

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE MISCHIEVOUS BOY / SHUM BOLA (1936)

G'afur G'ulom (1903-1966)

OVERVIEW

Author G'afur G'ulom (1903–1966) was a prominent figure in 20th-century Uzbek literature during the Soviet era. Born in Tashkent, he was orphaned at a young age yet managed to receive both traditional and Russian-native school education. After pedagogical training, he worked as a teacher, school principal, orphanage caregiver, and newspaper editor. He began his literary career with poetry, publishing *Dynamo* (1931) and *Living Songs* (1932), followed by epic poems in the 1930s. During World War II, he gained recognition with works such as *You Are Not an Orphan* (1942), *Time* (1942), and *Longing* (1942). In the postwar period, he wrote fiction and literary criticism. Though some early poems reflected Soviet ideology, his writing is known for emotional depth, rich imagery, and strong national identity.

Novel *The Mischievous Boy* was first published in 1936. G'afur G'ulom revised it twice – first in 1941 and again in the early 1960s – each time enriching the story with new chapters, events, and details. In the original edition, the protagonist was 17 years old, but in later versions, his age was changed to 14 to better reflect his behavior and personality. The novel became one of the most beloved works among Uzbek readers. Although some of G'afur G'ulom's poems were criticized after independence for praising the Soviet regime, *The Mischievous Boy* remains a unique literary achievement. Translated into Russian and Ukrainian, it was also adapted into a 1977 film. In 2019, a monument to the main character was unveiled in Tashkent's International Business Center Park.

Background The protagonist of the novel is a boy who lost his father at an early age and is often seen as a reflection of G'afur G'ulom himself. Like his hero, young G'afur became an orphan during the hardships of First World War in colonial Turkestan. In one passage, the protagonist mentions his father's name, which coincides with that of the author's real father. G'afur G'ulom also shared the boy's energetic and restless nature. The story unfolds in Tashkent and its surroundings – places familiar to the author since childhood.

However, the novel is not strictly autobiographical; it incorporates many fictional elements. The author weaves folklore motifs into the narrative, and some episodes resemble traditional folk tales. Notably, the protagonist is never given a name – he is simply referred to as the “Mischievous Boy.” In the film adaptation, however, he is called Qoravoy – a name mistakenly assumed by the public to originate from the original novel.

CHARACTERS

<i>The Mischievous Boy</i>	orphaned boy, 13–14 years old
<i>Omon</i>	friend of the orphan boy, about 15 years old
<i>Domla</i>	false religious teacher and spiritual healer
<i>Eshon</i>	head of the <i>Qalandars</i> (wandering Sufi mystics)
<i>Sariboy</i>	landowner and major apple merchant
<i>Hoji Bobo</i>	owner of the opium den

SYNOPSIS

The story takes place in the early 20th century in Turkestan (present-day Uzbekistan), during the First World War. The Mischievous Boy from a poor, fatherless family, plays with the neighborhood boys. They decide to cook pilaf and ask him to bring butter. When he secretly takes it from his mother's house, his theft is discovered. The boy runs away to his aunt. Her husband asks him to take care of the birds, but he feeds them sour milk, and they die. Frightened, he runs away and meets his friend Omon, and together they decide to try their luck. At the shelter of an elderly Kazakh woman, they encounter thieves and escape with Domla, the man they had just robbed. At the request of the nomads, Domla and the boys clumsily perform

a funeral ablution and accidentally tear off the head of the deceased. They flee in panic. The boy seeks refuge in a mosque, where the imam offers him a place to spend the night. When asked to slaughter a sick ox, he mistakenly kills a donkey and runs away. Later, he finds work as a servant for an Eshon (head of the *Qalandars* (wandering Sufi mystics) but is fired for peeping through a crack in the women's quarters. He then works as a laborer on the estate of an apple merchant. Caught in a petty lie, he is fired. At the Sariog'och market, he again encounters Omon, now working as a shepherd for a cattle dealer. On the owner's orders, the boys lead a flock of sheep to the market. Near the railway tracks, a passing train frightens the flock, and five sheep disappear. They take the rest to the market but flee, fearing punishment. In a nearby village, they find work as servants for a rich landowner. Exhausted by the work, they decide to run away by slaughtering the owner's cow. A quarrel breaks out and they part ways. The boy reaches the city and stops briefly at Hoji Bobo's opium den but is soon thrown out for hooliganism. After receiving his salary, he leaves, not knowing where to go next.

SCENES

The streets of Tashkent during the First World War Barefoot, poorly dressed and dirty children wander through the market in search of amusement. At times, they taunt a parrot in an upscale teahouse before dashing away. Other times, they provoke mentally ill people wandering the market, the neighborhood, and the streets. They while away their days like this until evening. After a modest meal, they pour back into the streets to play a variety of games late into the night.

The Mischievous Boy is playing with his friends One of them suggests a game called *halfana* – a communal cooking activity where everyone contributes ingredients and utensils to prepare a meal together. They decide to cook pilaf. The ingredients are divided among them: meat, carrots, rice, water, and salt. The Mischievous Boy is assigned to bring the oil.

Mischievous Boy Steals Butter He must take it secretly – if his mother finds out, she'll be furious. She's about to bake samosa in a *tandoor* (a large clay oven shaped like a vase). The butter is stored in the pantry behind the house. To distract his sister, who's watching their younger sister, he lies and says someone took her doll. She runs off to look for it. He quickly sneaks into the pantry, grabs a piece sheep's butter, wraps it in paper, and hides it in his pocket. Then he snatches a fresh egg, hides it under his hat and runs.

The Egg, the Butter, and the Rolling Pin His mother notices him and calls for help, asking him to light the fire in the tandoor. As he works, she begins scolding him for hanging around the streets all day. The boy silently lights the fire. Suddenly, the butter, softened by the heat, starts to drip from his pants. Enraged, the mother thinks he's peeing in the kitchen and gently taps him on the head with a rolling pin. At that moment, the egg hidden under his hat cracks and runs down his face. Horrified, she thinks she's hurt him – and the boy takes off running.

The Aunt's House The boy can't return to his friends or go home, ashamed of losing the butter and egg. He heads to his childless aunt's house, where her kind husband, a fur coat maker who loves birds and owns a dog, welcomes him. The boy enjoys the new life and befriends local kids. One day, he secretly takes the dog to a fight, it ends with the dog injured and limping for life.

The Yogurt Disaster The boy's uncle goes out of town with friends for a few days of vacation. Before leaving, he gives the boy some money and asks him to take care of the birds, some of which are trained falcons. The boy has never fed birds before. Seeing their white droppings, he assumes they eat yogurt. For two days, he force-feeds them yogurt. On the third day, he enters the enclosure and finds them dead. In a panic, he runs away, taking with him a pair of birds in a cage.

The Exchange The boy arrives in Achchabod, where gypsy boys surround him and demand his birds. Realizing they could take them by force, he agrees to trade. Instead of money, they give him useless junk – twice as heavy as the birds. With no choice, he accepts the deal and continues his journey, burdened but determined to move forward.

In Search of Happiness In the grassland, the boy spots a figure – it is Omon, his old friend, carrying a hoe on his shoulders. Reunited and joyful, they talk and decide to continue their journey together. They

spend the night in a teahouse and plan to sell the hoe and the goods they have received for the birds at the market.

Theft at the Market The boys sell a hoe, shovel, and toys at the bustling market, then enjoy a simple but delicious meal together. With money in hand, Omon acts like a rich man and wants to buy a ram. The boy protests but follows him. Suddenly, he witnesses a theft: Sulton, a known thief, accuses a simple artisan of stealing his wallet and a silver ring inscribed with “Oh, Ali.” The artisan is shocked.

Witnesses When the local police arrive, Sulton suddenly spots the boys and declares them witnesses. A frightened Omon runs away, but the Mischievous Boy stays and watches brazenly. The police question Sulton and then the artisan about how much money each has. Both name the same purse, the artisan having slightly less. Shortly after, the police escort Sulton and the artisan to the community elder for further questioning

Night at the *Bo’za* Vendor A frightened Omon returns to the boy, jokingly warning that someone might be looking for them. Together, they search for a place to spend the night. The boy suggests visiting an elderly Kazakh woman who sells *bo’za* (a traditional, slightly fermented grain drink). They arrive and trade boza for lodging, asking her to prepare some food in the meantime.

Unexpected Return Just as they finish, Sulton returns with his companions – one resembling a mullah, the others like brigands. His reckless nature is evident in his swagger. The boys quietly sit on the grass. Sulton hands the old Kazakh woman some ingredients for the meal, orders *bo’za*, and asks her to start cooking. Then, noticing the boys, he invites them to join him.

Wallet and Ring Sulton teases Omon, calling him a “future robber.” When asked about the market incident, he proudly confesses he stole a purse from a craftsman, slipped some money and a silver ring inscribed with “O Ali” into it, and then returned it to the man’s pocket. During interrogation, the craftsman failed to describe the items and was imprisoned. Later, Sulton bribed the local police to arrange the man’s “release,” for which he was gratefully thanked.

Twilight Feast At twilight, an elderly Kazakh woman brings *bo’za* and food. Sulton invites Domla, a mullah-like figure, to join. Domla refuses politely, but Sulton mocks, “You used to drink with us!” Pressured, Domla downs the *bo’za* in one gulp. The gathering turns rowdy with drunken songs and shouting. Quietly, the boys leave, asking the old woman for bedding. At night, they awaken to muffled voices: “I have no more money... I do not lie”.

Morning Flight At dawn, Domla wakes the boys and urges them to flee – Sulton and his gang have stolen their money, and they must avoid trouble. They run for three hours to reach Tepaguzar, then stop at a grocery store to buy food and supplies.

Agreement Over breakfast, Domla shares his story: he boasts of his descent from *Eshon* (an honorific Sufi title). He admits that in the past he consorted with thieves, dressed as a woman, and danced at wealthy weddings. Though he never completed madrassa, he now claims the title of *Domla* (religious healer) and enjoys respect. He asks the boys to address him as *Hazrat* (an honorific meaning “Respected Presence”) in public and to call themselves his students. He proposes a share arrangement: he takes most future earnings; they split the rest. The boys agree.

Request for a Funeral As they talk, a cloud of dust approaches, and soon a rider appears. He introduces himself as one of the nomads. One of their tribesmen has died of illness, and they need someone to wash the body and perform the funeral prayer before burial. Hearing that Domla is among them, the man perks up – his religious knowledge makes him the ideal candidate. Relieved, the nomad leads them to where the deceased lies awaiting burial.

Funeral in the Fortress After a long march, they arrive at an old, abandoned fortress. The nomadic tribe remains on the grasland, while more than twenty tribesmen come to bury the deceased according to tradition. Neither Domla nor the boys have ever washed a body before, but Domla, having negotiated a generous fee, pretends to be an expert.

Mistaken Regret Domla orders everyone to leave and not peek, calling it sinful. Once the door is locked, Domla, Omon, and the boy enter one by one, trembling as they approach the body, its face concealed by an old shirt. Suddenly, Omon screams and collapses, while the boy recoils in terror – the shirt shifts as if the corpse had come to life. Panicked, the trio rushes to the courtyard, only to find the gate sealed with stones. They shout for help, and hearing their cries, tribesmen descend from the fortress walls. Then, a large grassland cat bursts from under the shirt. It has been lying on the corpse's chest, gnawing at the man's nose – explaining the horrifying movement.

The Reluctant Ritual The three lock the door again and argue, reluctant to wash the body. Omon suggests tying a rope around the man's leg and rinsing him in the yard pond. The plan is agreed upon, and they scrub him, feeling fear fade. However, when they try to pull him out, the body doesn't budge. Omon dives in, discovering the head entangled in roots. Together, they pull it out – only to find the head has fallen off.

The Furious Flight In a panic, Domla quickly sews the head back on. They wrap the body and call the nomads. But when the grieving relatives stroke the man's face, they gasp – the head is sewn on backwards. Domla insists the man was a sinner and is being punished by God. When the truth comes out, outrage erupts among the nomads, and chaos follows. Omon and the boy flee, chased by the furious tribe. The boy yells for them to split up. He runs toward a drainage ditch and disappears. His pursuers lose sight of him and give up.

The Imam's Task A boy emerges from a gutter and enters the town mosque. After praying, he stays. A *sufi* and *imam* (servants of the mosque) approach him, and he asks if he can stay the night, introducing himself as a madrasa student looking for work. Domla senses the lie, but invites him home, citing evening duties. Over dinner, Domla explains the task: sick cattle must be slaughtered quickly to avoid losses from carrion. Giving the boy a sharpened knife, he warns, "Don't fall asleep", emphasizing the urgency and responsibility of the task.

The Great Donkey Mistake During the night, the boy is awakened by the animal's scream and still shaken from the previous day's escape, decapitates it with a knife before falling back into a deep sleep. In the morning, he is awakened by a strong kick from Domla. It turns out that he mistakenly killed a donkey instead of a sick bull, which has already died itself. The boy runs away, and an enraged Domla chases him. He climbs the stairs and races across the rooftops. Domla trips and falls, getting tangled in his pants. Looking back, the boy slips off the roof and crashes into someone's tandoor, getting stuck inside.

A Secret Meeting The boy is locked inside a *tandoor*, able to move only his right hand. A woman enters the kitchen; he quickly hides beneath the lid. She prepares dinner, placing two portions – one in the cauldron, one inside. A young man arrives, sits on the *tandoor*, and whistles softly. When the woman returns, they steal a kiss and begin eating together. He asks if her husband suspects their affair. She complains he no longer pays attention to her.

Release from the Tandoor The hungry boy reaches for the food with his free hand. Seeing this, the man pulls him out of the tandoor. Covered in blood from butchering the bull and blackened with soot, the boy startles them. When the man asks, "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" the boy retorts with the same question. A heated argument follows. The boy threatens to scream. The woman urges him to leave, but he demands food. She brings him bread, but he stays. Then he asks the man for money. Gritting his teeth, the man gives it to him. The lovers make him swear not to reveal what he saw. Then he leaves.

The Punishment The boy is walking in the middle of the night and finds himself in the market again. He decides to spend the night there. In the morning, he is awakened by loud voices. A crowd gathers around him. People shout, "Yes, it's him!" They beat him with whips and drag him through the market. He is publicly punished.

The Butcher's Son It turns out that a crime has taken place there: the day before, a wealthy cattle dealer who had stopped at a tea shop was killed and his money stolen. Seeing the boy's bloodstained clothes, the people assume he is one of the criminals. They are ready to stone him. But one man intervenes and silences the crowd. He argues that the boy is too young, appears mentally unstable, and couldn't possibly be the murderer. He explains the blood on the boy's clothes by saying he is the butcher's son, who ran away from home the previous day. The boy is released.

Becoming a Qalandar On a Friday (the most blessed day of the week in Islam), a disillusioned boy wanders through the market. Suddenly, he sees the *Qalandars* (a group of wandering Sufi dervishes) approaching, singing wildly. The boy begins to cry. He kisses the hand of their leader and begs to be taken in. The head of the *Qalandars* receives him kindly and declares him one of their own.

The New Calling The boy enjoys his new life, singing with the *Qalandars* as people offer money and food. In the evening, they visit the Eshon, a revered spiritual leader. The *Qalandars* hand over their collections; the Eshon keeps most, returning little. Noticing the boy, he praises his spirit and strokes his forehead. The next morning, as the *Qalandars* prepare to leave for another market, the Eshon invites the boy to stay and serve. The boy agrees, though he misses the freedom of wandering.

Strange Task The Eshon makes the boy swear loyalty and treat his wives as mothers. One day, the Eshon asks him to bring a donkey. Not understanding why, the boy takes the donkey for two hours and ties it to a tree. The Eshon's second wife, delighted, tells him to prepare a place for her under the tree. Then she asks him to leave.

Exile Curious about what she plans to do with the donkey, the boy secretly clears a crack in the wall to watch. The woman takes a pair of scissors and makes a small cut on the donkey's ear. As flies settle on the wound and the donkey flicks its ears, she watches with satisfaction. It turns out the Eshon's spoiled, pregnant wife is experiencing an unusual craving. The boy laughs – but just then, someone strikes him on the shoulder. It's the Eshon. Furious that the boy has looked at his wives, he drives him away.

The Kalas River A boy wanders aimlessly until he comes upon an unfamiliar river. An old man on horseback, carrying grapes, reluctantly agrees to ferry him across. Along the way, the boy learns the river is called the Kalas. They arrive at a village, and the old man advises him to seek work with Sariboy, a wealthy apple merchant in need of cheap labor. The boy takes a job as a servant but warns his master that he sometimes lies. Sariboy sneers, "You seem cunning," and hires him anyway.

A Hard Duty The boy works for Sariboy, tending apple trees and occasionally selling the fruit. Sariboy wins a rich man's estate in Chuvalchang in a game of chance and falls in love with the place. He marries a pretty Kyrgyz woman and stays there for a long time. Meanwhile, the apples ripen, but no one dares act without his word. Known for his temper and his menacing "And then what?" followed by whipping, he is feared. After the draw, the boy is sent to fetch him.

And Then What? In his new estate, Sariboy is having breakfast when a boy enters. Sariboy asks, "Why are you here?" "I wanted to see you." "And then what?" The chain of lies grows: the knife broke, the dog died, the horse died, the farm burned down, the youngest son died. Sariboy begins to cry. "But", says the boy, "your daughter Adol gave birth." "She's not married!" "If God allows, an unmarried woman can give birth too. The boy looks just like your coachman, Badal". Sariboy faints.

The Punishment An hour passes before the boy returns. Sariboy appears on horseback, weeping. His family rushes out, and, without understanding what has happened, they begin to cry as well. Soon, it becomes clear that everything the boy said was a lie. Anticipating trouble, the boy has already made himself scarce. The next day, Sariboy orders him brought before him. After twenty lashes with the whip, Sariboy drives him away. When the boy demands payment, Sariboy tosses him a sack of low-grade apples. The boy, nonetheless, is happy, even with that.

A Face in the Crowd The boy spends the night in a nomadic yurt, then heads to the Saryog'och market. After selling an apple, he wanders the stalls and suddenly spots Omon. They embrace. Omon tells how he fled after the man's washing incident, begged his way to Chimkent, and found work as a shepherd for a Tashkent cattle trader. Now traveling to Tashkent to sell sheep, they pass through Saryog'och. The boy begs Omon to ask the owner to hire him. Omon promises to help.

The Market Drive The owner instructs Omon and the boy to take the rams to the Ko'kterak market. To arrive early, he rides ahead on horseback. After a short rest, they set off at night. Without a goat to lead them, the rams move slowly. Soon, a railway appears before them. A train with two locomotives thunders past, and the terrified rams scatter in all directions. The boys, in despair, spend the night gathering them. By morning, five rams are still missing. Along the way, one ewe gives birth, which calms them slightly.

Escape The boy and Omon arrived at the market, where the owner was already waiting for them. He scolded them for being late. The boys trembled in front of him, afraid that he would discover the missing rams. But then buyers appeared and surrounded the owner. When he began to bargain, the boys quietly slipped away. Running as fast as they could through alleys and gardens, they finally stopped in an abandoned yard. Angry, Omon blamed the boy for everything that had happened. But the boy reproached him for being ungrateful - for forgetting how he had helped return the missing rams.

The Carrot Field Hungry and exhausted, the boys search for a way to the city. They meet workers digging carrots. When they ask for directions, the old man leading the group suggests they stay and work instead. They agree and begin digging, eating carrots as they go. The owner arrives, praises them, and invites them to dinner. That night, Omon sleeps on a rope bed he once dreamed of. His stomach aching from carrots.

Chasing the Cow In the morning, the owner offered the boys work and shelter for the winter. They agreed and began immediately. Since Omon had suffered diarrhea overnight, he stayed to help with chores. The boy was sent to graze a seemingly calm cow, which suddenly turned wild and ran off. He chased it all day, as it stopped to graze then bolted again. By evening, he finally tamed it and returned, utterly exhausted.

The Hero of the Rope Bed Omon lies on the bed, bragging about how they welcomed the guests, the delicious food they were served, and how much he ate. Later, they toured the village to collect debts, and the villagers treated them to more delicacies. The boy, not wanting to appear exhausted, also boasts that the cow was completely obedient and grazed on its own while he slept the entire day.

Switched Duties The boys wake up and decide to swap responsibilities for the day. The boy stays home, and Omon goes to graze the cow. Omon advises him to refuse the bread and yogurt the owner usually brings at noon, promising a hearty dinner later. The boy jokingly suggests he take the bed with him, since sleeping on the ground is uncomfortable – the cow will graze on her own, after all. Omon hoists the bed onto his shoulder and leaves. Meanwhile, the owner instructs the boy to dig up two poplar stumps. He works with all his strength, expecting guests to arrive, and declines the bread and yogurt. He works until evening – never seeing either the guests or the promised treats.

The Cow, the Bed, and the Lie The boy lies hungry and exhausted. Omon returns – pale, exhausted and silent. The cow began to act up, and Omon, afraid that someone would steal the bed, chased after it, throwing the bed on his shoulders. Having dealt with the cow himself, the boy imagines what Omon had to go through. Both are clearly lying: Omon out of anger, the boy as a joke. The boy suggests making peace and running away. But not empty-handed: they will slaughter the annoying cow and take the meat with them to sell.

Meat and Mistrust The owner locks the gate and goes to bed. At midnight, the boys sneak into the barn, and the boy slaughters a cow. They pack the meat into a sack. Then, using the boy as a support, Omon climbs onto the roof. The plan is for Omon to pull the sack of meat up with a rope and then help the boy climb up. But the boy, suspicious of Omon's intentions, removes the meat from the sack and climbs in himself. Omon lifts the sack, grins, and says "Gotcha! Take care of it yourself," and leaves. He finds a lower spot, releases the meat, and jumps down.

The Break On the way, Omon is surrounded by a pack of village dogs. One of them sinks its teeth into the sack, biting the boy's side and making him scream. Startled, Omon drops the sack. The boy crawls out, injured and furious. A quarrel breaks out between them – Omon blames the boy for everything that went wrong, while the boy mocks Omon's foolish dreams. They finally part ways, each going off on his own.

The Meeting at the Bakery The boy notices a caravan of camels, joins it, and follows them into the city. After passing the shopping arcade and the mosque, he heads to a bakery. Hungry, he sits down beside it, pretending to warm himself. An old man approaches, buys a stack of flatbreads, and asks the boy to carry them. On the way, the boy briefly says that he is an orphan. The man leads him to a low, suspicious-looking house – an opium den. Inside, several visitors are waiting for breakfast. They call the old man Hoji Bobo. After giving the boy something to eat, Hoji Bobo offers him a job as a servant, and the boy agrees.

Among Strangers, Among Stories The boy works as a messenger and loves his job. Two men treat him especially well. The first is Hoji Bobo himself – kind and never stingy. The second is an Indian merchant, generous with tips and full of stories. He often speaks of India as a land of riches and wonders, filling the

boy's imagination with dreams of going there. The other guests are harmless too; they spend their time reading books about legendary warriors and chatting about unrelated topics.

The Explosion On a cold morning, a boy puts a bottle of water in a brazier, seeking fun. When it explodes, smoke fills the room, and some guests faint. He splashes them with water. The police are called, find nothing, and suspect the children. Hoji Bobo bribes them, then punishes the boy.

The Dismissal In the morning, the boy asks for tea leaves. Hoji Bobo can't find the box where he keeps his tea and marijuana and accuses the boy of stealing it. The boy denies it. Hoji Bobo beats him, and Mirsalim, a regular customer, joins in. The boy accuses Hoji Bobo of unfairness and underpaying him. Hoji Bobo calls him ungrateful and drives him out. Mirsalim and the Hindu try to ease the tension. They decide Hoji Bobo will pay him and dismiss him by evening. As the boy packs, Cunningly, Mirsalim advises him to leave immediately warning that Hoji Bobo may try to avoid paying more. The boy agrees, walks out, and wonders, where should I go now?

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

MISCHIEVOUS BOY

The Mischievous Boy is a complex, constantly evolving character, full of contradictory traits. He is a vivid representative of ordinary people struggling to survive in the harsh conditions of Turkestan during the First World War. His love of life, faith in a bright future and sense of humor make him very attractive despite some negative traits.

Optimistic A defining trait of the Mischievous Boy is his deep love for life. He understands the world of ordinary people and embraces it as it is. Even in the most difficult situations, he never blames others or complains about life. Instead, he holds himself – and his restless nature – accountable. He sincerely believes that something good awaits him in the future. Although he often stumbles and faces failure, he always finds the strength to recover and continue searching for his place in the world.

Cunning In difficult situations, the Mischievous Boy often relies on cunning. He lies to the hot-tempered Sariboy to avoid a beating, or pretends to the mosque imam that he is a madrasah student working in his free time to gain approval. However, due to his young age and inexperience, this tactic is only temporarily effective and often leads to more serious consequences.

Exuberant The Mischievous Boy is full of energy, and his cheerful nature constantly draws him toward adventure and mischief. He dislikes a quiet, monotonous life. While living with Hodji Bobo in a dim opium den, he experiences relative stability but soon grows bored of being surrounded by drowsy drug addicts engaged in the same repetitive, disconnected conversations. Seeking amusement, he sets off an explosion using a bottle of water – an act whose consequences turn out to be both humorous and unfortunate.

Practical The Mischievous Boy is marked by a down-to-earth, folk practicality shaped by a difficult life. Whenever he is dismissed from work, he demands payment for his labor and takes what he believes he has earned. While working for Hoji Bobo, he tries hard to please the one who tips generously and carefully saves the money he receives. However, his practicality sometimes leads him to morally questionable actions. For instance, he extorts money from a young man in exchange for keeping quiet about his secret meetings with someone else's wife. Later, when he and Omon leave the stingy farmer, he convinces Omon not to go empty-handed, but to slaughter the owner's cow and sell the meat. Although these actions are dishonest, they reflect a desperate attempt to survive in the harsh, unforgiving reality he is abandoned to.

OMON

Omon, like the Mischievous Boy, is on the threshold of an independent life and searching for his own happiness. He is also an orphan, having lost his mother and now living with his father. He dreams of becoming rich and does his best to achieve that goal. At first glance, he appears more practical and goal-oriented than the Mischievous Boy. However, certain darker traits make him less sympathetic. Unlike the Mischievous Boy, Omon lacks the sincerity and playful charm that endear the main character to the reader.

The Dreamer Although he has no money, Omon dreams of becoming a wealthy sheep breeder and pursues this goal with all his might. In the harsh realities of Turkestan, however, his dream seems more like

a naive fantasy. Confronted by the difficulties of life, he settles into the role of a cattle trader's servant, yet he does not give up hope of one day achieving his ambition. In the end, he becomes a servant to a local man from the mahalla, caring for his horse – a modest position he takes pride in.

Evasive Like the Mischievous Boy, Omon often gets into difficult situations due to his inexperience. However, unlike his friend, he tends to blame others rather than himself or the circumstances. For example, when a flock of sheep panics at a train station after being startled by a passing locomotive and several sheep are lost, the boys flee, fearing punishment from their owner. Omon blames the Mischievous Boy for the incident, calling him a “bringer of misfortune”.

Hardworking Omon takes his work seriously. When Domla, the Mischievous Boy, and Omon are assigned to wash the body of a deceased person, he initially faints from fear, but soon recovers and actively participates, carrying out the task bravely – though clumsily. Later, while working as a shepherd for a merchant, he tends the flock diligently, motivated by the promise of a reward: a few rams with which he dreams of building his own herd.

Vengeful Omon is vengeful at heart. Despite their friendship and shared adventures, he harbors resentment deep inside. When he and the Mischievous Boy run away with the meat of a slaughtered cow, Omon cold-bloodedly betrays his friend, leaving him to face the consequences alone – secretly pleased at the thought of his punishment. Even after his betrayal is revealed, and he briefly shows discomfort, he quickly returns to blaming the Mischievous Boy for all their misfortunes.

HOJI BOBO

Hoji Bobo, the old man who owns the opium den, is a character who embodies both virtue and vice. Despite his involvement in illegal activities, he evokes a certain sympathy in the reader, enhanced by his distinctly national characteristics.

Kind Hoji Bobo is generous to people. When he sees a hungry boy on the street, he takes him under his wing. He feeds him, clothes him, and gives him shoes as best he can, and also provides money once a week for trips to the city. When the boy shows special care or gratitude, Hoji Bobo is very happy and speaks kindly to him. He also protects him from falling into drug addiction, urging him not to follow the clients.

Witty Hoji Bobo is an old man brought up with traditional teachings, and his speech is rich in wise folk proverbs and metaphors. He gives the boy sound advice on how to behave and takes on an educational role. Although his understanding of the modern world and current events is rather limited, he gives accurate and insightful descriptions of people.

Impulsive Hoji Bobo is prone to sudden outbursts of anger. After losing a box of hashish, he harshly punishes the boy – beating him and accusing him of theft without making any real effort to investigate. As the boy defends himself, Hoji Bobo grows even more agitated and accuses him of ingratitude, citing folk proverbs to justify his actions.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class The novel presents events through the eyes of a young boy from the lower class, allowing the author to maintain a seemingly neutral tone while conveying an underlying sympathy for the poor. Mischievous Boy accepts class differences as a fact of life, yet his portrayals of the wealthy are laced with subtle wit: the apple merchant Sariboy is both a gambler and a bore; the sheep merchant is a shrewd but stern businessman, from whom the boys flee after losing his flock; and the village farmer, though outwardly friendly, is stingy and exploitative enough to provoke the boys into taking revenge by stealing the meat of a slaughtered cow. In contrast, the lower-class characters – often unemployed, working odd jobs, or simply unlucky – are depicted with warmth and understanding, despite their flaws.

Illustrative Moment: The boys stop near the Ko'kterak market with their flock of sheep. Exhausted, they notice the animals look thin and decide to let them graze to improve their condition before sale. While the sheep feed in a meadow, the boys lie down and doze. Suddenly, a loud curse wakes them. A horseman with a whip appears, furious that the sheep have trampled his cotton fields. They had not noticed the

animals wander into the crops. The man, a wealthy local landowner, lashes Omon several times and orders his servants to seize the flock. The boys plead, but he refuses – until Omon mentions his master's name. Relenting, he returns the sheep. This episode highlights the power of the rich over the disadvantaged and the unfairness of a system that forces inexperienced children to work beyond their capabilities.

Education: Ignorance Ignorance reigns in the society to which the boy belongs. People think only about how to survive in the harsh conditions of the First World War – felt especially acutely in Russia's backward colonies, including Turkestan. Many of the characters the protagonist meets are engaged in dubious occupations: Domla, who never graduated from a madrassa, poses as a theologian and offers spiritual healing; the Eshon, calling himself a Sufi who has renounced worldly goods, profits from alms; Hoji Bobo lives on the money of opium den visitors. The common people's ideas about the war are extremely primitive: in their imagination, Germany is a six-eyed, winged monster, and a mobile cannon is a dragon. The Mischievous Boy's notions about India are equally naïve – he imagines pearls scattered along the streets, everyone naked, and bread growing on trees. In this way, G'afur G'ulom underscores the spiritual decline that accompanied the economic crisis in colonial Turkestan.

Illustrative Moment: The Mischievous Boy is walking through the market when four men drag a handsome, well-dressed man into the square, accusing him of pimping. The crowd shouts, "Beat him!" He tries to defend himself, but no one listens. The mob attacks, and even the police cannot stop them. The man is killed, and the crowd disperses. Later, it is revealed that the victim was Akram, husband of the famous singer Oyshahon. In Fergana, he posed as a bachelor and married a young widow, Latifa. Back in Tashkent, he begged Oyshahon to hide the truth by pretending she was his sister, promising to send Latifa away soon. He broke his word, humiliating Oyshahon in Latifa's presence. Enraged, she told Latifa everything, adding that Akram planned to sell her to a brothel. Horrified, Latifa fled the house. Akram caught up with her at the market, where she publicly accused him – provoking a lynching that exposed the moral decline and ignorance of society.

LIFE STAGES

Childhood Most authors of Ghafur Ghulam's generation wrote about their own childhoods, but this novel stands apart. Drawing on his experiences of orphanhood during World War I, *The Mischievous Boy* depicts childhood as a time of survival and resourcefulness. Without family support, the protagonist relies on cunning, small earnings, and occasional deception to get by. Yet his open and courageous nature brings light to the darkest days. The novel also celebrates children's vivid imagination and resilience, showing that even in hardship, curiosity and creativity endure.

Illustrative moment: Bored in his usual den, a boy craves excitement. On a cold winter morning, he places a bottle of water in a *manqal* (a portable charcoal brazier) and covers it with ashes. Guests arrive, eat breakfast, and talk about the war. The boy waits. When the water boils, the bottle explodes with a loud bang. Smoke fills the room; some guests faint. The boy splashes them with water. One of the guests brings the police, claiming someone threw a bomb. The police find nothing but suspect the children. During the search, they discover marijuana and try to confiscate it. Hoji Bobo bribes them, then beats the boy. The boy cries and denies everything. This scene vividly illustrates the theme of childhood as a mixture of innocence and daring. The boy's impulsive act – turning boredom into a risky adventure – reflects the novel's view of childhood as both imaginative and shaped by the harsh realities of survival.

POLITICS

Colonialism The events of *The Mischievous Boy* unfold in 1915 in colonial Turkestan, a time of severe hardship brought on by the First World War. Russia's demands for food and goods to supply the front placed a heavy burden on its colonies. Prices and taxes rose sharply, and agriculture shifted largely toward cotton production, forcing many farmers to lose their land. Factories were established to produce war-related goods, making it impossible for local artisans to compete and leading to widespread unemployment. These historical realities are reflected in the wanderings of the Mischievous Boy, whose journey mirrors the social and economic upheavals of the era.

Illustrative Moment: The Mischievous Boy roams the streets with his friends. The streets of Tashkent are filled with mentally ill figures, each bearing a tale of misfortune. The boys playfully tease them: Crazy Karim,

a former calico weaver, lost his livelihood when cotton replaced calico and eventually lost his mind; another man, embittered by the authorities, constantly curses Tsar Nicholas and colonial officials. Mairamkhan, wearing iron scraps strung on wire like a necklace, was once a metalworker, but after factories began producing iron goods, he too was left without work and went mad. Beneath the comedy of this scene lies the tragedy of ordinary people crushed by the colonial regime's harsh economic policies.

JUSTICE

Crime The novel describes several criminal cases: theft at the market, the murder of a person by a crowd, the killing of a cattle dealer in a teahouse, and others. The protagonist also turns out to be an accomplice – he acts as a false witness when the thief Sultan outsmarts a craftsman. Later, together with Omon, he slaughters the owner's cow in order to steal and sell the meat. He also works for Hoji Bobo, who is involved in illegal drug trafficking. Crimes often go unpunished, since the police are easily bribed. After outsmarting the craftsman, Sultan "frees" his victim with a bribe. When drugs are found in Hoji Bobo's house, he avoids prosecution by paying off the authorities. Society takes this for granted, and the legal system is unable to enforce the law.

Illustrative Moment: the Eshon calls the boy and complains that it is difficult for him to feed his wives, children, and numerous servants. He hints to the boy to help in "other" ways – that is, he suggests stealing. The boy is at first perplexed, but then, inspired by the Eshon's words, he begins his "work". On the street near the Eshon's house, he sees a calf that has strayed from the herd. He quietly ties his belt to the calf's horns and brings it to the Eshon. The Eshon, delighted, praises him. That same evening, the calf is slaughtered, and its meat is taken to the kitchen. The owner of the calf goes in search; the tracks lead him to the Eshon's house, but he does not dare to suspect him, since this would be a sin, and he returns. This episode shows that in the reality the boy has entered, the boundaries between lawfulness and lawlessness are blurred, and immorality is rewarded.

APPEARANCE

Lies in the novel function not as mere moral failings but as strategic tools of survival, resistance, and characterization. The Mischievous Boy often resorts to deception – not out of selfishness, but as a necessary response to his powerlessness in a harsh and indifferent world. His lies reflect his vulnerability as a child navigating adult systems of control. In contrast, Omon's lies are driven by bitterness and a desire for retribution; he distorts the truth to shift blame onto the Mischievous Boy, using deception as a form of emotional retaliation. The Mischievous Boy's lies, however, are infused with humor and playfulness, aligning him with folkloric trickster figures whose cunning is celebrated. By invoking folklore, the author reframes lying as a mark of ingenuity and adaptability. As such, the Mischievous Boy's deceptions are not condemned but viewed positively, inviting readers to see them as acts of creative resistance within a destabilized, often unjust social order.

Illustrative Moment: The Mischievous boy is sent to visit Sariboy, the new owner of an estate that he won in a game of chance and now lives in. Because of Sariboy's habit of constantly asking, "And then what?" and his fiery temper, no one dares to approach him anymore. As Sariboy is having breakfast in his new home, the boy enters. Sariboy asks why he has come, and the boy replies that he simply wanted to see him. Sariboy replies, "And then what?" The boy says that Sariboy's expensive knife has broken, and when asked why, explains that it happened while he was skinning a hunting dog. Confused, Sariboy asks how the dog died, and the boy replies that it ate too much of Sariboy's favorite horse's meat. When Sariboy asks why the horse died, the boy says it was tied to a trough and forced to carry water, and since the horse wasn't trained for such work, it collapsed. When asked why the horse had to be tied to the trough in the first place, the boy explains that there was a fire, the farm had burned down, and they needed water. Sariboy then asks how the fire started, and the boy replies that it was caused by a candle. When asked why the candle was lit, the boy answers that it was for the soul of the deceased. Alarmed, Sariboy demands to know who died. At that point, the boy bursts into tears and replies that Sariboy's youngest son fell from a tree and died. Sariboy begins to cry, but the boy quickly adds that he has good news: Sariboy's daughter, Adol, has given birth to a son. Shocked, Sariboy exclaims that she is unmarried, but the boy replies that if it is God's will, even an unmarried woman can give birth – and that the child looks exactly like the coachman, Badal. Hearing this, Sariboy faints.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How are political events represented in the novel?
2. How would you evaluate the actions of the Mischievous Boy? For instance, can his actions be justified when he steals the cow from his master?
3. Is Omon right to blame the Mischievous Boy for his misfortunes?
4. In your opinion, what is the Mischievous Boy's greatest strength?