rinpoche, promoted the candidacy of the boy Ogyen Trinley Dorje (b. 1985), but Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche, the Shamarpa, who is the second-highest Karma Kagyu lama, and thus superior to Tai Situ, favored a different candidate, Trinley Thaye Dorje (b. 1983). The Dalai Lama, despite his non-Karma Kagyu lineage, stepped in officially to recognize Ogyen Trinley Dorje as Karmapa in 1992. The Sharmapa protested about irregularities in the process that installed Ogyen as Karmapa and performed Karma Kagyu rites to install Trinley Thaye as seventeenth Karmapa in 1993, respectfully rejecting the Dalai Lama's action as misguided meddling. The continuing disagreement has divided the Karma Kagyu community worldwide.

Nydahl joined the Shamarpa in supporting Trinley Thaye as Karmapa and enlisted the support of many of the thousand-plus Diamond Way centers that he has created around the world (Børup 2008, pp. 33–34; Gearing 2003; Lehnert 1998). Both sides have engaged in an active propaganda war, including a series of books by both pro-Ogyen Trinley authors (Brown 2004; Martin 2003; Terhune 2004) and pro-Trinley Thaye advocates (Curren 2005; Lehnert 1998). Nydahl has, not surprisingly, been criticized for his active role in this dispute, but considering his forceful personality and close relationship with the sixteenth Karmapa, it is also not surprising that he would take a keen interest in the succession.

Nydahl has been controversial in other ways as well. Lama Ole refuses to play the conventional role of a world-renouncing monk or holy man, instead reveling in such seemingly unspiritual pursuits like driving sports cars and motorcycles at high speeds, and parachute jumping, which nearly cost him his life in 2003 (Gearing 2003; Nydahl 1999, pp. 46, 98). He is quite open in celebrating the value of sexual pleasure, brushing aside the critical view that many religious traditions take of sexual desire as a potential distraction and spiritual obstacle (Olson 2008; Powers 2008) and the fact that most of his own spiritual teachers were celibate monks and much of his own Buddhist training took place in monasteries (Nydahl 1996, pp. 44–45, & 1999, p. 47; Mishlove interview with Nydahl, n.d; Przybyslawski interview with Nydahl, 2003).

Nydahl's positive view of sexuality finds justification in the Tantric school of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism that utilizes sexual union as a form of advanced meditation, though only under certain restricted conditions (Powers 2007, p. 289), and the 'Crazy Wisdom' tradition of Tibetan lamas who lived lives of wild abandon for the purpose of

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shocking their followers out of social and spiritual complacency (Dowman 2000; Przybyslawski interview, 2003). Nydahl's views and lifestyle suggest that the thrill-seeking young Ole Nydahl who freely indulged in the delights of the 1960s counter-culture is still very much present in the meditation-teaching but also parachute-jumping Lama Ole of later years. This carries over into his vision for Diamond Way in Europe and the West as an essentially non-monastic religion movement based in lay meditation centers. Other Karma Kagyu lamas preaching Buddhism in the West have established monasteries, but not Nydahl.

Nydhal has also expressed extremely harsh and negative opinions about Muslims and Islam with a bluntness that might seem unbefitting for the leader of a religious movement usually perceived as peaceful and tolerant (Nydahl 1999 p. 83; Przybyslawski interview, 2003). Listening to Nydahl deliver a public lecture at the New York Institute of Technology on 13 June 2011, I found his hostile and sarcastic comments on Islam to be the single discordant note in an otherwise pleasant and inspirational discussion of Buddhist teachings and meditation techniques peppered with colorful personal reminiscences.

Nydahl's attitude toward Islam is best understood in the context of the political debates that have raged in his native Denmark, as well as nearby Holland, in recent decades over the place of Islam in European society and the social and cultural integration of Muslim immigrants. In a 2007 interview with the journalist Lars Hedegaard, a well-known Danish critic of Islam, Nydahl conjures up a stark scenario of impending battle against Islam reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's concept of a 'clash of civilizations'. Nydahl observes, 'Several of my students have joined the National Guard. That is a good place for young people if they feel that our country is in danger. If I were a bit more in Denmark and if I were under 65, I would join too' (Hedegaard interview with Nydahl, 2007). Nydahl's hard-line stance against Islam is in keeping with his own self-image as a reincarnated Tibetan warrior of the Khampa tribe, which has historically defended Tibet against external threats (Nydahl 1999, pp. 59, 62, 91, 120), as well as his Scandinavian pride in being a descendant of the equally fierce Vikings. In 1974, when the sixteenth Karmapa visited Denmark, Nydahl made a point of showing him a statue of Holge Danske, a legendary patriotic hero believed to have joined Charlemagne's army to assist in repulsing the invading Muslim forces at the battle of Tours in 732 (Hedegaard interview, 2007).

Nydahl's complex and controversial persona uniting spiritual teacher, joyful hedonist and militant opponent of Islam have led some to regard both the man and his Diamond Way movement with suspicion (Børup 2008; Freiberger 2011, n. 30; Orso 2009; Scherer 2009). Despite the controversies that swirl around Lama Ole – or possibly even because of them – Diamond Way has continued to attract adherents and open new meditation centers. How the movement will fare when Nydahl, now 71, someday passes on will be the ultimate test of whether the movement has flourished due to the merit of its teachings and practices, or the personal charisma of Lama Ole.

Though Nydahl's Diamond Way Buddhism is firmly rooted in Tibetan Karma Kagyu tradition, it is much less connected or attached to Tibetan culture than Krishna Consciousness with its warm and close relationship to India. This de-emphasizing

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of its Asian roots may increase Diamond Way's appeal among people uninterested in Asian culture but hungry for spiritual experience. As Nydahl bluntly states,

> We take no refuge in anything Tibetan. It was a medieval society like Europe around 1450. The only thing of interest to us is the transmission of the teachings which the Buddha gave to his brightest students. That wisdom was preserved in India for 1,500 years and then kept for 900 years in Tibet until 1959, and now it's here. (Hedegaard interview 2007)

Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu in Lithuania

Diamond Way first came to Lithuania in the late 1990s, with a lecture tour by Ole Nydahl in August of 1997 sparking sufficient interest for Karma Kagyu-Diamond Way to be registered with the government as a religious community by the end of 1997, putting Karma Kagyu on the same long 25 - to 50-year waiting list for government recognition as the Krishna movement. The first meditation center was established in Šiauliai in 1997, where Nydahl's first Lithuanian lecture took place, then was followed by centers in Vilnius in 1998, Kaunas in 2002, and Klaipėda in 2007, as well as more informal groups in Kuršėnai, Panevėžys, and Elektrėnai. A farmhouse near the town Kražiai was converted into a meditation retreat center called Stupkalnis in 2000 (*Buddhism Today* 2005). Diamond Way has had notable success in eastern Europe. To but mention Lithuania's immediate neighbors, there are two meditation centers in Latvia, two in Belarus, more than 50 in Poland, and more than 60 in Russia.[7] The 2001 Lithuanian census estimates the total number of Buddhists in Lithuania as 408, but does not distinguish between different sects of Buddhism, making it impossible to judge the number of Karma Kagyu Buddhists in Lithuania. As noted earlier, the 2011 census does not provide any figures for Buddhist communities in Lithuania.

I was able to meet with members of the Šiauliai and Kaunas Diamond Way meditation centers in summer of 2005 and again in spring of 2009 with the Kaunas group. I also interviewed a Lithuanian Diamond Way practitioner now living in New York City in 2011. Their religious practices, ideas, and attitudes toward their religion form a striking contrast to those of the Krishna movement.

The Diamond Way meditation centers that I visited in Kaunas and Šiauliai in 2005 and 2009 as well as New York City in 2011 are bright, clean, rented, and converted apartment flats minimally decorated with framed photographs of Lama Ole and the sixteenth and seventeenth Karmapa, as well as a small number of Tibetan Buddhist ritual objects such as bells. Krishna devotees may do their best to create an oasis of Indian culture in their temple communities, but Diamond Way adherents have no intention of establishing a mini-Tibet in their meditation centers. Following the lead of Lama Ole, they view the practices of Tibetan Buddhism as a universal spiritual technology that does not require any adoption or imitation of the original Tibetan context. No Karma Kagyu follower I met was planning a pilgrimage to Tibet like those undertaken to India by Lithuanian Krishna devotees.

Diamond Way meetings center on Tibetan techniques of sitting meditation, visualization, and chanting meant to stimulate progressively higher states of

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consciousness. The general mood of these activities is of quiet, calm, and concentration, as opposed to the more exuberant Krishna worship with its music, chanting, and feasting.

The personal charisma of Ole Nydahl has undoubtedly helped drive the rapid growth of Diamond Way in Lithuania. Mindaugas Stankūnas (b. 1970), a writer, translator, and head of the Šiauliai Diamond Way center, was quite articulate in expressing his admiration for Lama Ole (Stankūnas interview, June 2005). He seemed highly impressed with Nydahl's rejection of asceticism and monasticism and his frank acceptance of sexuality. Mindaugas expressed the view that celibate monkhood had probably only been necessary in the past due to the lack of contraception and was not needed for modern people in the West, though he conceded that other Karma Kagyu lamas have in fact established monasteries in several countries in Europe. Commenting on how Lama Ole often jokes about sex in his public lectures, Mindaugas speculated that this was not merely bawdy humor, but a deliberate strategy on Nydahl's part to drive away timid and puritanical persons who might not be temperamentally suited to the teachings of Diamond Way. The implicit suggestion that Diamond Way is something of an elite movement reserved for the unusually bold and open-minded may be another source of Diamond Way's appeal, as those who like to see themselves as audacious, unconventional and unrepressed may very well find Lama Ole an attractive spiritual role model. This is in marked contrast to the Krishna movement's thoroughly non-elitist desire to reach out to all individuals regardless of their personal limitations. There is no Diamond Way equivalent of 'Food for Life'. The emphasis is strictly on meditation for personal transformation for those who are capable of it.

Mindaugas first became interested in 1997, when his employer assigned him to the translation of Nydahl's *The Way Things Are* (Nydahl 1996) into Lithuanian. Initially most curious about the philosophy of Buddhism, Mindaugas soon became engrossed in the transformative potential of Karma Kagyu meditation techniques. Asked how his years of practice have affected him, Mindaugas pointed to an increase in his self-understanding and ability to regulate his emotions, becoming less rash and reactive, and more patient and tolerant. He takes very seriously the Diamond Way goal of incorporating one's highest state of mind into everyday activity, making life and meditation a single process. On the topic of the Tibetan cultural background of Karma Kagyu, Mindaugas expressed the view that focusing on 'the exotic East' rather than on one's own immediate reality and experience could actually be an obstacle for Buddhist practice.

Another individual drawn to Diamond Way by the charisma of Ole Nydahl is Žemyna (actual name disguised by request) (b. 1973), a professional musician who was living with her family in Vilnius in the mid-1990s after completing her masters' studies (Žemyna interview, June 2011). She first discovered Diamond Way while walking on the street late one night in 1997 when she saw a poster plastered to the side of a building advertising a lecture by Ole Nydahl. Žemyna had no idea who Nydahl might be or what Diamond Way was about, but she found herself peculiarly fascinated by his face. This period in her life had been very difficult and introspective. Žemyna had been searching in vain for a deeper meaning to her life, and had a powerful intuition that the man in the poster was the teacher she had been looking for. Purchasing a copy of *The Way Things Are* some days later after seeing Nydahl's face on

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the cover in a book shop, she devoured its contents with growing excitement. Žemyna already had some understanding of Buddhism, having read a number of works on Buddhist philosophy, mostly in Russian, in the past. Her interest had also been stimulated by Asian references in the music and lives of composers like Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin.

Žemyna joined an informal Diamond Way discussion group which began experimenting with Tibetan-style visualization meditation. She immediately found this exhilarating even though no one in her group had a complete understanding of the steps of meditation. From this enthusiastic if inexpert beginning, several members of this group would go on to become leaders of the Diamond Way movement in Lithuania. In July of 1998, Žemyna traveled to Poland to hear a lecture by Lama Ole, which inspired her to undertake the strenuous initial stages of foundational practices called Ngondro, performing 111,111 prostrations followed by 111,111 recitations of a 100-syllable Tibetan mantra. She found the full-body prostrations, meant to purify the body, a joyful if physically demanding process, and reciting the mantra brought her to tears, a reaction in line with the excercise's intended purpose of cleansing the mind and the emotions. Žemyna progressed to higher levels of meditation, involving visualization techniques for the cultivation of specific mental and emotional states related to Buddhist teachings, but an exploration of these practices goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Žemyna became an active member of the Diamond Way center in Vilnius in the late 1990s, close to the time of the construction of the rural retreat center in Stupkalnis in 2000. She has remained a devoted practitioner even after relocating to the United States in 2006. Žemyna sees the special merit of Diamond Way Buddhism in its emphasis on practice and experience over intellectual abstraction. She feels that many criticisms of Lama Ole's personality and behavior would be put to rest if his critics observed his patient manner toward the large numbers of people he encounters on his nearly non-stop travels, something she herself witnessed while participating in a Diamond Way tour in Russia in 2003.

Žemyna reports that practicing Diamond Way has stabilized her mental and emotional states and increased her ability to focus on her music without having to wait for fleeting moments of inspiration. It has also brought forth a sense of joy that she believes she often knew in childhood but lost in later years. When asked if this cultivation of inner peace might in some cases amount to a kind of narcissism, Žemyna countered that the gaining of inner stability and joy gives one a better vantage point from which to help others who are suffering than by simply joining them in the same state of mind, adding pain to pain and sorrow to sorrow. She also argued that the Buddhist doctrines of interrelatedness and compassion actively work against any inclinations toward self-centeredness. Žemyna expressed interest in someday visiting India, Tibet, and Nepal but does not see this as an essential spiritual pilgrimage, in the way of Krishna devotees traveling to India, but simply as the chance to see a fascinating region of the world in which she has a particular interest.

Linas Putelis (b. 1964) is an agricultural scientist who has served as a researcher and consultant for the Lithuanian Chamber of Agriculture. A native son of Šiauliai, he now lives with his wife and children in Kaunas. I interviewed him in May 2005 and March 2009 when he was the director of the Kaunas Diamond Way meditation center.

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Linas had brief periods of involvement with Paganism and Catholicism in the late 1980s, but these were transitory phases motivated more by political and patriotic concerns than any genuine religious feeling. He mainly related to the Catholic Church and Romuva as anti-Soviet, pro-Lithuanian organizations in the years leading up to independence. Linas's interest in Buddhism was initially sparked in his teen years by Eastern-oriented literature such as Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* and then renewed in his thirties by the mid-1990s writings of Jurga Ivanauskaitė (1961–2007).

One of the most popular and controversial authors of recent decades in Lithuania, Ivanauskaitė is a significant figure in her own right. Her novels and short stories in the late 1980s and early 1990s shocked the literary establishment of the time with their cynical and satirical views of Lithuanian society laced with elements of fantasy. She was most notorious, however, for her frank portrayals of female sexuality. Aušra Labokaitė, born in 1974 and now a lecturer in English literature at Vytautas Magnus University, was among the younger generation attracted to Ivanauskaitė's rebellious writings. She observes, 'To me and my generation she is special because she presented a woman differently than a woman was usually presented in Lithuanian literature. Jurga is a liberator of women's voice' (June 2011 email).

Ivanauskaitė's works also alluded to religious and spiritual matters. She helped stir interest in Eastern religion in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular through a series of books recounting her travels in India and Tibet in the early 1990s, including an extended stay in Dharamsala to study Tibetan Buddhism. These include *Ištremtas Tibetas* (Tibet in exile), published in 1996 with a foreword by the Dalai Lama; *Kelionė į Šambalą* (Journey to Shambhala), published in 1997; and *Prarasta Pažadetoji žemė* (Lost promised land), published in 1999 (Jarvis 2000). These are the works that caught Linas Putelis's attention in the 1990s and helped turn him toward Buddhism.

In the year 2000, Linas began investigating Buddhist resources on the internet, finally coming across Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu. After gaining knowledge of the basic teachings and meditation practices through the Vilnius center, Linas became one of the founders of the Kaunas center in 2002, and its director by 2005. Linas is a firm believer in the necessity of distinguishing the teachings and practice of Karma Kagyu from their original Tibetan context, quoting Lama Ole as saying, 'We are not fighters for Tibetan culture. It is Buddhism that we are talking about' (May 2005 interview). By way of contrast, he pointed to the Krishna adherence to Indian customs, which he felt sometimes reached a point of absurdity.

> In November, they have a big celebration. I believe in India at that time, it's nice climate, but it's really awful here . . . and when they run half-naked through Laisvės alėja [the main pedestrian thoroughfare in downtown Kaunas], it's terrible . . . they scare people! . . . The way they take [not only] the Krishna teachings, and the Krishna logic and understanding, [but also] all this Indian stuff and culture and the way of living, it's not really a good thing to do . . . . In our school of Buddhism, we try to really keep clean of everything that is not really acceptable to our culture, that is strange to our culture, because the teaching is not the culture. . . . We try to keep our own culture . . . and if the Krishna people would do the same, they would have much more success. (May 2005 interview)

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Linas also commented with bitter humor on how on one occasion, his enjoyment of a particular Lithuanian holiday was nearly ruined by the Krishnas. This was the early March holiday of Kaziuko Mugė, a day when traditional folk arts, crafts, and music are on display in every Lithuanian town and city. Linas was in downtown Kaunas enjoying the traditional activities with his children when, suddenly, a troupe of Krishna devotees appeared, loudly disrupting the Lithuanian ethnic ambiance with their characteristically boisterous chanting, dancing and drumming. Linas felt that this was an extremely inappropriate intrusion of Indian culture on a day devoted to Lithuanian folk traditions. Linas would probably have felt the same if a troupe of Tibetan monks had appeared on the same street loudly performing Buddhist chanting.

Linas sees the main social value of Buddhism in helping people gain inner strength and self-reliance. Asked if he would want to see Diamond Way become involved in charity work in Lithuania, Linas answered that he sees Karma Kagyu's contribution not in taking care of the sick and needy, but in providing a tool for those who are ready to look inwards and undertake the hard work of spiritual transformation. Ieva, a 24-year-old Diamond Way practitioner who joined our discussion, rephrased Linas's point as Diamond Way's purpose being not so much to help the sick regain their health, but 'to help the healthy become super-healthy'. This could be judged as somewhat hard-hearted, elitist, and lacking in compassion for those on the bottom rungs of society, but it may also be justified as a realistic assessment of who is best able to benefit from Buddhist practice, and who is not. Linas emphasized that the meditation center has an open-door policy with no deliberate intention to exclude people with social, emotional, or addiction problems. It is simply the case that people with such issues tend to drop out of the community fairly quickly (May 2005 interview). Linas's and Ieva's view, also shared by other Diamond Way practitioners interviewed for this article, is fully in line with the Buddhist belief in people evolving over multiple lifetimes to where they can fully appreciate Buddhist teachings and follow the Buddhist path in earnest. Nonetheless, this does contrast strongly with the Krishna Consciousness decision to actively engage in charity work. Linas did also comment that he thought Buddhism could be of assistance in combating social problems such as violent youth gangs in Lithuania, insofar as young people exposed to Buddhist meditation might develop new ways of coping with angry and agitated emotional states.

Asked how he had benefited personally from Diamond Way, Linas spoke of gaining more awareness and control of his internal states such as becoming more able to choose how to respond to events in his life rather than simply reacting in an impulsive manner. He also stated that his practice of meditation has made him less self-centered and more aware of others' needs and feelings.

Tomas Mileris (b. 1986) is the youngest member of Diamond Way interviewed for this article, a 22-year-old art student at the time of our meeting at the Kaunas center in March of 2009. A young man of obvious intellectual acuity and curiosity, he came to Karma Kagyu after investigating a number of other spiritual paths from yoga to Reiki to Krishna Consciousness from the age of 16 onward. He was most impressed with Krishna Consciousness and Diamond Way, participating in both for a number of months before settling on Diamond Way, finding the philosophical framework of Karma Kagyu more logical and comprehensive than that of Krishna

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Consciousness, and deriving a sense of trust from the knowledge that there were living spiritual masters such as Lama Ole and the seventeenth Karmapa to testify to the effectiveness of the method and the attainability of its goals. Tomas's girlfriend and mother became regular practitioners as well.

Upon resuming communications with Tomas two years later, I discovered that he has steadily progressed to more advanced forms of Karma Kagyu meditation. He is now hoping to study with Lama Sherab Gyaltsen Rinpoche (b. 1950), a Tibetan lama initiated by the sixteenth Karmapa, who operates several monasteries in Nepal but also visits Europe to supervise meditation retreats for European students of Karma Kagyu (June 2011 email). Asked to reflect on whether his decision to study with a Tibetan lama reveals the superiority of Tibetan traditional training over a totally Westernized approach, Tomas answered as follows.

> I would like to learn the classical version of Tibetan Buddhism and then compare my experiences to what we have in the West. I feel happy that I have the chance to learn the traditional way. I have also started to study the Tibetan language. And I think everyone who really wants to go deep into Buddhism should learn the language and the traditional way and then decide themselves which is better for them. But I do not care if the teacher is from Tibet or from the West as long as he can give me the proper instructions, has compassion, and experience in meditation. (June 2011 email)

In his first interview, Tomas listed the benefits that he has derived from Karma Kagyu as including an increased willingness to take responsibility for his situation in life rather than blaming others, and greater ability to resist the lure of computer games, to which he had become practically addicted for a time. He also stated that the teachings on death and reincarnation had been immensely meaningful and comforting to him. In our second round of discussions, two years later, Tomas gave the following self-assessment:

> I have never been this happy and content. Meaning that I am not ecstatic in a lunatic way like rolling eyeballs and a creepy smile but I have this feeling of inner peace, stability and satisfaction that follows me day and night and is almost unaffected by outer conditions. Also because of my experience I am able to help others. I can tell them about Buddhism and be a living proof that in fact correct meditation and correct conduct and view produce these positive and lasting results. (June 2011 email)

Romuva: Linking Baltic Paganism with Indian Hinduism

Romuva, the main Baltic Pagan revival (or Neo-Pagan) association in Lithuania, was established in its more or less current form in the late 1960s by Jonas Trinkūnas (b. 1939) and his wife Inija Trinkūnienė (b. 1951), who still lead the movement today. Initially posing as a strictly folkloric association to evade Soviet suspicion, Trinkūnas and his associates were in fact laboring to reinvigorate Paganism in Lithuania by researching and recreating myths, folk songs, rituals, and customs related to pre-Christian Baltic Paganism. Suppressed by Soviet authorities in the 1970s, Romuva

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revived in the more open atmosphere of the late 1980s as Lithuania began to move toward independence. Romuva's celebration of ethnic folk culture and Lithuanian identity fit the mood of the times perfectly and the association gained widespread public acceptance. Romuva attained the minimal legal status of a registered religious community in the early1990s, though the Lithuanian Parliament has rejected its attempts to attain higher official status as either a traditional or non-traditional religious community (Glodenis, March 2009 interview, December 2011 email; Trinkūnas, December 2004 and March 2009 interviews).

The 2001 census put the number of followers of Romuva, listed as 'Baltic Faith', at 1270, a figure higher than that of Krishna Consciousness and Buddhism combined, though this does not account for those who occasionally attend Romuva events without seeking formal membership. A further difficulty with this figure is that the census does not indicate whether some who claim to follow the 'Baltic Faith' may be involved with other similar religious groups. As noted earlier, the 2011 census does not provide any figures for Baltic Faith and/or Romuva communities in Lithuania.

Romuva has become sufficiently respected in the broader world community for Trinkūnas to be invited to represent Romuva at the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Melbourne, Australia, in 2009, the largest interreligious assembly on the face of the Earth.[8] I will not attempt an account of Romuva's history and development here, having done this elsewhere, as have other authors (Dundzila 2007–2008; Strmiska 2005, 2012a; Strmiska & Dundzila 2005; Trinkūnas 1999; York 1995). Romuva's highly acclaimed artistic offshoot, the folk music ensemble Kūlgrinda, is examined elsewhere by the author (Strmiska 2012b). The focus here will be on certain ways in which Romuva relates to India and Hinduism, which form an interesting contrast to the Eastern associations of Krishna Consciousness and Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu.

Romuva takes considerable inspiration from nineteenth-century research into Baltic ethnic folklore and Indo-European linguistics and comparative mythology, which, as noted earlier, both glorified the folkloric traditions of the Lithuanians and established certain points of kinship with ancient traditions of India, including certain correspondences between Lithuanian, or more broadly speaking, Baltic myth and religion and those of Hinduism. This Indo-European link is actually something of a double-edged sword, however, as these Indo-European origins may also be taken to undercut and relativize Baltic Pagan claims to uniqueness and antiquity by indirectly acknowledging that the oldest Baltic religious traditions derive from an older cultural background that pre-dates and transcends a strictly Baltic frame of reference.

A similar dual calculus prevails when we consider Baltic Pagans' claims to represent a modern continuation of ancient Indo-European traditions, as asserted by Trinkūnas and others (Trinkūnas 1999, 2005). The Balts, and particularly the Lithuanians, can certainly claim pride of place for practicing Paganism longer than all other Europeans, as the Latvians and Lithuanians were still singing songs of worship to the Sun when the Greeks, Romans, Celts, German and Scandinavians had long since taken up the cross, and continued to maintain certain Pagan traditions at the folkloric level even when the Baltic nations became officially Christianized.

The impressive persistence of Baltic Paganism cannot, however, match the track record of Hinduism in India, which not only managed to survive unbroken up to the

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present time, despite oppression under Muslim rule in the Middle Ages and British colonialism in more recent times, but also continued to develop and refine itself, not merely as folklore but in highly sophisticated forms of art, architecture, literature and philosophy. Baltic Pagan traditions have never undergone the kind of continual development and refinement so evident in Hinduism or Buddhism. The folk songs that function as the primary sacred texts in Baltic Paganism, the Latvian *dainas* and the Lithuanian *dainos*, are comparable only to the first phase of Indian Hindu scripture, the hymns of the Rig Veda, with nothing to match the further stages of Hindu and Buddhist sacred literature and philosophy. A number of Krishna Consciousness and Karma Kagyu followers interviewed for this article remarked on this exact point as a key reason for not choosing Baltic Paganism as their personal spiritual path, despite their affection for Lithuanian mythology and ethnic culture.

In attempting to construct or reconstruct a religious movement on an essentially folkloric foundation, Lithuanian Pagans confront the inevitably restrictive nature of the source materials, which are primarily folkloric texts such as myths and folk songs. If Romuva and other Baltic Pagan movements are to move beyond simply reiterating the glorification of nature and rural customs inherent in the folkloric traditions, additional philosophical and/or theological tools and techniques are needed beyond what is available in the folklore itself. Here, the Indo-European connection to Hinduism offers a potential solution. With Hinduism and Baltic Paganism seen as sister Indo-European traditions rather than as aliens, enemies or competitors, sophisticated concepts from Indian religion and philosophy may be borrowed and adapted to the Baltic Pagan context in order to articulate further dimensions of meaning inherent in Pagan folklore. The same could be done with Hindu practices such as yoga and meditation. Vydūnas, as noted previously, was an early twentieth-century proponent of such borrowing and blending. Rudra Vilius Dundzila, a long-time student of yoga under an Indian guru in Chicago as well as an American Romuva leader, is a more recent one. He spoke of such parallels in a speech in Vilnius in June 1998 at the first meeting of the World Congress of Ethnic Religions.

Since the late 1990s, Jonas Trinkūnas has promoted a number of conferences and organizations that bring together Pagans and Hindus to discuss common concerns and increase awareness of one another's religious traditions. The first of these was the World Pagan Congress, convened by Trinkūnas in June of 1998 in Vilnius, soon to be renamed the World Congress of Ethnic Religions (WCER) and to continue henceforth as an annual gathering (Strmiska 2012a). The author of this article participated as an invited guest. The participants included practitioners of European Pagan traditions from Denmark, Sweden, France, Poland, Russia, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Latvia as well as Lithuania. Also included were representatives of Indian religions. Though originally intended as a worldwide association of indigenous or ethnic religions, the World Congress took on a pattern of European-plus-Indian membership that has continued at subsequent annual meetings of the group. Speeches at both the 1998 congress and later ones have often portrayed European Pagans and Indian Hindus as long-lost cousins who are now being reunited. It is worth noting that the first WCER gathering featured a concert of classical Indian music performed by Lithuanian musicians.

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This sense of Indo-European, Hindu-Pagan camaraderie was further emphasized by representatives of Romuva, Dievturi – a Latvian equivalent to Romuva (Misāne 2000) – and other WCER member groups taking part in several interreligious conferences held in India, the first in 2003, a second in 2006, and a third in 2009. These meetings were sponsored by two related organizations, the World Council of Elders of Ancient Traditions and Cultures (WCEAT) and the International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS). A still more explicit statement of Baltic Pagan-Indian Hindu commonality was expressed at an 'Indo-Romuva' conference organized by the ICCS in the USA in 2003 and was attended by Romuva and Dievturi delegations as well as Indian representatives of various sects of Hinduism. The conference proceedings were published as 'Syncretism: An Indo-Romuva Strategy of Integration', a slightly misleading title in that there was no merger of these religious groups in the offing, only continuing efforts at mutual support and understanding (Trinkūnas 2005). Trinkūnas has also hosted Hindu visitors to the Romuva folklore summer camp that he and his wife conduct each year in Lithuania (March 2009 interview). At such meetings, Indian Hindus and Lithuanian Romuva members have enjoyed sharing and comparing ritual practices, from singing and chanting to reciting prayers, saluting the sun, and using fire altars for ritual purposes. There can be no doubt that Romuva members feel a genuine bond with Hindus, based on their common Indo-European heritage as well as their shared sense of threat from opposing cultural and religious forces, especially global consumer culture and missionary Christianity. In an interview in March of 2009, Trinkūnas remarked on the amazement and joy he felt when visiting India and seeing the colorful and vibrant forms of Hindu worship, jokingly commenting on the depression he felt upon returning to grey, cold Lithuania in the midst of winter.

Though Trinkūnas has mainly concentrated on building organizational bridges between Indian Hinduism and Baltic Paganism, he has also speculated on possible philosophical parallels between the Lithuanian term *darna*, which roughly translates as 'harmony', and the Hindu concept of *dharma*, a term with multiple levels of meaning from social duty to cosmic order. 'Baltic *darna* morality is a very similar concept to the Hindu *Dharma* – the moral core of the world' (Trinkūnas 1999, p. 159). The linkage with a highly significant Hindu concept lends additional prestige and credibility to the Lithuanian term and, by extension, to Baltic Paganism itself, illustrating the rhetorical potential of such parallelism. At a speech delivered at the 'Indo-Baltic' conference in 2003, Trinkunas further elaborated on the *darna-dharma* parallel, demonstrating that the linkage was more than a casual allusion (Trinkūnas 2005).

In our interview in his Vilnius home in March, 2009, I asked Trinkūnas if he felt any interest in building on such parallels by borrowing concepts and practices from Hinduism. He gently turned aside the suggestion, explaining that he was only interested in sharing and exploring common or contrasting elements of Romuva and Hinduism, not importing Indian elements into Romuva. His wife Inija expressed considerable consternation at an idea that she had apparently encountered on more than one occasion, namely that the many deities of Lithuanian Pagan polytheism could be viewed as 'aspects' of one deity or cosmic principle, as in some forms of Hindu Vedanta philosophy. 'My goddess is not an *aspect*', she scoffed. 'That would be an insult to her!' (March 2009 interview). Referring once more to his recent visit to

India, Trinkūnas stated that what impressed him most was the warm, heartfelt piety of simple people there, not the advanced philosophy to be found in sophisticated Hindu texts. When asked if he was interested in Romuva pursuing a closer relationship with the Krishna community in Vilnius, which would seem to represent the closest Lithuanian equivalent to Indian-style Hindu piety, Trinkūnas merely shrugged. I had the impression that he was a great admirer of Hinduism as a vibrant component of Indian life, but not something to be transplanted onto Lithuanian soil.

From our discussions, it seems clear that currently Romuva is unlikely to seek to incorporate any Hindu ideas or practices into its philosophical and religious repertoire, even while it continues to derive strength from its historical links and organizational bonds with Hinduism. Given the popularity of other forms of Indian religion and culture in Lithuania, it is possible that future generations of Romuva followers may seek a more philosophical, more mystical, and less folkloric faith, and may wish to graft Indian spiritual practices like yoga and meditation onto the sacred oak tree of Lithuanian Paganism.

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Conclusions

The three religious movements described in this paper all delineate different ways in which modern Lithuanians are engaging with religious ideas and practices that originate in Asia. The two most strongly related to Asian religious traditions, Krishna Consciousness and Diamond Way, have built their respective followings on a foundation of long-standing interest in Eastern culture and religion in Lithuania, helped along by the generally tolerant atmosphere of post-Soviet, independent Lithuania that had already begun to manifest in the late Soviet period of *glasnost*. Romuva is only indirectly related to Eastern religion and Asian culture, but this connection is highly significant as a manner of demonstrating the antiquity and profundity of Baltic Pagan traditions, as first noted by nineteenth-century scholars, and establishing supportive relationships with Hindu organizations in India.

Krishna Consciousness represents the most comprehensive effort to transplant Eastern religion to eastern Europe, showing equal enthusiasm for establishing both Hindu religious practices in Lithuania as well as select aspects of Indian culture, such as Indian food, clothing, and festivals, and reaching out to the public with a lively display of devotional Hinduism wrapped in a colorful package of Indian culture. Its members feel a very strong personal connection to India as their spiritual homeland, as is borne out by the importance placed on pilgrimage travel to Vrindavan and other sacred sites in India.

Diamond Way-Karma Kagyu demonstrates a much more tightly circumscribed adaptation of Eastern religion to the Lithuanian context. Following the lead of its Danish impresario, Lama Ole Nydahl, Diamond Way largely detaches itself from the original Tibetan context of its Buddhist traditions, focusing on Buddhist teachings and meditation techniques while firmly eschewing any borrowing of Asian culture beyond the bare minimum needed to explain the originally Indo-Tibetan teachings and practices. Lithuanian Diamond Way Buddhists do not express any marked attachment to Tibet or any desire for pilgrimage comparable to the feelings of Krishna followers

toward India. They tend to see themselves as Lithuanians who follow a religious practice that happened to develop in India and Tibet, but that is not bound to those places.

Though neither the Krishna nor the Diamond Way religious movement has received any substantial support from the government beyond a minimal level of official recognition, they have also not suffered any persecution, and in the case of the Krishna movement they have even become the partners of local governments in providing food relief to needy citizens. Followers of these two religions report similar benefits of enhanced appreciation of life and increased self-awareness and self-control, though there is more emphasis on connecting to something beyond oneself, namely the divine presence of a beloved deity, in the case of the Krishna movement. Where these two movements most differ is in how they appeal to those who become their followers and how they relate to the original cultural context of their religious traditions. Of the three NRMs considered in this article, Diamond Way comes closest to New Age spirituality in its focus on self-transformation and its minimization of cultural context. However, devotion to Buddhist teachers and teachings, the cultivation of extraordinary states of consciousness that move beyond the ordinary, egoistic sense of self, and the option of participating in a monastic community also provide a self-transcendent dimension to Diamond Way. The shared success of these two very different Eastern-inspired religious movements in Lithuania testifies to the varied needs and capacities of Lithuanian seekers of spiritual knowledge and experience.

Romuva is a different case from either of these, as it does not seek to adapt or transplant any Eastern religious practices whatsoever, but to enhance respect for native Lithuanian ethnic religion by honoring its common background with Hindu traditions of India. Its leaders take pleasure in visiting India and participating in Hindu rituals. This is understood not as a pilgrimage per se, but rather as an opportunity to become acquainted with traditions and people seen as long-lost kin – the meeting is like a family reunion with very distant relatives. The strongly nationalistic sense of loyalty to Lithuanian tradition and identity at the heart of Romuva faith is therefore supplemented by a sense of membership in an extended religious family whose branches reach to India.

All three religious movements represent a deepening, broadening and internationalization of Lithuanian identity that moves beyond a simple, sentimental, and possibly xenophobic nationalism to a more discriminating sense that Lithuanian life can be enriched and expanded through interaction with the spiritual and cultural traditions of Asia. This is obviously more pronounced with regard to the Krishna Consciousness and Karma Kagyu movements, which derive directly from Asian religious traditions, than to Romuva, but the latter's Indo-European link to Hinduism is nonetheless quite important. It is also notable that all three religious movements share a common concern with what they see as negative effects of Western materialism and consumer culture in the post-Soviet era, and view their respective religious traditions as a line of spiritual defense against this threat from the West.

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Notes

1 Text of the 1992 constitution is available online at http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm, accessed 25 May 2011.

2 Text of the 2005 'Law on Religious Communities and Associations of the Republic of Lithuania' is available at http://www.litlex.lt/Litletx/eng/Frames/Laws/Documents/332.HTM, accessed 25 May 2011.

3 Lithuanian Republic Constitutional Court, cases nos. 10/95, 23/98, ruling date 6 December 2007. An English-language explanation of the ruling can be found at http://www.lrkt.lt/dokumentai/2007/d071206.htm, accessed 27 May 2011. The circular reasoning employed in this ruling seems expressly designed to avoid engaging with the substantive issues at stake.

4 Indian names and terms such as Kṛṣṇa and Vaiṣṇavism will initially be given in 'Sanskritic' forms with diacritic accent marks followed by Anglicized forms in parentheses (Krishna, Vaishnavism). Where the Anglicized, de-accented spellings have entered common usage, subsequent mentions will follow the Anglicized forms.

5 All interviews are with the author unless otherwise indicated.

6 *Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis* (Statistical yearbook of Lithuania) 2011, available online at http://www.stat.gov.lt/en/catalog/list/?cat_y=2&cat_id=1&id=2039, with Section 12 (pp. 231–34) providing statistics on religious communities.

7 As noted in Diamond Way's 2010–2011 directory of meditation centers, available at http://www.diamondway-buddhism.org/pdf/GUiDE2010-2011.pdf, accessed June 20, 2011.

8 Information on the Parliament is available at http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm, accessed 7 June 2010.

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