

Influence of the Works of Chinghiz Aitmatov on Sri Lankan society

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka, which is reaching the 69th mile post in its journey since independence, has followed the principles of democracy and its framework as the tools of governance. When looking back it is evident that the steps taken by different Governments during the past period were combination of democratic, capitalist as well as socialist ruling systems. This is reflected by naming the governments as Democratic Socialist Republic but the real practice shows the vision of the rulers moving from one extreme to the other that is from socialism to capitalism, due to different situations as well as influences. Though the picture in the political arena is somewhat blurred, the literature of the country was and is always a flourishing field even under certain restrictions. The contribution of the foreign literature for the enhancement of Sri Lanka's literature is one of the areas which demands thorough study in this revolutionary age of modern technology. This paper attempts to open an avenue for an understanding on the influence of one of the great writers, Chinghiz Aitmatov, out of those men of letters, who have been introduced to native readers from the world literature during the past four or five decades.

Number of reasons made the base for selecting Aitmatov, who represented the socialist world and was later honored as the leading literary figure of the Kirghizstan, a republic of the former USSR. The contribution made by the literature of the socialist block during past few decades to shape the minds of the readers and to enrich the field of literature in the country itself should never be underestimated. In a country, where the leftist movements held a prominent place in the political arena, the literature that represented the left bank had been the most popular stream for a considerable period. Among those writers of the leftist bank i.e. Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokhov and

also among the great Russian writers such as Gogol , Tolstoy, Chekov, Chinghiz Aitmatov still is at the height of popularity even in a context where the USSR no longer exists in the world map.

BACKGROUND

An attempt made to explore his background will facilitate the purpose before analyzing the impact of his literature. Chinghiz Aitmatov can be identified as the most renowned and admired man of letter of Kirgizstan, of which the population is nearly five million. This writer, who blended Russian literature with traditional Kirgiz folklore, brought his country and the USSR to the apex of Eurasian literature during his time. Though he was celebrated in writers' circles and the ruling circles of USSR as one of the writers of the era, his writing were not totally free from harsh criticisms of the rulers at that time. However, he made untiring efforts amidst various obstacles to enrich Kirgiz literature both in Russian and Kirgiz languages and to build the bridge between the socialist world and modern Eurasian literature.

Aitmatov was born in to a family in a village called Sheker changing under the banner of socialism and situated at the foothills of Tien Shan Mountains in Central Asia. His father Torekul Aitmatov, who was an ardent communist fighting for a new society and later subject to execution , and mother Nagima Aitmatov, who made tremendous contribution to the struggle for the building of a new world, which shaped the world of little Aitmatov sowing seeds of socialism in his mind. However, the main character, who broadened the horizons of little Aitmatov, was his paternal grandmother. In a society which was facing slow changes his grandmother never wasted any opportunity to take this child to traditional field ceremonies, weddings, funeral repasts with a view to introduce the boy to the world's cultural heritage. The opportunity which he had to experience both the traditional and the socialist practices and the ability to communicate in Russian and Kirgiz languages has had their part when he

enters the adult world. Though the cruel fate of his father remained as a black mark in his mind for his whole life he never vacillated to accept socialism as the main wheel of the development of his land. Therefore, he extended his fullest assistance since boyhood to establish the principles of socialism. In a country where a main role in the culture is played by Bards, folk singers, folk dancers and the day to day life was decorated by the horsemen and shepherds and their traditions, Aitmatov discreetly opened his path through literature even though his studies focused on agriculture. Consequently, after graduating from Kirgiz Agricultural Institute, young Aitmatov enrolled for a higher course in literature at the Gorky Institute, Moscow. This is considered as the turning point of his life. The education at Gorky Institute moulded the talent of the future writer. His first short story translated in to Russian language was published in 1958, which was the year of his graduation. During the same year his first novel *Jamila* was published and this short piece of writing brought him the fame as a writer of the people. During his career Aitmatov wrote more than 10 novels. When the opportunity was given to Turkey to nominate a writer for Nobel Prize, Aitmatov was their selection. This fact alone proves the significant role played by him in the arena of world literature. His works have been translated to many languages. Out of his works *The First Teacher*, *Jamila*, *Mother Earth and Other Stories*, *To Have and to Lose*, *The White Steamboat*, *Farwell*, *Gyulsary*, *Spotted Dog Running along the Seashore*, *Camel Eye*, *Cranes Fly Early*, *The Place of the Skull* and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* have been translated in to Sinhala language during the past few decades. From the first day of the publication of the translation of *The First Teacher* as '*Guru Geethaya*', into Sinhala, Aitmatov became an icon of Soviet literature among Sinhala readers. There are few other writers who won the admiration of such a huge readership.

MAIN THEMES OF AITMATOV'S WRITINGS AND THEIR RELEVANCE

Several social, political, cultural and economic factors served to form the view as well as the narrative form of the writer. Firstly his traditional background where nomadic culture held a prime position; secondly socialism, suppression under Stalin and the struggle for a new society, whilst the Second World War made a heavy impact on the life of Aitmatov. In the meantime Cold War between two worlds and environmental pollution in the disguise of technological revolution and the hidden war led by the capitalist and leftist banks emerged with its adverse effects including nuclear weapons and hazardous experiments carried out by both camps. Bureaucracy is one of the other issues against which Aitmatov fought through his pen and vision. Moreover, he paid attention to the generation gap and the conflict between young generations, who are the heirs of socialism and the old generation who sacrificed their lives for building the new society. Amidst these positive as well as negative influences, Aitmatov emerged from other writers of his era because of his unwavering belief for a new man, who would have the capabilities to change the world. This new man or the fighter is highlighted in almost every work of Aitmatov. The protagonist Duishen in *The First Teacher* is the exemplary hero of all time.

Aitmatov paid special concern in his writings towards the world being destroyed by the power politics. Likewise he was against the suppression of sub cultures under the Iron Heel of Russian culture and neglecting the languages of minorities of the USSR. He intervened wherever possible to protect the language specially used in Central Asia in different forums calling his fellow writers for support. His vision was that no development could be achieved without respecting the rights of other nations living under USSR and therefore he spent his time and ink to point out the importance of preserving sub cultures and traditions of other nations.

The protagonists of his every novel are the men, who fight against odds and toil for a new world and women who wage a struggle against the age old negative attitudes on the womanhood. The reader of Sri Lanka, a country which had experienced the long term struggle for the leftist ideas, a brutal war for more than thirty years, religious antagonism and much other discrimination, finds similar experiences in the works of Aitmatov and in the meantime he meets from his novels the new man in his dreams. The struggle of Duishen, Thanabai, Yedigei, Boston and other heroes of his works paint the fights which are only too familiar to Sri Lanka. Under such circumstances the reader in Sri Lanka are attracted to the protagonists created by Aitmatov.

CONCLUSION

Aitmatov's works demand deep analysis and discussion with regard to the form and the content. However, under the present context of Sri Lanka, where a new dialogue is on stage for multicultural, multi religious and multiracial society, re-reading the works of Aitmatov in a wide political understanding can build avenues to run the wheels of unity which were stopped for more than thirty years.

“A writer is charged with the mission of speaking on behalf of his fellow human beings. Everything that happens in the world is happening to me personally. (Chingiz Aitmatov)

KEYWORDS

works of Chingiz Aitmatov, *The First Teacher*, protagonists in novels of Aitmatov

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