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**DAVID KUGULTINOV'S NORILSK: SIBERIAN TOPIC IN POET'S**  
**WRITING**

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**Abstract**

The paper examines the Siberian topic in the writings of David Kugultinov, an outstanding Kalmyk poet who survived through the Stalinist camps. The poet spent a long 10-year period in Norilsk, worked at the nickel plant within the Norilsk forced labor camp. Inspired by D. Kugultinov's writing, the authors reveal his creative "testament": documents, memoirs, letters, poems and prose reflecting the time spent in Siberia. 1930–1940s were overshadowed by the bitterness of repression. Poets and writers who had gone through Siberian exile noted that this was the time when the cream of literature, science, and technology intellectuals of the country was in the Gulag labor camps and prisons. D.N. Kugultinov was among them. He often spoke about Norilsk. The city sounds in many of his writings – poems, memoirs and letters. Norilsk and its residents did not forget the famous exiled either. Until June 1957, Kugultinov was a writer in Norilsk. In 2002, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, a collection of writings in 3 volumes was published in Norilsk. The first volume included poems of the 1930–2000s, the second volume – 1970–2000s, and the third – poems, articles and speeches. D. Kugultinov created over 40 books, which were published in Russian, Kalmyk, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Azerbaijani and other languages. Every word, every line written by the poet encapsulates his soul, his revelation to his people, love for his reader. But this is also a struggle for truth, for justice, which the poet put above all else.

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*Keywords:* David Kugultinov, Norilsk, poet, Siberia, poems, writing



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## 1. Introduction

The topic of exile occupies a prominent place in the history of Russia. This is not just because the number of those who suffered mass repression, including exile, grew from one year to the next. The topic became noticeable because of the exiles themselves – people not only famous, but also talented and courageous. Therefore, this type of punishment, having arisen in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as forcible removal of individual opponents of the state and the sovereign, over time took on a permanent, massive character. The extent of persecutions cannot but surprise: for the 19<sup>th</sup> century alone, about one million people were exiled to Siberia.

## 2. Problem Statement

The topic of deportation of peoples does not leave researchers in various fields indifferent including ethnographers, historians, linguists, literary scholars and other scientists (Avliev & Nadbitov, 2019; Dzhalaeva, 2006; Dyakieva, 2018; Filimonova, 2020; Tsutsulaeva, 2020). The topic of exile stands out in the lives and work of Russian and Soviet writers and poets. We all know that many great Russian writers and poets were in exile at different periods of their lives like Alexander Pushkin's exile in the South and Mikhailovskoye, Mikhail Lermontov's exile to the Caucasus, arrest and exile of Nikolay Chernyshevsky and Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev's exile to Spasskoye-Lutovinovo, and even earlier the exile of Alexander Radishchev.

Later, in Soviet times, especially in the 30s and 40s, during the period of Stalinist repressions, many famous Soviet writers went through tough times. These were Joseph Brodsky, Nikolai Zabolotsky, Nikolai Gumilev, Varlam Shalamov, Osip Mandelstam, Lydia Chukovskaya (Korney Chukovsky's daughter), Daniil Kharmis, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and many others.

Kalyaeva, daughter of Sanji Kalyaev, a classic of national literature, a famous Kalmyk poet, who was declared an enemy of the people, sentenced and exiled to Siberia for 8 years in labor camps, noted that “within 10 years after the 1<sup>st</sup> congress of Soviet writers, almost all of its delegates ended up in prisons and exile” (Kalyaeva, 1997, p. 56). Out of 2,000 repressed writers and poets, 1,500 disappeared forever in camps and prisons.

## 3. Research Questions

In the history of Russia, the exile of entire nations took place. The deportation of peoples is a sad chapter of the USSR in the 1930–1950s. There were no analogues of such atrocities in the world. In ancient times and during the Middle Ages, peoples could be destroyed, driven out of their homes in order to seize territories, but no one has ever thought of resettling them to other, obviously worse conditions, no one has come up with the labels “traitor people”, “punished people” or “mocked people”.

December 28, 2020 marks 77 years since the deportation of the Kalmyk people to remote regions of the country. The Kalmyks were far from the only people who went through the horrors of the pre-war deportation. More than two dozen nations suffered the same fate. These are Koreans, Germans, Ingermanland Finns, Karachais, Balkars, Chechens, Ingush, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks,

Bulgarians of the Odessa region, Greeks, Romanians, Kurds, Iranians, Chinese, Hemshils and a number of other peoples. What is more, seven of the above peoples also lost their territorial and national autonomy in the USSR.

The paper examines the Siberian topic in David Kugultinov's poetics. He was an outstanding Kalmyk poet who passed through the Stalinist camps. The poet spent a long 10-year lifespan in Norilsk, worked at the nickel plant within the Norilsk labor camp.

Inspired by Kugultinov's writing, the authors reveal his creative "testament" including documents, memoirs, letters, poems and prose reflecting the time spent in Siberia.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The paper seeks to investigate David Kugultinov's writing during his exile to Norilsk.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The study is based on the writings of literary critics and historians. The authors analyzed the literary criticism concerning the target issues. A descriptive method and a comprehensive analysis of the text were used.

#### **6. Findings**

David Kugultinov was a prominent representative of Soviet literature, who fully shared the fate of his people and his exiled brethren. David Nikitich Kugultinov was born on March 13, 1922 in the village of Abganer Gakhankin of the Western Ulus of the Kalmyk Autonomous Region (now the village of Esto-Altai, Yashaltinsky District of the Republic of Kalmykia). In 1931, the Kugultinov family was dispossessed and exiled to the Altai Territory. The future poet wrote his first poem at the age of 12, for which he received a volume of K. Marx as a gift. At the age of 18, the young man was admitted to the Writers' Union. In 1941, with the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, he submitted an application to go off to war and since 1942, as part of the troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Front, he took part in battles. He was a political officer, a correspondent for the divisional newspaper of the 252<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Kharkiv-Bratislava Orders of the Red Banner and Bogdan Khmelnytsky Division. He took part in the crossing of the Dnieper, and in the Korsun-Shevchenko operation. On active service, he was admitted as a member of the CPSU. These facts speak for themselves: he fought honestly and bravely. It is strange and yet true, in May 1944 he was removed from the front line for being a Kalmyk, as the Kalmyk had been exiled to Siberia in December 1943. In April 1945 he was arrested, convicted of poetry and speaking out in defense of his people under Article 58/10 and taken to Norilsk. On the territory of present-day Norilsk, the so-called Norillag, one of the largest corrective camps, was once located. It was custom-established to implement one of the government programs ensuring industrial development of some regions of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, rich in ore and coal deposits. In 1935, the Council of People's Commissars adopted a resolution on the construction of a nickel plant on the territory of Norilsk. A decision was simultaneously taken that prisoners would build this plant. During the war, it employed up to one hundred thousand people.

Reported by the Norilsk branch of the Memorial Society, from 1935 to 1957 over 300 thousand people passed through the Norillag, including citizens from more than 20 foreign countries. David Kugultinov was serving his sentence at plant No. 25 (nickel) of the Norilsk labor camp (state special regime camp). He was a pachuca operator, a medical record clerk, a washer-man, a foreman at the building site of the Norilsk airport, a warehouse manager. These familiar lines of the poet's biography are known to many, but what these more than 10 years in the life and work of Kugultinov contained can be learnt from what the poet wrote about Siberia, Norilsk, and long years of exile.

He often spoke about Norilsk, the city sounds in many of his writings – poems, memoirs, letters. Norilsk and its residents did not forget the famous exiled either. Until June 1957, Kugultinov was a writer in Norilsk. In 1992, JSC Norilsk Combine awarded Kugultinov the title of Honorary Pachuca Operator, accepted him as a shareholder, allocating beneficial and ordinary shares.

The days when I was young and healthy  
You took from me, you took, you took away,  
Norilsk, Norilsk, you are a unique city,  
Your frost burns me up once in the arms of Morpheus  
And still the fire of past grievances  
Unshines me with the radiance of the North.  
I love you, where youth and cold were merged,  
But how do I love? ... I knew the family,  
Where there was no love between spouses,  
But both adored their daughter ...  
Norilsk, Norilsk, tell me why  
Forever you are dear to my heart! (Kugultinov, 2002a, p. 5)

“Norilsk is a “unique city” of a difficult, tragic fate,” Kugultinov repeated. “Meanwhile, Norilsk is a magnificent city! Strange as it may seem, paradoxical as it may seem, this is what I say, who has seen a lot of terrible things, a lot of terrifying things, but it would be unnatural if THEN it did not happen. For THAT time, these terrifying things were predictable ... There, in Norilsk, I met, probably, the best people in Russia. The wisest people in Russia. The most educated ...”, the poet later emphasized. That was the time of hell associated with Stalin's prisons and camps, when many talented people “were repressed and spent the hard Norilsk years in the North against their will ...” They were the famous aircraft designer Sergey Korolev and his student Glushko, Lev Gumilyov – Anna Akhmatova's son, writer Sergey Snegov, journalist, Arctic expert Alexei Garry and many others. The poets and writers who passed through the Siberian exile noted: “It was a time when the cream of national literature, science, technology intellectuals was sent to the Gulag camps and prisons...” Kugultinov was among them. Norilsk was remembered first of all by meetings and friendship with outstanding people who also ended up in the Norilsk camp.

In 2002, on the occasion of the poet's 80th birthday, a collection of writings by David Kugultinov in 3 volumes was published in Norilsk. The first volume included poems of the 1930-2000s, the second volume – 1970–2000s, and the third – poems, articles and speeches. The publication was sponsored by OJSC Mining and Metallurgical Company Norilsk Nickel. In the preface to the publication, Khagazheev,

General Director of the Polar Division of the company, noted: “All of us, including David Kugultinov, are “hopelessly addicted” to this cold, contradictory, but still fascinating city.” Although 10 “Gulag” years are not the best years of the poet, he recalls with gratitude: “... Norilsk for me is an image of Russia. And the best Russia. The best! After all, the best immolate themselves “in the name”! (Kugultinov, 2002b, p. 173).

David Kugultinov writes and talks about Norilsk in his “Summer in Norilsk”, “The Sun in the Arctic”, “Norilsk – Krasnoyarsk”, “Flowers of Norilsk” and in other poems, memoirs and correspondence.

In his poem “I’m Going to Court” the poet says:

Although young but year-wise,

I went through trench hell.

And under a hail of bullets

I protected you, passers-by,

All your daily routines,

Your right to light and verse,

And today’s trial

And your unknown judges.

I didn’t stand aside

Never backed down.

No thought about wine! ..

“Ten year time” –

Will be placed on record (Kugultinov, 2002b, p. 197).

At the trial, another charge was brought against David Kugultinov saying that the poet, in his letter to Stalin, stood up for his people and condemned the exile of the Kalmyk people to Siberia. Kugultinov understood that life was like that, he personally experienced sinister slander, but it was very difficult to prove his innocence, although he personally knew his slanderers.

Because of my poetry

The dawn of my short youth

Like a half-opened flower

Was poisoned by a poisonous slander ...

Near the ocean

In the icy cold

I spent ten endless years

Behind the wire dense and barbed,

Like a spider’s snare

Where it is cold and greedy –

My heart was sucked out by melancholy

In a spider-like manner (Kugultinov, 2002a, p. 6).

However, the poet was worried about his people’s fate rather than his own destiny: “When the Kalmyks were taken to Siberia in cold cattle wagons in winter 1944, and for ten years I was thrown from

prison to prison, from camp to camp, defending my people in my poetry, imagining, what Pushkin and Lermontov would have done if they were in my position. Like that Streltsov from “They Fought for the Motherland” by Sholokhov, with tears I whispered the verses of my favorite poets lying on the camp bunks in the Gulag barracks, whispering like a prayer ...” (Kugultinov , 2002a, p. 3). The affirmation of truth and justice is fundamental and constant in Kugultinov’s writing. Semyon Lipkin, defining the main motive of Kugultinov’s poetics, articulated it as “a song of immortality.” In fact, the poet speaks about this more than once, but Polyakov who researched Kugultinov’s writing is closer to the truth, believing that “the statement of truth remains the leitmotif, the constant refrain of Kugultinov’s lyrical confession”.

It is paradoxical that at times it was the exile that had the most beneficial impact on the writing of poets and writers – it was precisely being in prison that many created their best pieces of writing. “David Kugultinov went through so many hardships and much suffering, but he withstood everything, did not break, showed great resilience, strength of spirit and character. All troubles forged from him a courageous, deep and wise artist,” the People’s poet, laureate of Lenin and State awards, a great friend of Kugultinov, Kaisyn Kuliev noted (Kuliev, 2002, p. 220).

In 1990, answering a question about the truth asked by Lyudmila Vinskaya, a journalist working for the Krasnoyarsk Rabochy, Kugultinov spoke about his attitude to the poem “I Did not Renounce the Truth” and added that he did not retreat from the struggle for the truth either then or now.

Today it can already be argued that the poem “I Did not Renounce the Truth” has become not only a monument to the struggle for truth and justice, but also a masterpiece of poetics. The poet, his fate, the images of his fellow countrymen, thirst for truth, passionate faith in himself, his native steppe make up a single picture in the poem “I Did not Renounce the Truth”. The Kalmyk people steadfastly and courageously withstood all the hardships of that period, but, unfortunately, there were other people among them, about whom the poet openly writes in his poem:

In those evil years of the freezing cold  
What hasn’t happened?  
Struck by fear  
A different – even faithful – wife  
Wrote a renunciation of her husband.  
And, striving to get out of the sticky web  
(After all, you have to live somehow, in the end!),  
Some – even loving – children,  
Weeping, disavowed their fathers.  
And those who were considered brave  
Trembling betrayed the truth and friends.  
Valuing their priceless skin, or something,  
Though they were not at all blue foxes! ..” (Kugultinov, 2002a, p. 3).

The triumph of truth and justice must prevail, though, for the struggle will be in vain. And so the poet raps out the words:

I have not lost my conscience and fear,  
Nor have forgotten my native language here,

Either known as a Buryat or Kazakh

I didn't hide ... I was and am a Kalmyk!

(translated from Kalmyk by Neyman)

In September 1956, the poet was fully rehabilitated, reinstated in the ranks of the CPSU and the Union of Writers of the USSR. In his native Kalmykia, among his fellow countrymen, his talent really blossomed: year after year, poems, lyrics, fairy tales, memoirs, articles were born, including the poems "Love and War" (1957), "Moabit Prisoner" (1958), "Song of the Wonderful Bird" (1961), "Sar-Gerel" (1963–1964), "Memories Awakened by Vietnam" (1966), "Lord of the Time" (1967), "Riot of the Mind" (1965–1971), cycles of poems "Life and Reflections" (1963–1967), "All the Years" (1939–1967), "Memory of Light" (1979), etc.

## 7. Conclusion

David Kugultinov's authority was very high. In different years he was a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the RSFSR, the Executive Committee of the International Community of Writers' Unions, chairman of the Council of Elders under the head of the Republic of Kalmykia. He was awarded two Orders of Lenin (03/12/1982; 10/26/1990), Order of the Patriotic War, 2<sup>nd</sup> class (03/11/1985), Order of the Red Banner of Labor (03/10/1972), Order of Friendship of Peoples (11/16/1984), the Russian Order for Services to the Fatherland, 3<sup>rd</sup> class (12.03.1997), and medals. He is the Laureate of the State Prize of the USSR (1976), the State Prize of the RSFSR named after Maxim Gorky (1967).

Minor planet No. 2296 (1990) under the name "Kugultinov" bears the sign of great Russian poetry in outer space.

Kugultinov created over 40 books that were published in Russian, Kalmyk, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Azerbaijani and other languages. His best writings were translated into Arabic, Czech, English, Mongolian, Japanese, and other languages.

David Kugultinov has a verse "The Soul of the Word", the lines of which are full of deep meaning: "Having many shades, The sound is no more than clothes ... Each has their own soul of words, It looks like the soul of the speaker."

Every word, every line of the poet is his soul, his revelation to his people, love for his reader. Nevertheless, this is also a struggle for truth, for justice, which the poet put above all else.

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