

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **Sacred Blood / Qutlug' qon (1940)**

Oybek (Muso Toshmuhammad o'g'li) (1905-1968)

### OVERVIEW

*Author* Muso Toshmuhammad o'g'li Oybek was a central figure in 20th-century Uzbek literature, known for his poetry and historical novels. Although he is often described as a Soviet ideological writer, this view overlooks the deeper intellectual and cultural influences that shaped his work.

Born in 1905 in Tashkent to a poor weaver's family, Oybek began his education at a traditional school before transferring to a modern school called Namuna ("Model"). Among his teachers were several Turkish educators, through whom he was introduced to early 20th-century Turkish poetry. It was at this time that he began composing his first poems and, following the advice of a Turkish teacher, adopted the pen name Oybek. He studied social sciences at the Central Asian State University (now the National University of Uzbekistan) and briefly worked as an assistant there. Realizing it wasn't his true calling, he turned to literature and culture, later holding roles as a teacher, researcher, institute director, journal editor, and translator. He gained early acclaim for his lyrical poetry and epics, later turning to prose with major works like *Sacred Blood* (1940) and *Navai* (1944). Stalin's purges cast a shadow over his life and writing, often limiting his ability to fully express his realist literary vision.

*Novel* *Sacred Blood* was begun in 1937, quickly completed in 1938, and published in 1940. It was Oybek's first foray into the historical novel genre, which brought him considerable fame at the time. The novel was shaped by early Turkish reformers and *Jadid* thinkers such as Abdullah Qodiriy and Cholpon, who emphasized cultural awakening, secular modern education, and a national identity rooted in Islamic and Turkic traditions. In contrast, Soviet ideology prioritized class struggle, atheism, and the erasure of national differences in favor of a unified socialist identity. These ideological differences deeply influenced Oybek's work, which subtly reflects the humanism and national consciousness beneath its Soviet surface.

Critical reception has varied over the years. Soviet critics praised it as an example of socialist realism – a dominant style in literature and art – highlighting the socio-political conditions of the working class in history to critique the power structures behind them. However, following independence, it faced criticism for its overt ideological leanings. More recent evaluations have adopted a more balanced perspective, recognizing the ideological elements while offering a more nuanced and objective appraisal.

*Background* The novel reflects the national liberation movement against Russian colonialism, particularly the historic 1916 uprising against the Tsar's decree to conscript the population of Central Asia. As a child, Oybek witnessed many of the events depicted in the novel. He saw firsthand the hardships people endured and the growing divide between rich and poor. In the novel, good is symbolized by the generalized figure of the poor, and evil by the rich. It is noteworthy that the novel was begun during the height of Stalin's repressions, a political context that significantly shaped the portrayal of its characters. Communist ideology demanded a class-based approach to character development, and any deviation from this was seen as a serious flaw. This ideological pressure was a key factor behind the harsh criticism faced by truth-seeking writers, often leading to persecution, arrests, and executions. These events had a profound impact on Oybek, instilling deep fear and ultimately contributing to the decline of his health in his final years.

## CHARACTERS

<i>Yolchi</i>	Young man from a village, working as a servant for his wealthy uncle
Mirzakarimboy	Powerful and wealthy man from Tashkent, Yolchi's uncle
<i>Gulnar</i>	Beautiful young girl from a poor family, Yolchi's beloved
<i>Nuri</i>	The daughter of Mirzakarimboy
<i>Yormat</i>	Mirzakarimboy's long-time servant and Gulnar's father

## SYNOPSIS

Set in colonial Turkestan during World War I, the novel follows Yolchi, a young village man who goes to live with his wealthy uncle, Mirzakarimboy, after his father's death. Desperate for work, Yolchi's strength and determination earn him a place in his uncle's household, where he proves his worth. Mirzakarimboy's youngest daughter, Nuri, falls in love with Yolchi and secretly meets with him. Meanwhile, life on the estate is harsh for the servants, who toil for meager wages while the rich live in luxury.

Yolchi falls in love with Gulnar, the daughter of Mirzakarimboy's servant, Yormat, and she reciprocates his feelings. Nuri marries a wealthy man but soon becomes disillusioned by his obsession with money. Later, she offers Yolchi a place in her home, hoping to make him her lover, but he rejects her. After Mirzakarimboy's wife dies, Yolchi receives news of his own mother's death and returns to his village for the funeral.

Suddenly, Mirzakarimboy announces his intention to marry Gulnar. Yormat agrees, tempted by the prospect of wealth, leaving Gulnar heartbroken. Tensions rise as Mirzakarimboy's children, especially Salimboyvachcha, oppose the marriage to protect their inheritance. In desperation, Salimboyvachcha kidnaps Gulnar. Yolchi returns and is devastated to learn of the planned marriage. He rescues Gulnar, but their escape fails, and she is forced into marriage.

Crushed, Yolchi leaves Mirzakarimboy's house and is paid only a pittance for his labor. He moves in with a poor shoemaker but soon discovers that Salimboyvachcha is trying to seduce his orphaned sister, Unsin. Yolchi attacks him and is arrested. In prison, he meets a Russian worker, Peter, who convinces him to join the revolution. They escape together, but Yolchi soon learns that Gulnar has died – she was poisoned by Salimboyvachcha because she was pregnant, and he feared losing his inheritance. Consumed by grief and rage, he joins the uprising against the Russian Tsarist regime and dies fighting for the cause.

## SCENES

**A New Beginning** A young man walks from a village on a hot summer day. He enters a teahouse, asks, and is directed to Mirzakarimboy's house. The young man enters Mirzakarimboy's luxurious house and meets an elderly but strong man who turns out to be his mother's uncle. The young man, Yolchi, tells him how his father had fallen ill and passed away two years ago, that they were forced to sell their land to pay off his father's debts while he was still alive, and that the family is now in a difficult situation. Mirzakarimboy, impressed by Yolchi's strong appearance and sincerity, offers him a place to live and work in his house. Yolchi agrees.

**First Impressions at Mirzakarimboy's Estate** Yolchi meets Yormat, Mirzakarimboy's loyal but boastful servant. Yormat is sent to fetch Hakimboyvachcha, Mirzakarimboy's eldest son, because guests are arriving. Meanwhile, Yolchi offers to mow the grass. In the evening, Hakimboyvachcha orders Yolchi to tend the horses. Yolchi spends the day serving guests and dines on leftovers with the coachman. Afterwards, he spreads an old mattress on the floor and falls fast asleep.

**A Day Begins at Mirzakarimboy's Estate** Yolchi wakes early to clean stables, sharing his love of horses with Jura, the unmarried coachman. Jura recounts lifting a curse from Hakimboyvachcha's prized

horse. When the rich guests wake and stroll near the flower garden, Yolchi, feeling they are from another world, hesitates to approach. Just then, Mirzakarimboy arrives and asks Yolchi to follow him.

**A Look at Beauty and the Bonds of Service** Yolchi is tasked with digging up large tree stumps. While working, he notices a young girl watching him. Despite her shabby clothes, he sees her beauty and feels drawn to her. The girl looks embarrassed, hides her face, and quickly leaves. Yolchi continues to work despite his hunger until Yormat arrives with food, advising him not to overexert himself. At dinner, Yormat reveals he's from Samarkand, serving Mirzakarimboy for 16 years. He lives with his wife and daughter – likely the girl Yolchi saw.

**The Call for Change** After a hearty dinner, the guests discuss trade and women, and share jokes. At this point, Mirzakarimboy approaches and asks one of the guests, Abdishukur, an enlightened *jadid* (modernist reformer) who reads newspapers, to inform him of what is happening in the world. Abdishukur talks about the war and begins addressing the ignorance among Muslims, stressing the importance of sending children to modern schools. He criticizes the wealthy for spending money on extravagant weddings instead of investing in education. Not everyone is pleased with his words.

**An Unexpected Encounter in the Garden** The women of the Mirzakarim family prepare for a visit, and Yormat takes them there by cart. Before leaving, he instructs Yolchi to plow the land for sowing. After completing the task, Yolchi returns to the garden, where only the 10-year-old son of Hakimboyvachcha and Nuri – Mirzakarimboy's youngest daughter – remain. The boy, looking bored, brings Yolchi some food. To entertain him, Yolchi makes a whistle, which the boy enjoys. He then carves a flute. The boy offers his flute, and Yolchi plays it. Suddenly, a woman's voice calls out from behind a door, asking him to play another melody. Yolchi plays again, then lies down for a nap. He is awakened by a voice warning that the garden is flooded. Rushing to check the water flow, Yolchi sees Nuri, who takes his hand, leaving him feeling both embarrassed and excited.

**The Burden of Kindness** Yolchi is sent to labor in Mirzakarimboy's cotton fields alongside hired workers. There, he meets Uyghur Aliakhun and Kyrgyz Oraz, simple, hardworking, yet discontent men. The work is exhausting, and the pay is meager. When Shokosim, one of the workers, loses his wife, he is heartbroken and wishes to perform proper funeral rites. Yolchi asks Yormat to lend money, but Yormat insists the body must be buried quickly due to the heat. Despite their poverty, the workers contribute what they can. Moved by their kindness, Yolchi quietly hides his tears.

**Chaos at Tantiboyvachcha's Party** Yormat arrives from the city and tells Yolchi to help Tantiboyvachcha, Mirzakarimboy's son-in-law, on the farm near the cotton fields. As they talk, music from Tantiboyvachcha's house reveals a party. Yormat invites Yolchi to watch; though hesitant, he agrees. At the party, a young boy in women's clothing dances until a shot is fired. A man with a gun chases the boy, who begs for help. Yolchi intervenes, taking the gun. Yormat scolds Yolchi for getting involved in something that wasn't his concern. It turns out that the man with the weapon was none other than Tantiboyvachcha himself.

**At the Tantiboyvachcha Estate** Yolchi works in the house of Tantiboyvachcha, where his servant Kambar praises him. Tantiboyvachcha then speaks to Yolchi, laughing as he asks if Yolchi was the one who took his gun. Yolchi confirms this and, curious, asks why he shot the boy. Tantiboyvachcha replies that he doesn't remember whether he rejected the tea offered to him or didn't flirt with him. Tantiboyvachcha sends Kambar to town to buy alcohol. When Kambar returns, Yolchi finds the guests gambling – including some who are religious. Watching the scene unfold, he feels both embarrassed and uneasy.

**Midnight Encounter** Nuri learns Yolchi is at her brother-in-law's house and tells her mother she misses her sister. She visits Tantiboyvachcha's estate with her nephew and stays for days. One night, while everyone is asleep, she secretly sneaks onto the terrace where Yolchi is resting and wakes him up. Yolchi is confused and tries to reason with her, but, realizing it's futile, he chooses not to upset her. Instead, he gently hugs her. Overjoyed, Nuri treasures their reunion. Before leaving, she offers Yolchi a shirt, which he initially refuses, but she begs him to accept it.

**Nuri's Wedding Ceremony** Yolchi returns from the field to find Nuri's wedding at Mirzakarimboy's house. Fifteen carts of gifts arrive, and guests overflow the house. Although their relationship was never serious, Yolchi feels sad recalling their last meeting. He's also embarrassed by the family's formal manners and the guests' clear display of social status differences.

**Business and Bacchanal at the Restaurant** Yolchi is told by Salimboyvachcha to prepare horses and a carriage, then drives him to an upscale restaurant. There, Salimboyvachcha meets a cotton merchant and the merchant's manager. Their conversation covers alcohol, new schools, and trade. The manager stresses that national capital should be controlled by local wealthy merchants skilled in economics and business, essential for factories and trade. They toast to national capital. Drunk, Salimboyvachcha and the merchant invite two women of easy virtue to join them, and the drinking continues.

**The Unwanted Guest** While waiting for Salimboyvachcha by the cart, Yolchi strikes up a conversation with another coachman. The coachman soon falls asleep while Yolchi stays awake. Salimboyvachcha arrives and pulls Yolchi into a restaurant where he feels out of place. Salimboyvachcha sits between two women and places Yolchi opposite him. The women admire Yolchi's physique, and one offers him wine, calling him Hercules. Yolchi refuses, but she insists, so he drinks it quickly. Suddenly, an elderly Russian employee taps Yolchi on the shoulder, pointing to the door. Yolchi blushes. Salimboyvachcha intervenes, telling Yolchi that he can stay. Feeling humiliated, Yolchi quietly leaves.

**Dreams That Turned Out to Be a Mirage** Nuri is unhappy in her marriage. Her husband isn't the man she dreamed of – he works all day, comes home late, eats in silence, and quietly counts his money before bed. Bored by his routine, Nuri eventually bursts out, asking why he doesn't talk to her or enjoy life despite his wealth. He replies that the money is his father's and he must add his own before spending freely. Frustrated, Nuri begins to miss Yolchi and longs for something more.

**Spark of love** Yolchi sits in Mirzakarimboy's house as evening falls. A girl in a *burqa*, leading a cow, comes out of the old house and enters Mirzakarimboy's home. Her burqa brushes Yolchi's knee as she passes, causing him unease. He recognizes her as Gulnar, Yormat's daughter. Yolchi remembers meeting her at Nuri's wedding, where they both helped serve guests. She is shy at first, hesitant to approach him. But when the older women approve, saying it is acceptable at a wedding, she no longer avoids him. Yolchi notices the spark of mutual interest between them and falls in love with her.

**A Reluctant Request** A fellow villager from Yolchi's settlement arrives, saying Yolchi's mother is in need and asking for money. Yolchi hesitantly approaches Mirzakarimboy, who has never paid him for his work. Mirzakarimboy replies that women should not be encouraged to ask for money. Yolchi defends his mother, but Mirzakarimboy insists money must be spent wisely. Reluctantly, he gives Yolchi the money. Yolchi remains concerned about his uncle's attitude.

**A Moment of Compassion** Yolchi visits the shoemaker Shokir Ota, whose son is seriously ill and has little time left. A broker arrives to collect orders, but the shoemaker pleads to keep half so he can buy food. The broker refuses until Yolchi intervenes. Reluctantly, he leaves a few boots. Yolchi offers money, but Shokir Ota gently declines, aware of Yolchi's own hardships.

**Nuri's Scheme** Unhappy in her marriage, Nuri longs for Yolchi and dreams of a romantic connection. Knowing that divorce is impossible – her father would never allow it – she devises a plan. While her husband prepares for a business trip to Moscow, Nuri complains about the burdens of housework and suggests hiring Yolchi as a servant. Her husband agrees, and Nuri is overjoyed. She arrives at her father's house for her brother's party.

**A Secret Offer and a Choice of the Heart** Entering the room reserved for female guests, she is greeted with respect, recognized as a young, wealthy woman. But she is focused only on the opportunity to see Yolchi. Taking advantage of the moment, she secretly approaches him and offers a high-paying position in her household. However, Yolchi refuses, afraid of losing Gulnar.

**Nuri's Discontent** Nuri's mother sends Gulnar to visit her. Gulnar helps with the laundry and earns praise from Nuri's mother-in-law. Disappointed by her failed plan, Nuri speaks with Gulnar, sensing her feelings for Yolchi, and offers to hire him as a servant. Gulnar's expression changes, but she agrees and leaves under the pretext of hanging laundry.

**Relief and Resolve** Gulnar is deeply saddened to learn of Nuri's intentions. Her mother tells her they are going to Mirzakarimboy's country estate to prepare for his move. When her father mentions that Yolchi will be driving the carriage, Gulnar feels a glimmer of hope. Upon arrival, Gulnar meets Yolchi near the ditch. She asks if he will work for Nuri, but Yolchi replies he will never leave Mirzakarimboy's house. Feeling relieved, Gulnar approaches him, and he gently strokes her hair.

**Nuri's Jealousy** Nuri becomes angry and jealous when she learns of the love between Yolchi and Gulnar. Seeking revenge, she slanders Gulnar, telling her mother that Gulnar is a harlot who sinned with Yolchi. Nuri asks her mother to inform Gulsumbibi, Gulnar's mother, of her daughter's behavior. Nuri's mother invites Gulsumbibi to her home and shares the slander. Later, alone with Gulnar, Gulsumbibi, in despair, beats and interrogates her daughter. Gulnar, stunned and crying, begs her mother to believe in her innocence, but confesses that she loves Yolchi. Gulsumbibi believes her but orders her to forget Yolchi.

**Hope and Loss** Yolchi has been working in his uncle Mirzakarimboy's house for three years now, cherishing the hope of marrying Gulnar. He plans to ask his uncle to persuade Yormat to give his consent. Meanwhile, Yormat also needs to marry off his daughter, but he is waiting for Mirzakarimboy's approval – who always replies, "Wait a little." Then, Mirzakarimboy's wife suddenly dies of a heart attack, and Yormat decides it's not the right time to discuss the marriage. Later, Mirzakarimboy receives a letter from a villager and solemnly informs Yolchi that his mother has died, leaving Yolchi quietly overcome with grief.

**Temptation and Refusal** On a cold winter morning, Yormat informs Gulnar and Gulsumbibi of Yolchi's mother's death. Saddened, Gulnar quietly weeps. Unaware of her feelings for Yolchi, Yormat coldly orders her to clean Mirzakarimboy's room. While Gulnar cleans the owner's room, Mirzakarimboy enters and speaks to her kindly. He invites her to come closer to see something, and though Gulnar feels shy, she steps forward. As she approaches, Mirzakarimboy watches her with a look of desire. He shows her a chest of jewelry and offers her any piece. Although tempted, Gulnar remembers Yolchi's grief and refuses. Mirzakarimboy leaves the room, somewhat reluctantly.

**Inheritance Conflicts and Marital Maneuvers** The head of the district tells Hakimboyvachcha that Mirzakarimboy wants to marry and seeks his assistance. Hakimboyvachcha agrees but is shocked to learn that the bride is Gulnar. He had planned to marry Gulnar as his second wife, but his father's decision completely ruins these secret intentions. Hakimboyvachcha tells Salimboyvachcha about their father's plan for marriage. Salimboyvachcha is afraid of losing his wealth, since Gulnar may give birth to new heirs. Although wealthy, Hakimboyvachcha dislikes dividing inheritance, so they plan to ask their father to write a will favoring them. However, Hakimboyvachcha tells Salimboyvachcha that he must go to Fergana, and to avoid his father's wrath, he leaves the matter to his brother.

**Nuri is furious** Nuri learns of her father's proposal and is furious. Enraged, she confides in her brother Salimboyvachcha, accusing Gulnar of possibly flirting with their father. She questions how a beggar could become the head of their family. Salim urges her to calm down and share her plan to transfer the property to the children's names. In desperation, Nuri consults a fortune teller to obtain a curse for revenge.

**Unwanted Marriage Proposal and the Pain of Lost Dreams** Yormat eagerly tells Gulsumbibi that Mirzakarimboy wants to marry their daughter, and that he has agreed to the proposal. Gulsumbibi is horrified, fearing for Gulnar's happiness. Yormat silences her, calling her foolish and arguing that although Mirzakarimboy is old, he is still strong and very wealthy. That evening, Gulsumbibi hesitantly tells Gulnar of her father's decision, leaving Gulnar shocked and heartbroken. Meanwhile, Yolchi returns from the village with his orphaned sister, Unsin, and leaves her at Mirzakarimboy's house. He then meets with his friend Koratoy, who informs him of his uncle's plan to marry Gulnar. Yolchi is stunned and calls

his uncle unprincipled, especially since he had hinted at his relationship with Gulnar. Koratoy urges him to run away with her, but Yolchi remains uncertain, overwhelmed by the sense that life is deeply unfair.

**Gulnar's Disappearance** Yolchi is heartbroken and tries to see Gulnar, but when he approaches her house, her father claims she has been kidnapped and, in desperation, blames Yolchi – despite the fact that he was in the village at the time. Realizing the accusation is unfounded, Yormat reports the incident to the head of the district, who instructs him to keep it from Mirzakarimboy for now and promises to investigate. Yolchi is left feeling desperate and helpless. Tantiboyvachcha visits Mirzakarim's house to meet Salimboyvachcha and, on the way, meets the head of the district, who shares news of Gulnar's disappearance. The official suspects Salim, but Tantiboyvachcha denies it. Later, when Tantiboyvachcha speaks with Salim, the truth comes out. Gulnar's disappearance was planned by Salim and Tantiboyvachcha. Salim, hoping to stop his father from marrying her, sought Tantiboyvachcha's help. Together, they hired people to kidnap and hide Gulnar, following Tantiboyvachcha's advice.

**Tantiboyvachcha's Scheme** Tantiboyvachcha is pleased now that Salim is under his control and paying him for his services. However, lacking business acumen, he has already squandered more than half of his father's wealth on self-indulgence. True to his nature, he turns to his friend, known for his penchant for vice. Tantiboyvachcha suggests they visit a secluded, neglected place – hardly suited for pleasure – where Gulnar is being kept.

**Yolchi's Courage: The Rescue of Gulnar** While deep in thought at a teahouse, Yolchi learns from Kambar – Tantiboyvachcha's servant – that Gulnar has been kidnapped by two troublemakers and Salimboyvachcha. Guided by Kambar to one of the kidnappers' hideouts, Yolchi finds Gulnar being held captive. There, he confronts and defeats a guard, whose respect for Yolchi's bravery leads him to release Gulnar.

**Hidden Love and Betrayal** Yolchi and Gulnar hide in a small room in the courtyard of his friend Shokosim, who works there as a servant. When asked if she'll return for her wedding to Mirzakarimboy, Gulnar chooses to stay with Yolchi. Despite Yolchi selling his house, they plan to go to his village, determined to build a future together. Their departure is delayed when Gulnar falls ill. While Yolchi fetches a horse, Shokosim's master informs Yormat of their hiding place. Yormat and the district head arrive and take Gulnar. Although she accuses Tantiboyvachcha and Salimboyvachcha, the district head sides with them to remain in the good graces of Mirzakarimboy's family.

**Breaking Point** A month passes; Gulnar, now married to Mirzakarimboy, is deeply unhappy. Yolchi, falsely accused by the district head, is in hiding. His 15-year-old sister, Unsin, serves in their uncle's house, where Gulnar often talks with her. When Yolchi visits, Unsin reveals Salimboyvachcha's harassment. Enraged, Yolchi takes her away and beats Salimboyvachcha before leaving. One evening, Yolchi returns to Mirzakarimboy's house and faces his uncle's fury. Mirzakarimboy scolds him for disappearing and accuses him of ingratitude. Yolchi defends himself and declares he wants to leave, demanding payment for his work. When Mirzakarimboy refuses, Yolchi sarcastically says he'd be better off searching for food like a chicken in manure, then leaves the house.

**Crossroads of Conviction** Yolchi brings his sister Unsin to Shokir-ota's house, seeking temporary shelter. Graciously welcomed, he works as a market loader, earning little but helping the household. One day, he meets Abdishukur, a *jadid* reformist. They discuss injustice and wealth. Abdishukur attempts to explain that such sentiments are misguided, emphasizing that successful entrepreneurs are vital for national progress, but Yolchi, disillusioned by inequality, remains unconvinced and eventually walks away.

**Arrest** Yolchi is sitting in a teahouse when a Russian police chief enters. The locals rise respectfully, but Yolchi stands his ground, refusing to bow. Enraged, the chief whips him across the neck and chest. An old man apologizes for Yolchi's ignorance, but the chief insults him. Yolchi refuses to apologize and silently grabs the whip, stopping the blows. Horrified onlookers watch as the chief orders Yolchi's arrest, following a complaint from Hakimboyvachcha after Yolchi reportedly beat Salimboyvachcha.

**In hope of help** Unsın worries when Yolchi is arrested and seeks Gulnar's advice. Gulnar suggests asking Hakimboyvachcha, but he's away. Unsın begs Mirzakarimboy for help, but he refuses harshly. Gulnar tries to intervene, but Mirzakarimboy responds with abuse. Tearful, Unsın leaves, feeling hopeless and alone.

**A Summer's Regret** A month has passed. In the summer, Mirzakarimboy's family usually moves to their estate in the countryside. Gulnar prepares for the move, suddenly realizes she is pregnant, filled with despair, wishing it were Yolchi's child. Yormat arrives, gently reproaching her for being unprepared. Gulnar asks her father to call Unsın. When she arrives, Gulnar gives her a silver ring to wear and deliver to Yolchi upon his release.

**Salimboyvachcha poisons the soup** Salimboyvachcha rests while his wife brings tea and complains about the heat. She casually reveals Gulnar is pregnant, shocking Salim. Worried, he fears that once the child is born, Gulnar will gain control over Mirzakarimboy and inherit everything, threatening his own future. Salimboyvachcha is alone and drunk at the country estate where the families of Hakimboyvachcha, Salimboyvachcha, Mirzakarimboy, and his wife Gulnar spend the summer. He sees Gulsumbibi bringing Gulnar – now pregnant – her favorite soup, since she has no appetite. After Gulsumbibi leaves, Salimboyvachcha poisons the soup. When he notices Gulnar returning, he panics and quickly flees to avoid being caught. Gulnar, lost in thoughts of Yolchi, serves tea silently, disliking her family's company. Upon entering her house, she notices Mirzakarimboy is missing. Before bed, she remembers her mother's soup and eats a little. Soon, she feels very ill. She calls for help, and Hakimboyvachcha's wife arrives, followed by Gulsumbibi. In her final moments, Gulnar reveals that the soup was poisoned by Salimboyvachcha. She regrets never seeing Yolchi again, whispers "Forgive me" to her mother and then falls silent. Gulsumbibi rushes for a folk remedy but returns too late – Gulnar is already dead.

**Yormat's Revenge** On the seventh day, a memorial is held for Gulnar. Gulsumbibi's relative invites her to Samarkand for comfort, and Yormat encourages her to go. Alone, Yormat visits Mirzakarimboy's house, where Salimboyvachcha prepares to leave. Offering a ride, Yormat drives him to a ravine, then fatally stabs him, revealing he knew the truth.

**Prison Break** Yolchi escapes from prison and spends the night in an abandoned mill. There, he recalls Peter, a Russian Bolshevik who taught him Russian and revolutionary ideas. Inspired, Yolchi vows to fight inequality. He finds refuge with his friend Jura, a servant of a wealthy merchant, who offers shelter and urges him to stay cautious.

**Revolutionary ideas** **A Visit to Shokir Ota** Despite the risk, Yolchi goes to the market to work as a loader. The people there are weary, anxious, and irritable, complaining about rising prices and the new decree conscripting workers to support Russia's military efforts in World War I. Yolchi visits his sister Unsın at Shokir Ota's house. They are glad to see him, and Unsın hides the truth about Gulnar's death. Yolchi shares his revolutionary ideas with his friend Koratoy, who is inspired and urges him to leave the area, inviting him to stay with his aunt. Yolchi agrees. Yolchi stays with Koratoy's aunt, helping her bake and spreading Bolshevik ideas. At the market, he sells bread and urges workers not to go to war. Suddenly, he sees Yormat being led away by police. Yolchi calls out, but Yormat only gives a sad wave – leaving Yolchi confused and deeply worried.

**Rebellion** Yolchi returns to Koratoy's aunt house, heartbroken over Gulnar's death and Yormat's revenge. Sharing his tragic love, his sorrow turns into fury against the wealthy, strengthening his revolutionary resolve. Suddenly, he hears protesters outside denouncing the Russian Tsar's decree recruiting poor locals for war while sparing the rich. Moved by their anger and violence against officials, Yolchi steps forward, urging the crowd to rise against oppression and fight for justice. On a summer morning, Yolchi works making bricks but hears a protest against sending young boys as laborers to war. He joins the crowd marching to the police station. Along the way, Yolchi meets Abdishukur, who tries to convince him not to join the mob, but Yolchi ignores him, feeling joy when he sees his friends among the rebels, driven by shared anger and hope.

**The crowd storms the Police Station** The crowd storms the police station, breaking down the fence and entering the building. Officers try to restore order but are overpowered and beaten. Women shout they won't send their sons to war. The crowd curses Tsar Nicholas and seizes an official, dragging him along. The police open fire, forcing the crowd to retreat, but they soon advance again.

**Yolchi is shot** Yolchi fights in the front row when, suddenly, he spots a young girl in the crowd who resembles Gulnar. His heart fills with longing as memories of her flood his mind. The police intensify their gunfire. Despite many killed and wounded, the people continue to fight. Cossacks appear and begin to beat and disperse the crowd. Yolchi battles a Cossack, knocks him down with a punch, takes his saber, and charges forward. In that moment, a bullet strikes him, and he falls to the ground.

**The Mourning of Yolchi** Koratoy, Yolchi's friend, embraces him and, crying, begs him to open his eyes. Yolchi opens his eyes and weakly motions for him not to cry. His friends lift him up and carry him to an abandoned house, laying him on the ground. He was dead, a bullet having struck him in the chest. They secretly transport his body to the house of Koratoy's aunt. Shokir Ota and Unsin arrive, overcome with grief. Unsin places the ring on his finger, the one Gulnar had asked him to give to her brother. Yolchi is buried, and Unsin mourns his loss bitterly.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**YOLCHI** Yolchi is a young, handsome man, full of physical strength and energy. The author portrays him as the embodiment of the finest qualities of the common people: honesty, modesty, hard work, and patience. What sets him apart is his deep sensitivity to the hardships and suffering of others. At the same time, he remains indifferent to his own interests and often acts without considering the consequences, which frequently leads to serious outcomes. As the story progresses, Yolchi undergoes significant personal growth. After enduring severe trials and the harsh blows of life, he transforms from a shy, modest village boy into a courageous rebel.

*Hardworking* Yolchi loves his work and finds enjoyment in it. He could be a skilled farmer if he had land. He especially enjoys working the land, able to plow for hours without stopping or complaining of fatigue. However, he lacks focus on a specific goal – he simply pours his heart into whatever task is at hand. Though he often earns very little for his labor, he takes pride in being able to provide for himself through his own work. The reason for leaving his uncle's house isn't the hard work, but rather that his uncle took Gulnar away.

*Compassionate* Yolchi deeply sympathizes with the poor and suffering. He helps whenever possible and shares their pain when he can't. From family to strangers, their struggles move him. Even with Nuri, his feelings stem from compassion, not love. Only when the already-married Nuri wants him to be her lover does he firmly refuse her.

*Impracticality* Despite his honesty and hard work, Yolchi lacks practicality. His kindness clouds judgment – he sold land and his house for little. Rescuing Gulnar, he insists they flee to the village, though he has no plan. Ironically, poverty had once driven him and his orphaned sister from that very village to the city.

*Bold* At first, Yolchi is shy and reserved, especially regarding food, women, and money – his strong moral compass keeps him quiet and cautious. But as he faces repeated injustice and hardship, his character transforms. He becomes bold, brave, and defiant. He demands wages from his uncle, boldly confronts Salimboyvachcha for harassing his sister, defies Russian authorities, escapes prison, and embraces revolutionary ideals. His growing boldness drives him to act against oppression, ultimately leading to his death in an uprising against the colonial regime.

**GULNAR** Gulnar is a beautiful young woman from a lower social class. Here, too, the author – guided by a class-conscious perspective – generously endows her with many positive qualities: purity of soul, tenderness, honesty, and a commitment to hard work. Although illiterate, simple, and modest, Gulnar

possesses a romantic nature. She is free of ambition, uninterested in wealth or luxury, and dreams only of true love and union with her beloved. Her naivety and idealism leave her unprepared for the cruelty around her, making her vulnerable in a society that values power and pragmatism over sincerity. Gulnar's fate is tragic: she becomes a victim of the violence and injustice that surround her, powerless to resist the evil that ultimately overtakes her.

*Kind-hearted* Gulnar has a gentle, pure heart and trusts people easily, often struggling to see what lies hidden in their souls. Her innocence makes her vulnerable – she becomes the target of Nuri's slander over her bond with Yolchi and fails to recognize Mirzakarimboy's true intent to marry her when he offers a jewel.

*Romantic* Although Gulnar comes from poverty, she doesn't long for luxury. She dreams of a simple, happy life with Yolchi, helping her family and honoring her mother-in-law. Even after marrying Mirzakarimboy, she can't forget Yolchi. Her request to Unisin to give Yolchi a simple but cherished ring as a keepsake, as well as her mention of Yolchi before her death, reveal her deeply romantic nature.

*Hardworking* Like Yolchi, Gulnar has a deep love for work. Throughout the novel, she is often seen engaged in manual labor – serving guests, cooking, cleaning, or washing – always with kindness and wholehearted dedication.

**MIRZAKARIMBOY** Mirzakarimboy is portrayed as a successful and enterprising merchant. In line with the class-based perspective of the narrative, the author uses darker tones to depict this character. Driven by profit above all else, he often comes across as cunning, ruthless, and cruel, with little sense of compassion. While the writer emphasizes his negative traits, Mirzakarimboy is not without redeeming qualities. It's no coincidence that later critics recognized in him several admirable traits of a true entrepreneur – such as a sharp business acumen, foresight, and determination. Despite a certain bias, Oybek, as a committed realist, succeeds in crafting a complex and multifaceted portrait of a man from the world of commerce.

*Enterprising* Mirzakarimboy is well-versed in trade and seeks profit in every opportunity. During his first meeting with his nephew, he shares his experience, leaving the impression of a clever and farsighted entrepreneur. He is punctual, meticulous, and always acts according to a clear plan, typically achieving his goals.

*Cunning* Mirzakarimboy is initially kind and polite to his servants, never arrogant or rude. He avoids swearing and doesn't openly humiliate anyone. He can joke with his workers or offer advice when appropriate. However, regarding money and his own interests, he becomes extremely stingy and unfair. Although he pretends that Gulnar is like a daughter to him, he conceals his sexual intentions and quickly marries her after his wife's death.

*Ruthless* In pursuit of profit, Mirzakarimboy can sometimes be ruthless. For example, when a hired worker's wife dies, leaving him with a child, Mirzakarimboy fires him because he is no longer needed. Although Yolchi is his relative, he never considers helping the family. He believes that giving them food and clothing is sufficient. When Yolchi demands payment for his three years of work, Mirzakarimboy throws him out without paying a penny.

## THEMES

### SOCIETY

**Class** Class differences are clearly depicted in the novel. The upper class is often portrayed as arrogant, selfish, or morally corrupt, while the lower class is shown as hardworking, kind, and selfless. Due to ideological pressure from the Soviet regime, Oybek was compelled to adhere to the Marxist principle of class division – categorizing people as either exploiters or the exploited. As a result, he portrays members of the upper class in a negative light and the lower class in a more positive light.

However, as a realist, Oybek often presents characters as they truly are. For instance, the stingy and dishonest Mirzakarimoy is also a shrewd businessman; the cautious and crafty Hakimboyvaccha is far-sighted and concerned about the future of his homeland; the selfish and devious Nuri is nonetheless capable of genuine feelings for a young man from the lower class. Jadid Abdishukur, although often depicted sarcastically, is portrayed in a positive light overall: he opens a European-style school, dreams of an enlightened Turkestan, and opposes the division of society into two hostile groups – the rich and the poor.

*Illustrative moment:* In winter, unemployment is rampant. There is no work in the fields. Yolchi goes to the market to earn money as a hired loader. When he joins a group of loaders, they look at him with hatred, as if he were a rival. Yolchi pays no attention. There are about twenty loaders in total, including pale, sickly boys of fourteen or fifteen and hunched old men who can barely walk. All are poorly dressed. Instead of boots, they wear old, torn galoshes or wrap their feet in rags, tied at the top with string. Yolchi waits for about two hours but finds no work. He walks around the market. The people there are hungry, poorly dressed, and angry from the hardships of life. Prices are rising, money is scarce, and almost everyone is unemployed. He looks at the shops – there are plenty of goods and money. But all this belongs to the rich. The rich sit arrogantly in their shops, unconcerned. The war has brought poverty to the people, while the rich profit from it.

**Gender** Gender is one of the central themes of the novel. Women have no power to express their will and are entirely dependent on men. Lower-class women are constantly occupied with housework and serving men. Poor families try to marry off their daughters as quickly as possible, without considering their opinions. For example, when Yolchi's little sister is orphaned, Yormat immediately guesses that Yolchi will probably marry her off before returning to the city, as the girl is seen as an extra burden. Thinking or talking about love is considered shameful. Women from wealthier families may have better financial situations, but their rights remain severely limited. Their husbands often cheat on them, and polygamy is considered the norm in affluent families. For instance, Salimboyvachcha and Tantiboyvachcha frequently visit brothels, and in Nuri's husband's family, all the men have two wives.

*Illustrative moment:* Gulnar is kidnapped by the mercenaries Tantiboyvachcha and Salimboyvachcha, each with their own agenda. Salimboyvachcha does not want his father to marry her, while Tantiboyvachcha, driven by his own misplaced desires, takes advantage of the situation, hoping to exploit the beautiful Gulnar. Confident that she has already resigned herself to her fate, Tantiboyvachcha goes with his friend to Gulnar. Meanwhile, Yolchi comes to her rescue, and the two of them hide at Yolchi's friend's house. However, in the end, they are tracked down, and her father, along with the district chief, comes to take her away. In desperation, Gulnar confesses that Salimboyvachcha and Tantiboyvachcha kidnapped her and refuses to marry Mirzakarimboy. The district chief dismisses her claims, as it is not in his interests to expose two wealthy men. He is already considering how he might extract a reward for concealing their guilt. Instead, he threatens Gulnar, stating that disobedience under Sharia law can be punished by stoning. Despite her vehement objections, she is forcibly taken away. A few days later, Gulnar becomes Mirzakarimboy's wife against her will.

**Love** In the novel, love plays a central role in shaping Yolchi's character. The author explores how the protagonist evolves from a simple, reserved young man into a rebel. Despite enduring repeated injustices, Yolchi remains patient – for Gulnar's sake. However, when Mirzakarimboy decides to marry her, it marks a turning point in Yolchi's development. Although the author's intention was to depict the hero's 'awakening of class consciousness' and turn him into a mouthpiece for ideology, this emotional shift adds depth and realism to his character. Beneath Yolchi's outward patriotism and willingness to 'die for Bolshevik ideals' lies a deeper sorrow over lost dreams and separation from his beloved.

*Illustrative moment:* Yolchi moves alongside the rebels, rushing to help those being hunted in the area. As he moves through the crowd, his gaze falls on a young girl in a *burqa*. Like the other women, she nervously uncovers her face, then quickly hides it again. She appears to be the youngest among them, her eyes filled with tears as she desperately searches for someone. Something about her – the shape of her face, her features, her expressive gaze – reminds Yolchi of Gulnar. A wave of grief overwhelms him. His heart tightens with pain, his thoughts consumed by memories of Gulnar. "Where is she now? Where

is my beauty?" he wonders. "She lies in the depths of the earth. And this girl – she must be looking for her brother, or her loving mother. But where is my beloved?" With a heavy heart, Yolchi surges forward with the crowd. In the midst of the fierce fighting, a bullet strikes him in the chest. His friends carry him away from the crowd, but he dies shortly after.

## POLITICS

**Colonialism** Although Oybek adheres to Soviet ideology, he continues the *Jadid* tradition in his depiction of colonialism, portraying the impact of Russian rule on local culture and identity from a critical and reformist perspective. He offers a realistic portrayal of life in Turkestan under Tsarist colonial rule, highlighting the racist attitudes of imperial officials toward the local population. The colonizers are often depicted as arrogant, haughty, and ruthless, viewing the natives as savage, ignorant, and inferior to the "cultured" Russians. In response, the native population is typically shown as fearful of these brutal foreigners. However, Oybek is careful in his depiction, mindful of Soviet criticism, and ensures that he does not overlook the class aspect. He portrays the Russian working class as friendly and kind, emphasizing the complexity of the situation.

*Illustrative moment:* Yolchi takes Salimboyvachcha to a restaurant in a new town where Russians live. The restaurant caters to Russian officials as well as wealthy locals. Salimboyvachcha, along with his rich friend Jamilbay and his clerk Abdishukur, are enjoying themselves. Drunk, Salimboyvachcha drags Yolchi to a table. At the next table, two Russian officials are conversing. One of them sarcastically remarks to Yolchi that the Uzbeks are "democrats," drinking with their slaves. The second comments that the Uzbeks are a lower race, though oddly, they have a developed artistic sense and a love for flowers, songs, and dances. However, they are also cowardly and deceitful. The first official admits he is afraid to go among the locals, considering them savages and prone to bloodthirstiness. At this point, a restaurant servant orders Yolchi to leave, as he is part of the lower local class. Yolchi is deeply offended.

**Rebellion** In the novel, the author depicts life in Turkestan during the First World War, a time when the country's economic and social conditions became dire. Tsarist Russia exported food and material goods from Turkestan, while also collecting taxes from the local population. The low prices set by the tsarist authorities for cotton left the peasants in a state of poverty. Artisans, unable to compete with Russian industrial goods, led to widespread suffering as the people faced rising prices, unemployment, and destitution. Moreover, the tsar's decree conscripting indigenous men into labor battalions for the war effort only worsened the situation. This sparked a large-scale uprising against the Russian colonial regime in Central Asia. In the novel these events are reflected in the fate of the protagonist, Yolchi, who dies during the uprising.

*Illustrative moment:* A crowd has gathered at the police station, protesting Tsar Nicholas's decree to recruit natives into labor battalions for the war. The people are agitated. The police captain emerges, attempting to intimidate the crowd by threatening that they will pay with blood for disobeying the tsar's order, vowing not to spare any bullets. The people are enraged, shouting, "Beat the rapists!" Thousands of hands – both men and women – reach out to seize him and drag him away. The police chief flees in fear. He begins shooting, and his men continue firing as well. Despite the dead and wounded, the crowd pressed forward, shouting loudly and throwing stones.

## RELATIONSHIP

**Sexuality / Desire** In the novel, class differences are reflected in the personages' attitudes toward the opposite sex. For a man from the upper classes, a woman is viewed as an object of physical pleasure and entertainment. Salimboyvachcha and Jamilbay indulge with women of loose morals at a restaurant. Tantiboyvachcha visits a brothel, while the elderly Mirzakarimboy marries a young girl. The relatively decent Hakimboyvachcha desires Gulnar. Women from the upper classes also seek carnal pleasures. In the relationship between Nuri and Yolchi, Nuri takes the lead, driven by passion and physical attraction, displaying more desire and initiative. In contrast, individuals from the lower classes often long for unattainable lovers, whom they cannot pursue due to poverty. Women from poor families, in particular, become prey to wealthy men. Driven by poverty and hopelessness, Gulandom ends up in a brothel.

Gulnar, the daughter of a poor servant, is forcibly married to the elderly Mirzakarimboy, while Salimboyvachcha attempts to seduce Yolchi's young orphaned sister.

*Illustrative moment:* Tantiboyvachcha enters the brothel and is approached by Gulandom, a young woman whose quiet dignity sets her apart from what he expects. Although accustomed to treating women with vulgar indifference, he hesitates slightly as she begins to speak. In a calm, humble voice, she recounts a life shaped by poverty and betrayal: marrying an old man to support her unemployed father, being cast out after his death, then exploited by others – one man stealing her inheritance, another luring her to Tashkent with false promises before selling her into the brothel. Tantiboyvachcha listens, feigning concern and offering vague promises of help. He pours her wine. Gulandom hates this life, despises the world in which she is trapped – but she drinks. The wine dulls the pain. Around her, the brothel pulses with the heavy scent of lust and resignation.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why doesn't Yolchi reject Nuri's offer of physical intimacy if he doesn't truly have feelings for her?
2. Why does the author portray the wealthy class negatively and the lower classes positively? Do you think wealth negatively influences behavior?
3. Why did Abdishukur tell Yolchi that he had made a mistake by leaving Mirzakarimboy's service, arguing that businesspeople are essential for the country's future and that thinking about the future is not his concern?
4. In the novel, lower-class women are often unhappy, condemned to hard labor, or reduced to objects of sexual desire. What do you think of Nuri, the upper-class woman? Is she happy? Does she have more rights?
5. What do you think of Yolchi? As we know, he has many positive traits, but does he have any negative ones? Are all his actions justified?
6. How does Oybek, under pressure from Soviet ideology, express his political stance against Russian colonialism?
7. Why did the writer introduce the character of the Russian worker Peter?