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## Reflection of National Traditions and Mode of Life in Georgian writer Alexander Kazbegi's Works (According to "Elguja")

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### ABSTRACT

*This publication encompasses the literary analysis of one of the prominent novels in the Georgian Classical Literature of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; "Elguja" by Alexander Kazbegi- which is considered as a seminal work of Georgian literature thanks to Kazbegi's creative work in a high artistic value. Deep content of the writer's work reflects the problems, which are unlimited by local time and territory. The writer presents common problems: the struggle between kind and evil, the intangibility of a man, the respect and protection of national traditions, etc. Kazbegi's works have always been read with a high interest. Georgian literary criticism has done great work to grant his works suitable place in the history of Georgian Classical Literature. For over a century a number of fundamental works in Georgian, Russian, English, German and other languages were dedicated to Kazbegi's creative work.*

**Keywords:** Georgia, Russia, North Caucasus, traditions, religion, customary law.

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### INTRODUCTION

Monuments of Georgian historical literary materials, law books, historical documents and works of art contain diverse information essential for the study of old Georgian mode of life and culture. From this viewpoint, the contribution of Vakhushti Bagrationi—great Georgian historian, geographer and ethnologist of the feudal epoch is great. In his thorough work with the ethnographic analysis and interpretation of existential phenomena, Bagrationi prepared grounds for the study of the Georgian and Caucasian peoples' traditions (Bagrationi, 1973).

Great Georgian writers and scholars: Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Vazha Pshavela, Alexandre Qazbegi, Mose Janashvili, Petre Umikashvili and others suitably continued this tradition in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of the problems the researchers of Georgian literature and culture have been experiencing for over a decade, A. Kazbegi holds an appropriate place in Georgian literature of great traditions. The writer had fundamental knowledge of the Georgian and Caucasian peoples' modes of life, social relations. His works provide figurative descriptions of economic mode of life, social relations, traditions of brother adoption, expressions of devotion, scenes of the interrelation between community and society. While studying Kazbegi's work from this standpoint, I paid heed to the novel "Elguja" (Kazbegi, 1987).

The novel is remarkable from many perspectives. My research aims to: a) familiarize foreign readers with great Georgian writer's creative works; b) discuss the origin of the novel and its artistic value; c) make scientific analysis of the national traditions and mode of life of East Georgian Mountaineers; d) analyze the writer's attitude towards mountain traditions; e) present the systematic picture of the research.

### The path of Alexandre Kazbegi's life

Renowned Georgian writer and public figure Alexander Kazbegi grew up in Stepantsminda in the family of Mikheil Chopikashvili-governor of Khevi. In 1863 he studied at Classical Gymnasium, from 1867 to 1870 in Moscow Economic Academy. Upon graduation from the Academy the future writer returned to his homeland and worked as a shepherd.

In 1879 Kazbegi moved to Tbilisi; from this time on, he started his works as a writer in Georgian theatre. Alexander Kazbegi's creative works hold a significant part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian Classical Literature.

Kazbegi grew up in Khevi and contact with people, 7-year-work as a shepherd and friendship with shepherds, helped him to get familiarized with the mountaineers' mode of life and ancient traditions better (Khutsishvili, 1962).

Such conditions were dictated by Kazbegi's creative purposefulness, testified by the writer's words: "In addition to dramatic activity I spent all my life among common people, worked with them, made friends with them, studied their life and relations with neighboring peoples, got familiarized with their conditions, morals, habits and life. There were not many people like me in our literature to provide enough material on Georgia's customs and traditions, best preserved in the Mountains. It is enough to mention that I lived a true shepherd's life during seven years" (Kazbegi, 1950:187).

Later Kazbegi even justified his decision and emphasized how important those years were for his creative work. "...If in my works the reader finds anything close to his heart, does not get bored and reads them to the end, this is all thanks to my past, my shepherd's life and seven years spent with you..." (Kazbegi, 1950: 212-213).

Such proximity to his native region and people greatly determined the immortality of Al. Kazbegi's work. According to Shalva Radiani- a renowned critic, Al. Kazbegi's prose shows the height that can be reached by a writer who bases on true folk character (Radiani, 1954:498).

When the well-known Georgian poet and public figure Grigol Orbeliani read Kazbegi's "Elguja" for the first time, he exclaimed with enthusiasm: "... Oh, Mochkhubaridze, may you be joyous that you are the writer number one in Georgia.... God bless you for the pleasure my heart was filled with when reading the story" (Radiani, 1954:493).

### **The Origin of the Novel**

Before touching upon the Georgian national traditions and mode of life described in the novel, we would like to tell in short about the writer's life and interesting history of the novel's origin. Al.Kazbegi's activity in the 1880s was fairly diverse; according to his contemporaries Kazbegi was a man with valiant appearance, a just and straightforward person. In his memoirs famous Georgian writer and public figure Davit Kldiashvili described Kazbegi as follows: "Anyone who saw Sandro speaking ardently would understand how gifted he was" (Makharadze 1989: 36-37).

Kazbegi's works were published in the "Droeba" newspaper: "Elguja" in 1881 was followed by "The Father's Murderer", "The Castaways", "Gocha the Khevi Leader", etc. (Khutsishvili, 1983: 6-7). In 1884 the novel "Elguja" was published as a separate volume, but the book was banned by the censorship and the entire circulation was destroyed, only one copy survived to this day. As Georgian writer Giorgi Natadze recalls the Tbilisi Seminary students sought for the banned "Elguja" with great interest. "... The content of the book enkindled our young hearts; we had not experienced anything like that before" (Makharadze, 1989:42-43).

Also noteworthy is another fact on creation of "Elguja". Davit Kldiashvili narrates the story I told by Kazbegi himself:

"Initially "Elguja" ended with Elguja's death in today's Chapter One. But when the writer brought the book to the typography, the workers refused to typeset the text unless the writer continued the story of Elguja – the hero. "We won't let him kill such a brave man". After short hesitation Kazbegi accepted their demand and immediately altered the final sentence as follows: "Heavily wounded Elguja was taken to the neighbouring village for recovery" and announced that the story would be continued (Kldiashvili, 1925:52). "Elguja" was published three times in Kazbegi's lifetime: in the "Droeba" newspaper (1881), as a separate volume (1884) and in the collection of Kazbegi's works (1891) (Chavleishvili, 1985:49). After Kazbegi's death, the novel was published a number of times and is still read with great interest. "Elguja" has been translated in Russian, English, German, Turkish and other languages.

The novel describes the mountaineers' life, provides a highly artistic description of their customs, culture, mode of life and social-political state of the country of the time. The novel consists of 26 chapters; the story develops from Chapter 5 and uninterruptedly continues until the culmination in Chapter 23. The story is narrated in chapters 5-26; these include the basic material of the work- Mzagho's adventure, the events related to Svimon Chopikashvili, the life of Elguja – main character of the novel. The reader witnesses interesting details from Mzagho's, Jajala's, Matia's, Svimon Chopikashvili's lives.

Alongside the afore-mentioned, Alexander Kazbegi created a new stage in the 19th century Georgian national consciousness, rejecting to use allegory in literary narration and directly describing the state of colonial Georgia. The author constructed his prosaic texts on real, historical facts. Kazbegi aimed to give a thorough description of the political reality – Russo-Caucasian and Russo-Georgian relations and for this he applied specific historical facts and documentary materials (Aptsiauri, 1993:6-7).

The plot develops on the background of Russian rule in Georgia: among Kazbegi's characters there are real historical figures: Vorontsov, Shamil, Georgian princes.... In his short stories the author indicated concrete historical dates and battles, showed the people's fate in the colonial country; by describing the administrative system he emphasized the representation of the establishment of colonial process: "This was the time when Georgia was under Russian protection i.e. the time of disorder and constant struggle

between those willing to find room under this protection and their opponents.... Exactly at this time the news on Georgia's annexation by Russia rapidly spread and shook the entire country... the Russians settled down in Georgia and guests quickly turned into hosts. People compassionate were either imprisoned, or scattered, common people were intimidated, people lived in uncertainty.... The Russians settled down but the people could not get used to new situation. Years passed. Russian government and laws were established in Georgia. People calmed down and started new life (Kazbegi 1987: 5, 61, 108, 132, 146, 150).

### **Relation Ties among Georgian Mountaineers and the Tradition of Brother Adoption**

During the study our attention was attracted by the role and significance of relation ties among the Georgian Mokhevians. Fundamental study of this centuries-old tradition is provided in Valerian Itonishvili's book "From the History of Family Relations of the Georgian Mountaineers" (Itonishvili, 1960). Out of family relations distinguished was blood relation, marriage and artificial relation. The latter was created through baptism or brother adoption. This was performed in various ways: by cutting a finger and sharing blood, drinking from a bowl with silver coins in it or bullet exchange ( Itonishvili, 2006: 107). From the brother adoption variants Kazbegi introduces the ritual of bullet exchange, aimed to strengthen devotion. After this simple but strong ritual people were obliged to be staunch to each other in good and bad times, and fight to death. " .... Where you will die I will die too"( Kazbegi, 1987:58-60).

In "Elguja" Kazbegi narrates about friendship and fraternity. Martia from Khandoskhevi instead of complying Gigi Chopikashvili's order takes the other side and becomes Givargi's adopted brother: " The two disarmed themselves, put the arms on the ground, exchanged bullets, embraced each other, kissed three times, made an oath of devotion, took the arms and went to Elguja, who on his part also became an adopted brother" ( Kazbegi, 1987:79-80).

According to the work brother adoption was the guarantee for devotion; this is confirmed in the episode of Elguja's preparation for Tusheti. "Matia called everyone to exchange bullets and become adopted brothers. After completing this he exclaimed: - may the traitor marry his mother!" The others responded back and set off" (Kazbegi, 1987: 78).

The process of brother adoption became broader with the inclusion of women; since Elguja was Matia's adopted brother; the latter became Mzagho's adopted brother too: "Elguja is my adopted brother, so I am your brother too." Jalala and Matia also became adopted brothers when they got acquainted. As Mzagho was Jalala's adopted sister, and Matia was Mzagho's brother, Jalala said: "My adopted sister's brother is my brother too" ( Kazbegi, 1987:62; 77).

In Kazbegi's novel brother adoption based on trust, oath and high moral, from this standpoint attention should be paid to the dialogue between Matia and Svimon Chopikashvili.

"- Listen Matia, I want to be your adopted brother.

-Do I deserve to be your brother?

I know you do... tell me directly: why don't you want to be my brother? A man should be straightforward.

- Matia proudly looked at Svimon;

- Why don't you tell me directly?

- I will.

- Well, I don't want to be your brother, because I am Elguja's brother and you want to be my brother in order to harm him. Adopted brother should not be betrayed, just like Lomisa. I will never break oath, even if I am hanged... I have said everything.... Order to catch me, shoot me, but I will never break my word" ( Kazbegi, 1987:82-83).

Matia accepted Svimon's proposal of brother adoption, only after becoming sure, that Svimon was doing his best to help Elguja.

With this dialogue Kazbegi showed the form of relationship, which created the atmosphere of mutual understanding between a common member of community and a man in high position. Thus, the writer showed the all-embracing power of tradition, which could not be harmed even by people's different social status ( Itonishvili, 2006:208-109).

From Kazbegi's work we see that this holy tradition of the mountaineers based on the folk tradition of upbringing, which excluded unreliability and treason. In the novel about twenty young men become adopted brothers and make oath of devotion. But tooth was not even necessary, as they were well-aware that devotion was their duty and tradition. And this is how it should be among the people, to whom the tradition of brother adoption was transmitted with breast milk ( Kazbegi, 1987: 102).

### **Reflection of the Tradition of Hospitality**

In Kazbegi's novel very interesting is the tradition of hospitality. The writer describes the rules of hospitality only in his works of art. From Kazbegi's works of art and publicist articles it becomes obvious that the writer considered hospitality as a humane custom and gave it particular significance.

In his viewpoint hospitality played important role in the reinforcement of family relations, approximation of village and community members and establishment of benevolent relations between people. Such importance of the tradition greatly determined its viability, which implied particular attention to a guest. Such attitude was revealed in individual as well as mass hospitality ( Itonishvili, 2006: 112).

Kazbegi's essay "The Mokhevians and Their Life" gives more or less thorough description of hospitality rules in Khevi. The writer is interested in the characterization of guest treatment at folk festive occasions. Hospitality, as an expression of a person's respect, demanded to follow the etiquette and express particular attention to a guest. Respect implied offering best food, entertainment, lodging for the night, keeping his arms and feeding his horses. In this case neither the guest's personality, nor the length of his stay mattered. Even if he were the host's friend, his help in family affairs was considered violation of hospitality tradition. This attitude is also encountered in "Elguja", more precisely in the dialogue between the host and guest. Mokhevi Elguja told his Mtiuleti friend Matia – the guest to his house, that he had to go to Snostsqali (Local parallel name of the Sno Gorge, with the villages Achkhoti, Sno, Akhaltsikhe, Koseli, Karkucha and Juta). and invite people to attend the rites (*shesandobari* and *topis khmis gatekhva*) for the deceased Gagi Chopikashvili. **(According to the tradition in Khevi, on the 3rd or 7th day after a person's death the family of the dead would invite guests and arrange a shooting competition, entertain the guests and reward them correspondingly. Among the rewards were the clothes and things of the deceased and money –shesandobari. After topis khmis gatekhva for the dead, everyone could go hunting and shoot from the guns, which was banned before completion of the rite. This was a general rule obligatory for everyone ( Makalatia, 1934: 177).**

On his part Matia asked Elguja to send him on this errand, but the host exclaimed: "Woe is me! What are you saying? Send the guest on an errand? To be laughed at?" (Kazbegi, 1987:90). As seen from the novel Matia's objection cannot make the host change his categorical and just opinion, despite the fact that Matia is Elguja's friend; It was absolutely irrelevant for the guest to do something at the host's house, this did not correspond to the traditions of hospitality.

The Mokhevians of Alexander Kazbegi's time thoroughly followed the generally accepted principle "Guest is from the God!", but the host was not only one family, but also all the family's relatives, neighbours and the entire village. The Mokhevians grew up with this consciousness; they considered it their duty to host any newcomer to the village immediately after the greeting ( Itonishvili, 2006: 121).

Especially interesting in the hospitality system of the Georgian mountaineers was the description of the guest's rest places, encountered in Kazbegi's "The Father's Murderer" and "Elguja". In the former described are the conditions in an ordinary community member's house, in the latter - those of a wealthy and influential family.

Receiving a guest was such a holy duty for the Georgian mountaineers that the host had to care about the guest even when the latter was persecuted by enemy or punitive authorities.

In "Elguja" the afore-mentioned is clearly seen from the dialogue between the Mtiuleti and the wounded Mokhevi sheltered at their house. Elguja -heavily wounded by the soldiers was at Ninia's house, Ninia learned that his guest was under threat as he had been denounced to the city authorities. The provident host decided to move the wounded guest to Tusheti. The idea of moving the half-dead guest worried the Mtiuleti. "Ah, Ninia, why send the half-dead guest to the Tushetians? Matia exclaimed: "Cannot we take care of one guest? What are we for? We will all die but protect the guest" (Kazbegi, 1987:60).

This is how the Mtiuleti thought and followed the tradition of hospitality. Violation of the tradition was considered a deadly sin. But under specific condition such attitude did not correspond to the real understanding of the situation. In such case determinative was evaluation of the concrete situation by a wise and experienced person. Such a person in the novel is the aged Ninia, who opposes another tradition (moving the endangered guest to a safer place) to the young troubled by the violation of the tradition. The Mtiuleti disapproved this decision, but lastly the elderly man took advantage of being the host and doyen and said to Matia: "Today I am senior and I want it this way." How important was the principle of respecting the elderly among the Mokhevians can be seen from the writer's words: "These words made Matia fall silent, as for mountaineers, the senior's order should be followed submissively" ( Kazbegi, 1987: 57).

The writer- a good connoisseur of the mountaineers' customs, gave a true picture of the Mtiuleti's moral, two variants to protect a guest – keep him at home or move him away in the case of need. In both cases the host's social and moral responsibility to the guest was fairly big.

### **Reflection of Religious Beliefs**

Reflection of religious belief in the mountaineers' life occupies important place in Kazbegi's work. As seen from his ethnographic essays, superstition was still rather strong. In his ethnographic records Kazbegi's

not only describes religious beliefs, but also expresses his critical attitude to the customs, which often acquired pagan character.

In Kazbegi's novels "Father's Murderer", "Tsitsia", "Modzghvari" and others, we often come across the author's viewpoint on the Mtiuleti's religious life.

Kazbegi pointed out: "In Khevi almost every village had its own shrine, and celebrated the fete-day once, twice or even three times a year. These celebrations were mostly in summer and so many people went to the shrine and spend a night there which is an occasion of pastime - pleasant for everyone (Vardishvili, 2010: 99).

It should be mentioned that in "Elguja" Al. Kazbegi lesser touches upon religious life, however in a number of episodes he describes various forms of religious rites performed by the Mokheviens.

When narrating about the fight between Elguja and Gagi Chopikashvili, the author tells a very interesting episode, Gagi Chopikashvili's men ready to arrest Elguja "... Crossed themselves in the name of their shrines, dispersed and went into the forest..."

Noteworthy is the attitude of the Georgian mountaineers to the Lord's power. Almost every word and act should be uttered and performed with the trust in God; the following quotes from the novel are illustrative of this: "Only God knows! No one can prevent Lord's order!..Go and bring some water with travelling glasses, I will wait and the God's order will be materialized...He speaks in the name of Lord!... (Kazbegi, 1987:63).

Worship of Lomisa occupied significant place in the Mokheviens' life. According to the legend Lomisa embodied a warrior (Makalatia, 1934: 101). According to the renowned Georgian scholar Sergi Makalatia Lomisa festival comes from pre-Christian time; however there also exists another opinion that the Deity of Lomisa comes from early-Christian times. It should also be mentioned that in East Georgian mountains Lomisa festival is still celebrated with its pagan elements. Law-court also started with entreats to Deity and other shrines of Khevi. In the novel the doyens, gathered to solve the problem between Elguja and Svimon Chopikashvili, started their meeting with these words: "Oh, God, almighty! Crosses and Angels of Khevi-Mtiuleti! Give powers to us gathered here and help us not to do an injustice!..."

At the same meeting the deacon of Khevi appeared in front of the gathered people and entreated God with these words: "...Oh, Glorious God, John the Baptist, Angels of Tsvveri, Trinity of Khevi, Holy Ghude, Martyr of Lomisa, have mercy on these people!" (Kazbegi, 1987: 70-72). The afore-mentioned episodes clearly show deep roots of the religious cult service that consolidated the Georgian mountaineers throughout centuries. All this greatly contributed to the steadiness of common cultural-domestic elements of the nation.

In connection with religion attention should be paid to Kazbegi's observations on some details of folk belief. The data reflected in his works are linked with cosmic belief, more precisely with the link between the stars and time telling and determining a human's condition (Itonishvili 2006: 256). The link between the stars and time telling is clearly shown in "Elguja", on the way to Mtiuleti after abducting Mzagho Elguja and his adopted brother Giorgi "looked at the sky from time to time, to tell time by the stars" (Kazbegi, 1987:21). The object of their particular observation was deviation of Venus. Observation of the stars is also encountered in Qazbegi's "Modzghvari".

Kazbegi also points out that after the establishment of Russian rule in Georgia and the change of political system: "Many old customs and viewpoints, without which the life would be hard to imagine, were buried in oblivion (Kazbegi, 1987: 148-150). The writer distinctly expressed the mountaineers' negative attitude to the alterations made by the Russian rule; clearly described the people's indignation caused by the encroachment of shrines and folk customs.

Kazbegi was particularly interested in the study of beliefs and religious fetes in Khevi of his time. From his notes and works it becomes obvious that the writer did not limit himself to the description and documentation of cult-religious traditions, but expressed his critical attitude as well.

### **Reflection of Customary Law**

Kazbegi's "Elguja" is also interesting in terms of describing customary law. Unlike the writer's other work "Gocha the Khevi Leader", which touches upon the violent period of the Aragviseristavis' rule and narrates about the traditional community rule, Kazbegi depicts dramatically altered state on the background of the 19<sup>th</sup> century situation. It is known that in the afore-mentioned period, in Khevi as well as all over the Caucasus strong bureaucratic rule was being established, suppressing national consciousness and folk traditions. Even the local governors of the Russian rule suffered the lack of the ancestral law. In this regard interesting is the episode, when Gagi Chopikashvili thinks how to avenge Elguja for Mzagho's abduction: "If it had been old time Gagi would have called the community, elect judges, and obey their decision; but now the times had changed; the community is not as powerful as before. Each person had to care about the community" (Kazbegi, 1987:26-27).

Staggering of old traditions in Khevi are described in Kazbegi's "Father's Murderer" and "Tsiko" (Itonishvili, 2006: 208-209). According to the mountaineers' old customary traditions avenge was considered a natural occurrence; this was realized via killing the murderer or one of his family man, in the best case the countered sides would reconcile, following the decision of the community judges and with regard of their terms; essential condition for reconciliation was the payment of the fine by the murderer- the sum was also defined by the judges proceeding from the motive of the murder, whether it was purposeful or accidental (Shamiladze, Miminoshvili, 2009: 130). Considered also was whether the bullet reached the aim immediately or indirectly. In the fight between Elguja and Gagi Chopikashvili Elguja's bullet shot Gagi's horse, which fell into the ravine together with the rider. The community judges considered this fact and made corresponding decision (Kazbegi, 1987: 34-35).

In the times when "Elguja" was written, the community law was gradually losing its power, but the people did not acknowledge the existing reality and continued to follow community tradition (Itonishvili 2006: 219).

In the novel Kazbegi extensively narrates about community court; the story goes like this: an Ossetian Mekhameta took Circassian woman Mzagho a prisoner and sold her to Gagi Chopikashvili as a housemaid. Elguja who abducted Mzagho was chased by Gagi and his man. As a result of the fight between these Elguja's and Gagi's families (Gagi's cousin - Svimon Chopikashvili among them) became deadly enemies. In this case interesting is the dialogue between Mzagho and Svimon Chopikashvili. Mzagho begs him to let the people go to look for Elguja. Svimon responds: "Elguja has killed my relative, he owns me blood." According to Khevi traditions here avenge would be justified, but Svimon sees that Gagi was unjust, he avoided avenge, but advised the enemy to avoid meeting with him (Kazbegi, 1987:55).

Also noteworthy are Svimon Chopikashvili's words: "If I had met Elguja in better times it would have been different but this is not the case now!...If he is still alive, he will be killed." But the woman's entreat touched his heart and he added: "Gagi was a malicious man and lived viciously(Kazbegi, 1987:55-56).."

This episode shows the manful nature of the Georgian mountaineers, avenge on a wounded or feeble person was an unacceptable deed for a man: "Our people are merciless with the enemy as long as the latter is strong, but if he languishes, or falls in trouble, fighting against him is a womanly deed. Elguja never had enemies; if he survived someone would host and give him shelter" (Kazbegi, 1987:53). Kazbegi gives an interesting description of the law-court, with witnesses, confessor, Svimon Chopikashvili and Elguja's distant relatives, speaking on his behalf". After the introduction speech a doyen comes out and appeals those present with the words: "Oh, Glorious Lord! Give us strength and wit not to do unjust due to our imprudence." "Amin" – responded the audience (Kazbegi, 1987:54).

These words show once again, that from ancient times the Georgian mountaineers considered God's power as principal judge and appealed to him for strength and wisdom, to solve their problem. Mountain shrines guided the mountaineers in almost all their activities; in the novel this is confirmed by a number episodes, e.g.: "May Lomisa help you, -entreated Martia after taking off his hat, - do not let the Russians take over..." (Kazbegi, 1987:31) and also "Thus the people crossed themselves in the name of their shrines, dispersed and went into the forest..." (Kazbegi, 1987:32). The above-mentioned quotes show that the mountaineers gave religious content to each social occurrence.

When discussing the case of Elguja and Gagi Chopikashvili the Mokhevians' local court paid attention to the fact that Elguja did abduct the woman and thus insulted Chopikashvili's house, but this was not an act of violence- the woman followed him with her consent. In the end the court came to the decision that the woman had to stay at Chopikashvili's and if Elguja wanted to take her he would have to pay 40 cows as bride token (Kazbegi, 1987: 57-59). After this Elguja's and Svimon's families would live in peace, brotherhood and love.

With exclusive mastery the author describes the reconciliation of the two families. In the novel Svimon Chopikashvili is the person who performs the avenge. For this reason in order to put end to the hostility the community representatives decided to make Svimon forgive Elguja. From this viewpoint Svimon Chopikashvili is a truly human person, after the discussion he addresses the community with these words: "People's words are God's words.... Let it be the way so many people will." This impressed people so much that a large crowd went to Svimon's house and begged God for Svimon's longevity.

After the doyens had brought sick Elguja to Svimon's house, according to Mtiuletian tradition few elderly silently led Elguja into the house. The hostess was seated on a chair surrounded by her people; they opened her bib and exposed her right breast. Elguja came up to her and touching her breast with his teeth said three times: "May you be mother and I –your child." When he was done she touched him and said: "Elguja, from this day on you are my child....you are blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh." After this the woman took Elguja to Svimon Chopikashvili, knelt before him and said: "I have brought my child to you, give your blessing to him!" Tears came to Svimon's eyes and he addressed Elguja with the words: "Elguja,

from this day on you are my child..... blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh! Who offends you -offends me... who hurts you –hurts me! Who wounds you-wounds me!” All those present watched the scene with esteem and crossing themselves they begged God for the well-being of the just related ( Kazbegi, 1987:157-158). By describing Elguja’s and Svimon’s reconciliation Kazbegi emphasized the significance of the tradition for the abolishment of animosity.

### **Respect to the Sick and Mourning over the Deceased.**

Masterly description of the respect to the sick and mourning over the dead occupies significant place in Kazbegi’s works. From this standpoint interesting is the description of the traditions performed during the illness and death of Svimon Chopikashvili – a renowned person all over Khevi. In this episode the author shows how highly valued in Khevi was magnanimity, patience and manly attitude of the person on the deathbed to others.

In the novel we read: “There was some movement in Svimon’s house. The gate door continuously opened and different people went in and out. Everyone was holding either a vessel with homemade arrack or a barrel of beer, or chicken and eggs, etc. People visited Svimon, as he was seriously ill, in the mountaineers’ tradition in such cases a visitor could not pay a visit without a present.... Svimon’s wife stood near his bed, she wished to caress her husband but did not even dare to move, she groaned secretly and respectfully. ..” Mentioned in the novel is the renowned *panduri* player in the highlands- elderly Ghinja, who sang touching verses for Svimon.

Kazbegi also masterly described the mourning custom still encountered in Khevi and performed with the participation of the entire community. The mourning over Svimon Chopikashvili - renowned person all over Khevi lasted seven days unlike the mourning over ordinary people, which lasted only 3 days.

The episode of burial described in the novel is of ethnographic significance, it goes like this: “After ablution the deceased was dressed in best clothes, shaved and put on the stretcher. Near relations and other mourners surrounded the body from three sides, leaving a path for the people to move...” (Kazbegi, 1987:163).

The people came in a row, following the leader, who slowly uttered mourning words: “*Dadai*” and the others responded stroking their cheeks and advanced with small steps. The custom was also performed by mourning over the arms of the deceased, which was the duty of an elderly woman( Kazbegi, 1987: 163-164).

Kazbegi also narrates about the peculiarities of male mourning, which was more restrained than that of women. In the novel we see, that Matia- heart beaten by Svimon’s death was crying like a child. Kazbegi pointed out that “According to the Georgian mountaineers’ tradition man’s crying, especially loud crying was considered a shame” ( Itonishvili, 2006:220).

When describing the mourning rules Kazbegi pointed out that funeral expenses were heavy load for the family. The novel tells: “On the funeral day a large number of cattle was slaughtered and many tables laid” ( Kazbegi, 1987:164).

However it should also be mentioned that people’s assistance (characteristic of the mountaineers) was a consolation for the near relatives of the deceased.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **The study of Alexander Kazbegi’s works allowed us to make the following conclusions:**

The writer pays particular attention to the reflection of Georgian folk traditions. In his novel “Elguja” the writer described the Georgian mountaineers’ life, their environment, economic conditions, and family and community life. When reading the novel we come across with a number of interesting episodes of hospitality, religious syncretism, customary law, respect to a sick person and mourning over the deceased.

On the other hand; the work clearly reflects that the mountaineers’ traditions were so firmly established in people’s consciousness throughout centuries, that it could not be disorganized even by an individual’s different social condition. From Kazbegi’s viewpoint the Mokhevian traditions played a significant role in the reinforcement of the ties of relationship, the approximation of the village population and the community members, the establishment of benevolent relations between peoples.

Furthermore; Alexander Kazbegi emphasizes the fact that, the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the change of social-political system, shook the power role of mountain traditions in the regulation of social relations. Moreover, while Alexander Kazbegi is a grand master of prose, with surprising depth of prevision he models immortal heroic characters. Closeness to his native region and people, determined the eternity of Kazbegi’s creative work, which is still being the topic of scholarly studies.

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