

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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SHORT STORIES / HIKOYALAR (2016)

Abdulhamid Cho'lpon (1897–1938)

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These ten short stories of Abdulhamid Cho'lpon are included in Volume 2 of a 2016 edition of his collected works. Written primarily between the 1910s and the early 1930s, these works represent some of the early experiments in the modern short story genre, in the European sense, within Uzbek literature. They explore themes such as ignorance, the importance of education, gender inequality, the plight of Uzbek women, colonialism, and broader socio-political issues.

Story 1. QURBONI JAHOLAT/ VICTIM OF IGNORANCE (1914)

CHARACTERS

Eshmurod a young boy
His father a wealthy local man
Mingboshi a local official
Mo'minjon Eshmurod's friend, the son of a local religious leader

SCENES / EVENTS

The Stolen Watch Eshmurod's friend Mo'minjon (*-jon*: term of endearment, like "dear") comes to visit. Eshmurod invites him into the house and asks a servant to bring food. The friend notices an expensive watch. It is a gift from a friend of Eshmurod's father, who has lent it to his son to wear for a while. Eshmurod takes the watch and goes out to hide it in a chest, explaining that children might break it. When he returns, Mo'minjon says that someone is calling him. As Eshmurod leaves the room, Mominjon quickly takes the watch from the chest and hides it.

Choices and Expectations: Eshmurod's Dilemma Eshmurod returns to the room, saying that no one had called him and that he must have misheard. The friends continue their conversation, and Eshmurod mentions the possibility of attending a Russian school. Mo'minjon objects, asking, what would he gain from a Russian school? Does he want to become a doctor, a lawyer, or a land surveyor? Instead, he suggests going to a madrassa, where one studies regardless of personal choice; afterward, his father would arrange his marriage, and he could enjoy a comfortable life. However, Eshmurod disagrees, saying that he does not want such a future and that he needs to think seriously about what lies ahead.

When the Watch Went Missing At that moment, the father arrives with his friend. Eshmurod invites them to the table. When the food is served, everyone begins to eat. Eshmurod, however, doesn't want to eat and goes to his room to read the newspaper. After the meal, Mo'minjon leaves. The father's friend asks about the watch. Eshmurod says he hid it but cannot find it in the chest. The father becomes upset that the watch is missing.

Humiliation and Escape: Eshmurod's Struggle When the guest leaves, Father Eshmurod punishes his son for losing the watch, beating him severely. Eshmurod feels humiliated and falls ill, remaining unwell for about a month. After recovering, he is plagued by the fear that if he continues down this path, he will become like an animal. To distract himself, he goes to the park. Sitting on a bench, he begins reading the newspaper.

Unexpected Theft at Mingboshi's Park At that moment, *mingboshi* (a municipal official), the park's owner, approaches. He asks Eshmurod what the newspaper says about the elections, and Eshmurod begins to explain. *Mingboshi* then invites him into the guest room to read aloud. At the same time, Eshmurod's handsome friend arrives. *Mingboshi* is delighted by his presence and steps out to order food. While Eshmurod is busy reading, the boy steals *mingboshi's* expensive watch. When *mingboshi* returns, Eshmurod, not wanting to stay for dinner, asks for permission and leaves.

Accused and Desperate: Eshmurod's Final Act Two days pass. The police enter Eshmurod's house and accuse him of stealing from *mingboshi*, informing him that he will be arrested the next day. Eshmurod is deeply distressed. After the police leave, he finds a gun, writes on the wall that he is innocent, and then commits suicide.

THEMES

Ignorance and the Need for Reform In this story, the author reflects on the moral and social crisis of early 20th-century society. The old education system cannot meet the needs of the new era, yet a new system has not fully formed. Russian schools exist, but they are unpopular among the local population, many of whom do not understand the value of a quality education. The wealthy focus only on their own pleasure, while the younger generation is influenced by ignorance, a passion for money, and a desire to acquire it by any means, often through dishonest methods. These problems highlight the relevance of *Jadid* (reformers, educators) ideas, to which Cho'ipon belonged. The *Jadids* promoted modernized education, critical thinking, and social reform for the upliftment of society. The protagonist's death symbolizes deep dissatisfaction with the current state of society and serves as a critique of traditional structures, echoing *Jadid* concerns about the need for education and moral development among the younger generation.

Story 2. DO'XTUR MUHAMMADIYOR / DOCTOR MUHAMMADIYOR (1914)

CHARACTERS

Muhammadiyor Doctor and businessman
Hoji Ahmad Muhammadiyor's father, a barber

SCENES / EVENTS

The Journey and Dreams of Hoji Ahmad In Turkestan, there lived a barber named *Hoji Ahmad* (*Hoji*: a title given to a Muslim who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, often associated with respect and social status). When he was fifteen, he set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca with his father. His father died during the journey, and Ahmad continued wandering for another ten years. Upon returning home, he spoke Persian, Arabic, Russian, and English. His wife later died, leaving him with only one son, Muhammadiyor, and he dreamed of giving his son a European education.

Muhammadiyor's Early Education and Tutelage When Muhammadiyor was ten years old, a teacher from Ufa (a city in Tatarstan, Russia) came to visit him. The teacher had heard about *Hoji Ahmad*, who spoke several foreign languages, and wanted to meet him. *Hoji* welcomed him warmly and invited him to live in his home while tutoring his son. The teacher agreed and settled in. Muhammadiyor began his studies with great enthusiasm, even taking physical education lessons from a Russian officer in his free time. Over the course of a year, he completed an education in Islam, history, and geography.

Tragedy and a Father's Last Wish Ahmad wants to send his son to a public school, but he does not have enough money. The teacher tries to find a sponsor among the city's nobility, but his efforts are unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the teacher prepares to return to his homeland. Hoji Ahmad and Muhammadiyor go to see him off. On the way back, they encounter gamblers fighting over money. Hoji tries to intervene, but one of them kills him and wounds Muhammadiyor. Before he dies, *Hoji Ahmad* makes his son promise to continue his studies.

A Nation's Ignorance and a Son's Grief Muhammadiyor suffers greatly, torn between the grief of his father's death and the ignorance that pervades Turkestan, and he contracts tuberculosis. One day, he goes to the theater to see a play depicting the dire consequences of drunkenness. During the performance, a fight breaks out between the sons of two wealthy men over a card game in the theater garden. One son kills the other and, fearing the consequences of his crime, takes his own life. Muhammadiyor is deeply disturbed by the moral decay around him and faints from shock.

Journey to the Caucasus and Reflections on Wealth He spent a month in the hospital. Afterward, the doctors advised him to go to the Caucasus. Since he had no money, they provided him with a letter promising free treatment. Muhammadiyor left his house in order to rent it to a Russian tenant. He boarded a train and set off. Along the way, he reflected on the contrast between an Armenian who, having arrived from the Caucasus, opened a store, became wealthy, and used his money to educate his two sons, and a Muslim compatriot who spent his money on weddings and funeral rites and remained in poverty.

On the Train: Reflections on a Lost Greatness During his journey by train – one of the defining symbols of the new, modern age – Muhammadiyor meets his gym teacher. The teacher asks where he is going, and Muhammadiyor replies that he is on his way to continue his studies. Learning of his father's death, the teacher expresses his condolences, and Muhammadiyor, in turn, speaks with deep regret. As the train moves steadily forward, Muhammadiyor takes out his binoculars and gazes at the distant mountains – lands once associated with great conquerors such as Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol Empire, and Tamerlane, a Turco-Mongol ruler and military leader of Central Asia. He reflects on how a region that once produced such powerful figures has now fallen far behind in civilization, and he wonders about the reasons for this decline.

Hope and Opportunity in Baku After several days on the train, he arrives in the city of Baku (a major port city on the Caspian Sea, now the capital of Azerbaijan). The city is known for its wealthy Muslim millionaires, who are generous in their charitable donations. He goes to the office of the newspaper Kavkaz and explains his situation, and the editor promises to help. The next day, he picks up a copy of the newspaper at a bookstore and sees an announcement stating that the "Community Donation Fund" has decided to support fourteen-year-old Muhammadiyor, who has come in search of knowledge, and is willing to cover the cost of his education. Muhammadiyor is overwhelmed with gratitude and joy.

From Education to Literary Success Muhammadiyor successfully completed high school and, with the support of donations from the local community, continued his education at the Baku Gymnasium. After graduating with a gold medal, he enrolled in the medical faculty of St. Petersburg University. In his second year, he wrote a novel that brought him widespread acclaim. In his final year, he wrote a play depicting wealthy compatriots who were humiliated by foreigners due to their ignorance. Muhammadiyor also earned substantial income from his literary work.

Education, Travel, and Achievement Muhammadiyor passed his exams and received a medical degree. With the support of a wealthy patron from Baku, as well as money earned from his play, he went to study in Switzerland. Despite financial difficulties, he managed to complete his studies. Upon his return, he traveled through several European countries before returning to Baku via Tashkent.

Farewell to Baku: A Mission to Enlighten In Baku, the city's residents welcome him into the home of his spiritual father and patron. He teaches medical courses there for three years and, with his patron's permission, decides to return to Turkestan. Before departing, he delivers a speech to the young people of Baku who have gathered at the port to see him off, expressing his gratitude to society for enabling a poor student from Turkestan to receive an education in Europe. He declares his intention to devote himself to awakening his people, who remain in a state of ignorance.

Reflections on Backwardness and Progress Muhammadiyor reflects on developed countries and laments that his homeland is lagging behind in civilization. He attributes this to ignorance, deceitful religious leaders, and widespread laziness. Upon returning, he encounters various conditions in society and observes notable contrasts: in areas inhabited by Russians, there is clear cultural progress, while in Muslim communities, little has changed. These observations leave him deeply saddened.

Returning Home and Opening a Clinic Upon returning home, Muhammadiyor finds a new house in the yard. The Russian tenant hands the property back, explaining that he built the house while Muhammadiyor was away and will pay rent, excluding the construction costs. Muhammadiyor tells him

he can stay if he has nowhere else to go, but the man says he has bought a good place and moves out. Muhammadiyor then opens a private clinic, treating the rich for a fee and the poor for free. Before long, he begins to earn a comfortable income.

Muhammadiyor: Wealth, Philanthropy, and Education Muhammadiyor purchased land in a village, where oil was later discovered. He began to profit significantly from it, becoming wealthy. With the help of local influential figures, he organized a “Charity Society,” largely funding it himself. He also established a library, a magazine, a newspaper, and courses for teachers. Muhammadiyor became a role model for educational development and earned the title “Doctor Muhammadiyor, Servant of the Nation”.

THEMES

Education, Reform, and the Romantic Ideal In the story Doctor Muhammadiyor, the author employs a romantic style, even describing it as a “fantasy.” The ideological dimension is central, emphasizing the transformative power of education – a core principle of the Jadid reform movement, which sought to modernize society through knowledge, critical thinking, and social progress. The characters often act according to the writer’s ideological vision rather than strictly realistic behavior. Before his death, Muhammadiyor’s father bequeaths him the gift of an education. Sponsors are found who help the poor boy become an educated doctor, trained in developed European countries. In the context of Turkestan, this was a remarkable achievement, and the fact that Muhammadiyor eventually becomes an oil magnate further reinforces the story’s romantic tone. It should also be noted that the story was written by a young and inexperienced author, reflecting his pure intentions, noble aspirations, and dreams for the betterment of his people.

Story 3. OYDIN KECHALARDA / MOONLIT NIGHTS (1922)

CHARACTERS

Qodirjon	The spoiled son of a wealthy local man
Daughter-in-law	Qodirjon’s wife
Zainab kampir	Mother-in-law of the young bride

SCENES/EVENTS

Midnight Awakening Old Zainab wakes at midnight. Moonlight falls across the bed where she sleeps. She reflects on the trivialities of everyday life. She would have dozed off if she hadn’t heard a woman crying. She doesn’t understand who it is – whose daughter or daughter-in-law? Perhaps *Peri* (a mythical beauty)? They say *Peri* combs her daughters’ hair by moonlight. But no daughter of *Peri* or *Vedma* (witch) cries like this.

Moonlit Lament She thinks it is the neighbor’s daughter-in-law. She compares her own daughter-in-law to her. The girl has a better life than the others: a luxurious house and expensive clothes. Her young husband is always nearby; she is unburdened by household chores and worries about nothing. She decides to let her know. The crying continues, and she quietly gets out of bed and walks toward the sound. As she approaches, she sees that the light in the bride’s bedroom is still on. She wonders, oddly enough, whether she has gone to bed yet.

Sorrow by Candlelight Sobbing comes from her daughter-in-law’s room. Confused, Zainab pushes the door open; it is unlocked, and she enters. Her daughter-in-law’s voice asks who it is. Zainab steps inside and sees her sitting by the double bed, wearing a red dress, her long black hair falling to the floor as she wipes away her tears. The old woman asks, “What happened? Why are you crying? Where is your husband, Qodirjon?”

The Same Sorrow The daughter-in-law cries out in grief, “Mother!” and throws herself into the old woman’s arms, sobbing bitterly. She asks if she is truly married only to spend her nights guarding an empty house. Zainab replies, “No,” and asks why she would say such a thing – where is Qodirjon? The young woman explains that more than a month and a half has passed since their wedding, yet they have spent only two nights together. On all the other nights, she waits for him until morning. She is hurt and feels deeply insulted. Tears fill the old woman’s eyes, and she says, “His father was the same”.

The Drunken Husband The old woman looks at the girl, kisses her eyes with maternal affection, and says, “Now you are my daughter. I will never harm you, and you, too, must forget if I have ever offended you”. The bride says she is not offended; she is only saddened that her youth will be spent waiting. At that moment, a drunken Qodirjon stumbles in through the open door. Both women exclaim in unison, “Here he comes!” Qodirjon returns from Anna, his Russian mistress, with whom he has spent the night. Stumbling and drunk, he calls out in Russian, “Where are you, my Anna?” before collapsing.

THEMES

Betrayal In the story, the author explores the theme of male infidelity and the moral decline of society. Although the main character appears only in the final episode, the entire plot revolves around this issue. The young woman’s suffering stems from constant and brazen betrayal, which she finds unbearable. Yet, because society is indifferent, she passively allows the man to act as he pleases. This is further emphasized when it is revealed that her mother-in-law also endured infidelity and silently accepted it.

Gender Cho’lpon is among the first authors in Uzbek literature to confront the issue of gender inequality. This short story portrays the world of the “*ichkar*” (inside) – the hidden lives of Muslim women confined away from the public eye. In this world, women are trapped in silence and stagnation, devoted entirely to their husbands and families, denied the right to make choices for themselves. Though the story depicts only a fragment of this life, it powerfully reveals the helplessness and muted suffering that define it. The young daughter-in-law bears her husband’s abuse in silence, shedding only tears. The mother-in-law, too, has lived her life quietly enduring humiliation and betrayal. They neither know how to resist nor possess the strength to do so.

Story 4. QOR QO’YNIDA LOLA / A TULIP IN THE SNOW (1923)

CHARACTERS

Samandar former merchant, now a sufi (Islamic mystic)
Sharofat Samandar’s young, beautiful daughter
Qumribush Samandar’s wife

SCENES/EVENTS

The Ball in the Pond The girls are playing with a ball, spinning around and tossing it to the ground before catching it. Sharofat drops the ball; it hits a tree and falls into the pond. The girls cry out in regret, and Sharofat comes to the edge of the pond. One of the girls, holding a long stick, tries to retrieve the ball, and finally they manage to pull it out. Sharofat picks up the wet ball and slams it to the ground, cursing. Her friend protests and squeezes the ball, trying to continue the game. Sharofat says it is no use – it’s impossible to play with a wet ball anyway.

The Matchmakers Arrive The girls need a new ball. At that moment, a little girl named Fazilat approaches. She is the younger sister of one of the girls, Turg’unbush. They want to send Fazilat home to fetch the ball, but she has something to tell her sister, and the two of them leave together. The girls laugh, thinking that matchmakers have come for Turg’unbush. Soon, she returns and says that the matchmakers have come for Sharofat. The girls exchange glances, and Sharofat blushes.

Faith, Devotion, and the Promise of a Gift Sharofat’s father had once been a successful merchant, but he had gone bankrupt the previous year. After this, he began visiting *eshon* (religious leader in Sufi orders) and spending most of his time there. He became a Sufi (Islamic mystic). At night, he prays and weeps.

Faith, Devotion, and the Promise of a Gift One day, a *Sufi* ritual takes place in the *eshon*’s house: the *sufis* dance and enter a trance. The next day, the *eshon*’s disciples and admirers bring him gifts. One of them asks Samandar what he intends to offer. Samandar replies that the time will come and that he will present his gift. On his way home, he ponders what he could give the *eshon*.

The Matchmakers’ Visit When he returns home, his wife announces the arrival of guests. Since women are present, he dines in another room, following Muslim custom. While he eats, Qumribush enters and announces that matchmakers have come to ask for the hand of Samandar’s daughter in marriage on behalf of *eshon*. Qumribush protests, saying he is mad to marry such a young girl at his age and insists that she wants to tell him she is too young. But Samandar, thinking of the gift for *eshon*

and the prospect of becoming his relative, suddenly orders his wife to inform the matchmakers that they agree to give their daughter in marriage. Qumribush turns pale and, leaning against the wall, freezes in place.

The Most Desired Bride Sharofat is Samandar's only daughter. She is beautiful, cheerful, energetic, and skilled in crafts. When the boys from the neighborhood gather, they talk only about her, wondering who will marry her. When news spreads that *eshon* is to marry her, everyone in the neighborhood begins talking about it.

The Wedding The wedding day arrives. Ten to fifteen carts, carrying women and the bride's dowry, escort Sharofat to the *eshon's* house. The women sing "Yor-Yor" (a traditional Uzbek wedding song performed as the bride is escorted from her parents' home to the groom's). The carts pull up to the *eshon's* gate. Outside, not far from the gate, men light a bonfire – a traditional custom symbolizing joy and transition – and sing "Yor-Yor" loudly. Neighboring women, brides, and little girls join in as well. According to tradition, the groom must lift the bride from the cart and carry her. The crowd watches. The old *eshon*, his hands trembling, lifts Sharofat and, after a few steps, sets her down. Those around him praise him, saying that he is still strong.

Voices in the Dark Two young men leave *eshon's* house. It is pitch-black outside. One says to the other, "It's so dark there isn't a single star in the sky". The other replies that the night is as dark as *eshon's* soul. One laments that such a beauty as Sharofat has been given to an old man, while the other blames the girl's father. The first young man adds that it is especially painful that the old man has married a girl young enough to be his granddaughter; it is unpleasant to witness. Then the watchman intervenes, comparing it to snow falling on a tulip.

THEMES

Gender In her story, Cho'lpon addresses the issue of Uzbek women's rights in the early 20th century, focusing on the acute problems associated with the *Jadid* movement, including unequal marriages, the lack of women's freedom to choose their partners, and their inability to express their own opinions. The author criticizes the practice of unequal marriages, which, although widespread at the time, were deeply unjust: due to financial hardship, young girls were often married off to much older men without their consent. Within this patriarchal Muslim society, decisions about marriage are made by the father. In the story, women remain largely silent when such matters are discussed. Sharofat appears only at the beginning, quietly blushing as she receives the news from the matchmakers, while her mother stands motionless when her husband announces his decision.

Religion In the story, the author's attitude toward religious figures is distinctly sarcastic. He does not criticize religion itself, but rather the hypocrisy and deceit of certain religious figures – a stance typical of enlighteners of the time. This is illustrated through the character of *eshon*, who lives off his teachings while presenting himself as a *Sufi* guide. In reality, his behavior contradicts the true principles of Sufism, which prioritize spiritual purification over material gain. *Eshon* openly accepts gifts, including those from the young Sharofat. The author expresses concern that people fail to understand the true essence of these teachings and instead blindly follow a deceptive religious leader.

Story 5. KLIO·PATRA/CLEOPATRA (1923)

CHARACTERS

Cleopatra Queen of Egypt
Guy A common man

SCENES/EVENTS

Moonlight on the Nile The events unfold in ancient Egypt. Queen Cleopatra wanders along the Nile by moonlight, gathering lotus blossoms. She has just returned, weary, from a hunt with her father, yet she cannot rest. Drawn back to the river, she picks flowers at the very spot where, that very morning, an Indian bridegroom had been cast to the crocodiles. She then returns to her chambers and falls asleep, breathing in the lingering fragrance of the blossoms she has gathered.

Lilies by Moonlight Cleopatra sleeps surrounded by the scent of lily blossoms. When she awakes, she finds that the lilies have wilted. Irritated, she crumples them and tosses them aside. At that moment,

a voice rings out from the garden – the voice of the prince, her betrothed, who is to be thrown into the Nile the next day to be devoured by crocodiles. The sound stirs her anger, already sharpened by the sight of the withered flowers. She turns, intending to summon her servants for fresh blooms, but changes her mind and lies back down. A young man approaches quietly and places fresh lilies upon her head. She does not notice him. Yet, as their fragrance rises around her, she sinks into a deep, restful sleep.

Flowers for Another Cleopatra Cleopatra wakes up and asks, “Where are these flowers from?” The slaves are unable to answer. At that moment, a young man approaches and says that the flowers are his. Captivated by him, Cleopatra looks at him and asks where he is from. He replies that he is lost. Cleopatra comes to her senses and says, “If you are lost, you may go”. The young man responds that he will leave if she returns the flowers to him. Cleopatra tells him to keep the flowers, but he explains that they are meant for his beloved, who is in Amu (a river in Central Asia) – his own Cleopatra. Tears appear in her eyes as she returns the flowers to him.

Flowers Grown from Tears Cleopatra orders him to follow her. Cleopatra orders him to follow her. They enter a luxurious room, where she gestures for him to sit. She asks why his flowers do not wither. He replies that they grow from his tears. When Cleopatra asks why, if they are born of bitter tears, they smell so sweet, he answers that they have absorbed the tears of hope and therefore do not wither. Cleopatra then asks why he wants the flowers returned to him. He replies that they are his. Cleopatra gazes into his eyes with desire.

Desire, Truth, and Unreturned Love She says she cannot live without the flowers. The young man replies that she can find them anywhere she wishes – in the Nile or on the streets of the city. He adds that the princes she once cast aside, like prey to crocodiles, loved her just as deeply and would have offered her such flowers. Cleopatra responds that no one loves her for her beauty; they love her because she is the Pharaoh’s daughter. If someone loved her as he loves his beloved, she would treasure him above all else. Yet she knows that, even as she stands before him, his thoughts belong to another.

Temptation, Awakening, and Departure Cleopatra orders the slaves to leave and the curtains to be drawn. Outside, the girls begin to sing. She tries to take his flowers and seduce him. The young man begins to yield to her charms. But suddenly, the scent of death rises from the flowers. He comes to his senses, and his passion fades. Cleopatra, her face filled with sorrow, collapses. The young man takes the flowers and goes to the Nile. There, he gathers lilies for his beloved and sets out on his journey.

A Letter from Cleopatra When the young man arrives in Amu, a dove brings him a letter from Cleopatra. She writes that, although she is the beautiful daughter of a great pharaoh, she has failed to find true and pure love. She believed she loved him, but it was only a longing – a dream of a love filled with genuine feeling. Now she realizes that she does not possess such love. Without it, her throne and empire mean nothing. In his thoughts, the young man addresses Cleopatra, as if she were before him. Amu rise in fury, their waves blocking the path for both Cleopatra and his beloved, so that no one will receive the flowers.

THEMES

Love The events of the story take place in Ancient Egypt, and the central figure is the historical character Cleopatra. However, the author’s aim is not to depict historical events or political issues. Cleopatra has long attracted the attention of many writers in world literature, particularly through her relationship with Antony, which has inspired authors across different eras. Cho’lpon’s portrayal, however, differs from that of others. Although his Cleopatra possesses traits often associated with her – such as passion, charm, and occasional ruthlessness – she is presented as a more human and emotionally vulnerable figure who yearns for pure and genuine love. The young man captures her attention with his selfless and sincere devotion to his beloved. She admits that her many suitors are drawn not to her true self, but to her status as the daughter of a great pharaoh, and that such admiration cannot be considered real love.

Story 6. SENI KO'B KO'RMASUN / MAY GOD NOT TAKE YOU AWAY (1924)

CHARACTERS

Hadichahon A young village woman
Roziq Hadichahon's deceased husband
Sobirjon Hadichahon's eldest son

SCENES/EVENTS

Echoes of Loss in Hadichahon's Life The story begins with a young woman caring for her son. As she gazes at him with maternal love, she recalls the past. Hadichahon's (*-hon*: respectful suffix for women) husband, Roziq, was a peasant. Their small family consisted of his wife, his elderly mother, and their two children. Before the *revolution* (the October Revolution of 1917, which brought Soviet rule to Turkestan), they lived a stable life, but the turmoil of internal conflict that followed made their existence increasingly difficult. Despite these hardships, Roziq struggled to provide for his family. A year earlier, tragedy struck: he did not return from the fields. By morning, three men brought back his body. Hadichahon and the old woman were overcome with grief. The villagers who had found him explained that, on his way home, he had been shot by the *beks* (local feudal elites or landowning nobles in pre-Soviet Turkestan).

Memories in the Field A woman remembers her husband and cannot sleep. She gets up, goes outside, and walks to the fields. There, she sees men at work: a neighbor plowing a cotton field, a kettle boiling over the fire, and a *chapan* (traditional robe) hanging from a mulberry tree. She imagines that, if it were Roziq, she would prepare tea and bring it to him, sharing it with bread. Her eyes fill with tears. Wiping them away, she returns home. The old woman says that she has sent her eldest son, Hadichahon, to town to sell yogurt and buy meat with the money. Hadicha, still lost in memories of her husband, quietly replies, "Very well".

A Night of Waiting, A Morning of Loss That day, Sobirjon (*-jon*: term of endearment, like "dear") does not return. The old woman and Hadicha fall into despair. They send their neighbor's son, Holmat, to town, but he does not return that evening either. Hadicha and her mother-in-law spend the night in anguish. The next morning, Holmat returns carrying Sobirjon's lifeless body in his arms. When the grieving women ask what happened, he replies in a calm, matter-of-fact voice that there was a shootout in town – probably a stray bullet.

Grief and a Mother's Prayer Because of her suffering, Hadicha looks thirty-five, though she is only twenty-three. Her grief has affected her deeply, and she is no longer entirely sane. The village children call her "Crazy Hadi" (a shortened form of Hadichahon). Her youngest child is ill, and in such times, it is difficult to find a doctor or medicine. She wipes the child, weeps, and prays to God not to take her only son.

THEMES

Politics The story explores political issues that the author reflects on in the context of the early twentieth century, expressing his personal views on these events. The Turkestan Autonomy, established in Kokand (a historic city in eastern Uzbekistan) in November 1917 – a short-lived, self-proclaimed autonomous government formed in Central Asia after the fall of the Russian Empire – was quickly suppressed by the Soviets, marking the failure of early attempts at independence. Cho'lpon was a strong supporter of autonomy, and his story is rooted in the historical events that took place in the Fergana Valley (a region in Central Asia) during this period. The brutal suppression of the Kokand Autonomy by the Bolsheviks led to widespread destruction and socio-economic hardship. Drawing on the lives of ordinary Fergana peasants, the author vividly illustrates the profound consequences of these events.

Political Conflict and Resistance The story describes the political conflict of the early twentieth century in Turkestan, particularly the resistance against Soviet rule in the Fergana Valley. The brutal suppression of the Kokand Autonomy in 1918 led to widespread unrest and the rise of the *Basmachi* (often interpreted as a national liberation movement). This resistance, although not unified, included various groups opposed to Bolshevik control. As a result, frequent armed clashes brought suffering to ordinary people. The author illustrates this through tragic events in the story: the protagonist's husband is killed by a bullet from unknown assailants, and her son is killed by a stray bullet during an armed clash in the city, reflecting the harsh conditions of a time marked by violence and instability.

Story 7. NONUSHTA / BREAKFAST (1924)

CHARACTERS

Fotima	eldest daughter
Soliha	youngest daughter
Saodat	mother
Parizodhon	young daughter-in-law

SCENES/EVENTS

A Morning in the Household It is a typical morning in an Uzbek family in the early 20th century. Two girls, Fotima and Soliha, are preparing breakfast, joking as they work. The younger sister asks if the kettle has boiled, and the older one replies, “Soon”. The younger compares the boiling kettle to a fistfight. Fotima teasingly calls her sister “bride,” and Soliha, embarrassed, reacts with childish indignation. Fotima asks her to bring yogurt into the courtyard (at that time, houses typically had two courtyards: an inner one for women and children, and an outer one for guests). Soliha, feeling lazy, makes an excuse, but Fotima insists. Soliha reluctantly leaves.

Tea, Bread, and Curiosity Fotima makes tea and brings the bread. Seeing that it is old, she frowns and thinks she’ll have to bake some fresh. But she wants to see the girl who has come from the city to visit her neighbor – a friend she has heard sings beautifully. Would she leave before tomorrow? She wonders aloud. At that moment, Saodat, her mother, leaves the room and reassures her that there is no rush; the guest will stay for a few more days. Feeling a little embarrassed, the girl quickly changes the subject, distracting her mother with another conversation.

Tea and Complaints The mother asks where the younger sister is. Fotima, pleased with the attention, begins to complain about Soliha’s behavior, saying she is lazy and sleepy. If they marry her off, she adds, she’ll disgrace them with such behavior. The mother counters that Soliha is no better than her sister – perhaps even worse – and that when Soliha grows up, her behavior will change too. Fotima, offended, insists that she does all the housework while Soliha does nothing. That is why Soliha went out for yogurt and never returned. They both fall silent and sip their tea. At that moment, the young daughter-in-law, Parizodhon, steps out of the room. Saodat feels awkward because she was not invited to breakfast, but the young woman smiles and reassures them that everything is fine; if anything, she feels embarrassed for not having prepared breakfast herself.

Small Mischief, Big Lessons The daughter-in-law notices Fotima’s uncombed hair and tells her she should wash and braid it. Fotima smiles. At that moment, Soliha returns with a bowl of yogurt. Her mother begins to scold her for being late. Soliha tries to justify herself, explaining how she saw the neighbors’ children stealing ripe cherries, chased them away, and ate the rest herself. Her exasperated mother firmly orders her to sit down for breakfast.

Giggles in the Courtyard Everyone falls silent, and a pause hangs in the air. Suddenly, the daughter-in-law bursts into laughter. Seeing her, the others begin to laugh as well. Finally, Saodat asks why she is laughing. Soliha says she’s laughing about her cherry story. The young woman shakes her head and replies that no, she laughs because of the morning joke about the boiling water. She continues laughing, and the others join in. At last, Saodat asks the girls to show how they joked. Both look embarrassed, but after their mother’s insistence, they begin to imitate their morning prank.

THEMES

Gender At first glance, the story appears to simply depict the everyday life of an Uzbek family, without touching on social issues. The women eat breakfast and discuss seemingly trivial matters. Yet beneath this routine lies a subtle critique: the dull, gray, and monotonous days of women confined to a life of domestic isolation. Their world is like an unchanging Groundhog Day, where the passage of time offers little relief or opportunity. This stasis shapes their attitudes – Fotima with her disheveled hair, bored yet self-conscious, and Soliha, who reluctantly carries out even the simplest tasks. Even Fotima’s small hope for amusement, expressed in her musings about a singer from the city, is tinged with embarrassment, revealing both the scarcity of stimulation in her world and the silent constraints imposed by social expectations. The story, through these subtle details, exposes how gender and social norms confine women to a life of monotony, shaping their behavior, desires, and even their sense of self at the beginning of the 20th century in Turkestan.

Marriage In this story, marriage is a life-changing event for women, for which they must meticulously prepare. For young women, it is also a source of fear – arising from the unknown, the lack of choice, and strict separation from the male world. In Fotima’s society, marriage is perceived as an unquestionable obligation. However, for young Soliha, it is something far more unsettling, filling her with anxiety about what lies ahead. When her sister teasingly calls her “bride,” Soliha responds with a mixture of shame and anger, saying, “You are the bride yourself.” As her sister continues to tease her about soon becoming a daughter-in-law and courting her mother-in-law, she grows even more irritated, repeating, “You will be the one courting her,” as if trying to cope with her emotional and social burden. Even the thought of love is suppressed, considered indecent and shameful.

Story 8. TARAQQIY/DEVELOP (1924)

CHARACTERS

Narrator young man
Ilhom friend
Salohiddin another friend

SCENES/EVENTS

Evening Decisions It has gotten dark. The boys are talking. Ilhom glances at his watch and says, “Let’s go, it’s time”. The narrator notes that he’s asking where, even though he already knows. “To the movies,” Ilhom answers. The narrator doesn’t want to go. He looks at Saloh (short for Salohiddin) and says he won’t go to the movies. Saloh agrees and suggests going to the circus. “What’s there?” the narrator asks. Saloh replies that they can dance there. The narrator objects, saying it’s no better than the movies. Suddenly, Ilhom suggests, “Let’s go to the park and “hunt” for girls”. Saloh glances at the narrator and reluctantly says that’s not right. The narrator then proposes going to So’fi *bobo* (a respected elder) to hear stories about history –about how the Russians came to Turkestan (19th-century Russian conquest) and about the conflicts between the Khans of Kokand and Bukhara (rival khanates). Saloh objects. “Why talk about the past? What good are the stories of this crazy old man?” he asks. The narrator responds that So’fi bobo is living history. But the others shrug: “How can we develop with this?”

Evening Games The boys head to the movies – but the film isn’t what interests them. They wander through the park instead, “hunting” for girls. Ilhom and Saloh toss compliments at every girl who passes, while the narrator blushes, uncomfortable and self-conscious. Ilhom starts to feel frustrated; how can someone so undeveloped act like this?

In the Park with Girls As the narrator and Saloh sit on a bench, Ilhom appears with three girls. One walks beside Saloh, another takes Ilhom’s hand, and the third, dressed in black, approaches the narrator. His hands tremble as he takes hers, and they begin walking together through the quiet park. The girl tries to speak to him in Russian, but he remains silent, cheeks flushed. She glances at Saloh and complains that he won’t talk. Saloh encourages him, “Talk about potatoes, carrots... anything”. The narrator retorts, “How can we talk about such things? Is this even a conversation?” Ilhom grows angry, regretting that they even brought him. “Is he even a human being?” he exclaims. The narrator fires back, “And someone who chases every skirt – is that considered human?” Ilhom interprets the remark in his own way and scolds him for being shy, convinced that he has grasped its meaning. Saloh throws up his hands in exasperation. “How can we consider ourselves civilized with him?”

THEMES

Identity In this story, Abdulhamid Cho’lpon examines the tension between tradition and modernity, highlighting the gradual erosion of national identity among the younger generation in the early 20th century. Ilhom and Saloh misunderstand the very notion of development, equating “civilization” with the superficial imitation of foreign practices. They adopt new social habits – such as “girl-chasing” in the park – incorporate Russian words into their speech, and attend dances, all of which they regard as markers of cultural progress. Yet this imitation remains shallow, detached from any deeper understanding of cultural values. By contrast, the narrator attempts to preserve a sense of historical and cultural continuity by inviting the boys to visit So’fi bobo and listen to stories about the past – stories that reveal how the very forms of “culture” they now admire were introduced through the Russian conquest. However, the boys dismiss these narratives as the ramblings of an irrelevant old man,

exposing not only their indifference to history but also their inability to critically engage with either tradition or modernity. Rather than presenting a simple opposition between past and present, Cho'ipon suggests a more complex dilemma: the danger lies not in change itself, but in the unreflective adoption of external models that leads to a gradual distortion of identity. Through this contrast, he warns of a generation at risk of losing a meaningful connection to its cultural roots, not by abandoning them entirely, but by failing to understand their value.

Ignorance In his story, Cho'ipon addresses the theme of ignorance and social apathy. Ambitious and forward-looking, he dreams of his country reaching the level of developed Western nations, seeing education as the key to genuine progress. At the same time, he expresses concern about the younger generation, who often waste their time and fail to pursue real knowledge. For Cho'ipon, this superficial engagement with Western ideas – understanding terms like “developed” or “cultural” only as fashionable trends or appearances – undermines the true meaning of development he envisioned.

Story 9. OQPOSHSHONING IN'OMI / A GIFT FROM THE WHITE TSAR (1934)

CHARACTERS

To'htash	a craftsman
Mullah Shamsiddin	a clerk in the city mayor's office
Senator	a subject of the White Tsar
Jalol	a local policeman

SCENES / EVENTS

The Exhibition in Moscow Mullah Shamsiddin is reading a newspaper and comes across an advertisement for an exhibition in Moscow. Oqposhsho (“White Tsar” – a term used by Central Asians to refer to the Russian ruler, emphasizing his supreme authority and imperial power) is offering generous rewards to artisans who present their work, and it seems that the Tsar himself will also be in attendance. The artisan To'htash wishes to participate in the exhibition and turns to Mullah Shamsiddin, the mayor's secretary, for advice. Mullah Shamsiddin assures him that if To'htash can create any item, he will personally send it to the exhibition. Delighted, To'htash enthusiastically begins preparing his work.

The Craftsman's Trick for the Tsar After a week, a parcel containing a wooden pair of galoshes was sent to Moscow. One of the galoshes was deliberately made with a defect. The craftsman imagined the Tsar would be amazed by their enormous size – and by how large the people's feet must be in that country. The Tsar would try to put them on, stumble as he walked, and then fall. Everyone would laugh, and the Tsar would reward the craftsman generously.

The Galoshes of Turkestan Instead of the White Tsar, a senator – one of his high-ranking officials – arrives. His attention is immediately drawn to the enormous galoshes. With a hint of curiosity, he asks in which region of Turkestan such unusual footwear is worn. The others, half-jokingly, suggest that they must belong to the *Sarts* (a term used in the Russian Empire to refer to the sedentary, urban Muslim population of Central Asia). The senator, however, takes the matter seriously and proposes establishing a factory in Russia to produce such galoshes, convinced that this would promote industrial development. The Governor of Moscow readily agrees, even suggesting that the factory be built in a region rich in forests. Eager to test them, one of the officials slips his feet into the galoshes. After a few uncertain steps, he trips and falls, eliciting subdued, awkward laughter from the group. At that moment, an elderly official quietly reminds the governor of the promised gift to To'htash.

The “gift” reached To'htash The Governor of Moscow was obliged to report the generous donation to the Governor of Turkestan, who, in turn, notified the district mayor and the mayor of To'htash's district. Policeman Jalol, having learned of the Tsar's gift, arrived in To'htash and asked for a tip in return for delivering the good news. To'htash was delighted, though somewhat perplexed. He gave the policeman his last kopeck. Finally, the policeman leaned closer and whispered in his ear, “The Tsar has sent you his “thanks”. Only then did To'htash realize that the “gift” consisted of nothing more than words. After seeing him off, he returned to his room, thoroughly perplexed. Meanwhile, the women – his mother and wife – had already begun to quarrel upon learning of the gift, and he silenced them with a stern threat.

To'htash's Reward The next day, To'htash somehow managed to find money for the trip, went to the regional center, and entered the deputy governor's reception room. He remarked, with a hint of

sarcasm, that the White Tsar's gift was too heavy for a commoner like him and that he wished to give it to the official instead. The deputy governor understood the joke and, laughing, ordered him to accept 200 *so'ms* (historically, this was the local silver currency, later replaced by Russian rubles; the term "so'm" is still used for the Uzbek currency). To'htash left the "generous gift" for the high-ranking official and returned to his city with 200 *so'ms*, planning to turn his small house into a luxurious one and to marry a new wife.

THEMES

Humor The story employs humor and irony not only to expose the protagonist's naïve expectation of imperial generosity, but also to satirize a bureaucratic system that reduces genuine effort to empty gestures of "gratitude." The author notes in parentheses after the title, "A funny story". Critics have observed that the narrative is reminiscent of anecdotes about the folk hero Nasreddin (Nasreddin Hodja: a folk hero known for witty, humorous, and satirical tales exposing human folly and social absurdities). The protagonist believes that the Tsar will appreciate his work and expects recognition for his gift. However, to his disappointment, a senator evaluates the work in terms of "public benefit." As a result, instead of the promised reward, the protagonist receives nothing more than a grand "thank you". The author thus mocks the protagonist's naïveté while also exposing the emptiness of official recognition. Yet the ending is unexpected. To'htash seeks a way to rectify the situation: he goes to the deputy governor and conveys the Tsar's "great thanks" to him. The deputy governor understands the sarcasm and, laughing, writes him a check for 200 *so'ms*. In this way, To'htash cleverly takes his revenge.

Story 10. NOVVOY QIZ / BAKER GIRL (1928)

CHARACTERS

Girl	Unnamed young baker from a low class
O'lmasboy	A middle-class butcher
Mother	The girl's elderly mother

SYNOPSIS

The events unfold in an unnamed city on the eve of the October Revolution and in the years that follow. A young girl who works as a baker is raped after being lured under the pretext of buying flatbreads. Left defenseless by the illness and subsequent death of her elderly mother, she becomes the target of gossip and moral condemnation, as the townspeople blame her for the crime committed against her. Later, the girl marries twice but finds no happiness. At the end of the story, the man who raped the young village girl is brought to trial. During the proceedings, a young woman appears unveiled and gives testimony; it is revealed that she is the baker girl herself. Ultimately, the court finds the rapist guilty and sentences him.

SCENES / EVENTS

After the Rape A young girl who baked bread was raped. The local butcher, O'lmasboy, lured the girl to his home under the pretext of buying all her flatbreads. He was alone, as the women of his family had gone out of town to harvest melons. Although the girl resisted fiercely, she was ultimately powerless against her attacker. The story begins in the aftermath of the incident, as she lies down. The house is quiet. From the street come the cooing of a pair of turtledoves, the voices of children at play, and the sad song of a young man. Light filtering through a narrow crack in the door illuminates the girl's pale face.

When the Call to Prayer Echoes The call to prayer sounds, and at its echo, O'lmasboy rises and approaches the girl, trying to rouse her. She lies silently, eyes open, lost in her sad thoughts. He looks at her with a victorious expression and smirks. She turns away in disgust. O'lmasboy opens the window, and she hastily covers herself. He glances at her and laughs. In a trembling voice, she reproaches him for what he has done, but he dismisses her anger, claiming that it was at least pleasurable. His words wound her deeply.

The Struggle at the Door O'Imasboy urges the girl to hurry, warning that the women of his family might return soon. She jumps up, straightens her clothes, drapes her burqa over her head, and rushes to the door. But at the threshold, she collides with O'Imasboy and recoils back into the room. He follows her, and their eyes meet. Pretending to be innocent, he asks if she wishes to leave, addressing her as a "noble maiden". The question offends her deeply, and she reacts sharply, calling him an infidel. O'Imasboy, calm and grinning, insists he is a pious man and asks what is wrong he has supposedly done. In a surge of anger, she grabs a cup and hurls it at him, but it misses and shatters on the floor. O'Imasboy laughs loudly. Forcibly restraining her anger, the girl puts her burqa back on and prepares to leave. O'Imasboy does not let her go. He follows her, blocking her path and trying to force her to submit. The girl resists, struggling with all her strength, but he is stronger and overpowers her. She rises quickly this time and rushes to the door, but he calls after her, taunting that, since the women are not returning, she might as well stay all night.

The Girl Returns Home. A girl returns home. She is a half-orphan who lives with her elderly mother. For five years, she baked and sold flatbreads, barely making ends meet. Her mother is gravely ill and is cared for by an elderly relative. The girl sits nearby, eating a meager bowl of soup. As her mother lies dying, she imagines a future without her – abandoned, sold, or forced to wander the streets as a prostitute.

The Girl's Mother Dies The girl's mother dies and is buried almost unnoticed, with very few people attending the funeral. The girl is left defenseless and vulnerable, like a baby bird separated from its mother. After her mother's burial, rumors about the girl's alleged affair begin to circulate throughout the community. The girl is unable to explain what truly happened or defend herself against these accusations. The girl marries, but the union ends in divorce. She soon marries again, yet the second marriage also collapses. Left in dire financial straits, she faces deep emotional and social hardship.

Breaking Free: A Woman's Journey to Activism She discards the burqa, asserting her independence and breaking free from societal constraints. With her newfound freedom, she becomes an activist, eventually leading the women's department and championing women's rights.

The Village Trial A show trial is underway for a man accused of raping a young woman, a village baker. The mosque courtyard is overflowing with people. Boys sit in the trees, watching the spectacle. The prosecutor presents the charges, and the defense attorney attempts to defend the accused. When the defendant is given the floor, he denies everything and protests his innocence. Suddenly, a young woman appears without a burqa, holding a folder. The entire crowd stared at her. She felt agitated and asked to speak. They gave her the floor, but she could not find the words. The people waited in silence. She began to recount her life, explaining that she had been a baker who spent five years baking bread, selling it, and caring for her elderly mother. When she tried to continue, her voice faltered; she gasped and trembled. Suddenly, she screamed wildly and fainted. At the same moment, another scream cut through the air – the voice of the criminal, who also collapsed. Both were led away, and the trial was adjourned. The trial resumes, and this time the girl recounts what happened. O'Imasboy can no longer deny his guilt.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

GIRL

The girl has endured many harsh trials in her life. Although she may appear defenseless at first glance, another side of her character lies beneath the surface.

Trusting The girl assumes others are honest and rarely questions their motives. Her inherent trustfulness renders her vulnerable to O'Imasboy, who exploits her naivety with ease. In her attempt to sell flatbread, she follows a stranger without suspicion, highlighting her innocence and lack of worldly experience. Although she lost her father early and faced significant hardships, these challenges do not diminish her trusting nature. Her limited "street smarts" and social inexperience result in poor judgment in unfamiliar situations, underscoring the tension between her moral integrity and the dangers of her environment.

Hardworking The girl struggles to earn money to support herself and her mother. From a young age, she has worked tirelessly, baking bread and caring for her elderly mother. She never considered any

other way of life. However, this misfortune changes her circumstances, making her struggle even more difficult.

Resilient Despite the profound insult and trauma, the girl does not respond with hysteria, verbal abuse, or blackmail. Instead, she internalizes her grief, expressing her emotional pain through quiet weeping rather than outward aggression. Her anger manifests in only a single symbolic gesture – calling her assailant “Infidel” and smashing a cup – an act that reveals the tension between her suppressed rage and her moral self-control. This restrained response highlights her ethical integrity, emotional discipline, and the psychological cost of her victimization.

Strong Repeated humiliations and personal hardships do not break her; she refuses to surrender to despair and continues to struggle for survival. In her attempt to reshape her life, she marries twice, yet both unions end in disappointment and loss, leaving her with nothing. Over the course of the narrative, she evolves from a vulnerable and defenseless figure into a resilient young woman who recognizes her rights and ultimately seeks justice against her abuser.

O’LMASBOY

O’Imasboy represents deeply rooted patriarchal values and the oppressive treatment of women in society. Yet rather than depicting him as a purely monstrous figure, the author presents a complex and unsettlingly realistic image of the rapist. Viewed through the girl’s perspective, he is morally condemned while remaining a convincingly human and narratively compelling character.

Cunning O’Imasboy presents himself as outwardly gentle and polite, a demeanor that inspires trust in those around him. It is precisely this façade that leads the girl to believe him and follow him without suspicion. Even after committing his crime, he continues to address her with a tone of gentle yet cruel sarcasm. When the girl calls him an “infidel,” he mockingly responds, “How could such a pious man be called an infidel?” Throughout the story, he persists in maintaining the image of an honest and devout man. Only in court does the girl finally expose his true nature.

Morally corrupt O’Imasboy’s distorted worldview reduces women to instruments of his personal desire, leaving no room for respect for their autonomy or consent. His brazen behavior reflects both moral emptiness and social impunity, as he remains unconcerned with the emotional and ethical consequences of his actions. Consequently, he mocks the girl’s anguished reproach with cynical amusement, misinterpreting her justified contempt as trivial flirtation, thereby exposing the depth of his misogyny and moral corruption.

Cruel In the author’s portrayal, O’Imasboy’s cruelty is revealed more through his actions than his words, though his mocking, merciless tone inflicts deep emotional harm on the girl. He deliberately targets a poor, half-orphaned girl with an elderly, ailing mother, fully aware of her vulnerability and limited ability to resist. When he urges her to quickly get up and tidy herself up before the women return from the countryside, it becomes clear that he has been patiently preparing his immoral plan, waiting for the opportune moment. Confident she will remain silent and conceal her shame, he exploits her helplessness without remorse. He then ruthlessly exposes her to gossip and public suspicion, mockingly calling after her, “Hey, baker girl! You left a basket of bread!” Throughout the narrative, he remains entirely indifferent to her suffering and fate.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class Like many writers of her time, Cho’lpon, under the pressure of Soviet ideology, strives to emphasize class differences. The main character is a girl from the lower social strata, and the author highlights her meager income, modest living conditions with her elderly mother, and constant food shortages. Her rapist belongs to the middle class – not particularly wealthy, but financially stable, a prosperous butcher. At the same time, Cho’lpon places greater emphasis on the moral struggle between good and evil. In keeping with the writer’s artistic style, symbolism plays a significant role: the baker represents goodness, as bread has long symbolized life, mutual aid, and spirituality. O’Imasboy, by contrast, is a butcher – a metaphor typically associated with excessive cruelty and indiscriminate violence, underscoring the profound harm he inflicts. As later critics have noted, in Baker Girl, the

exposure and punishment of the rapist signify not so much a conflict between social classes as the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Illustrative moment: When the girl returned home with a meager sum of money, her ailing mother lay dying. One of her relatives, an elderly woman, was caring for her. That day, the mother had not eaten her meager soup, leaving it for her daughter even though it meant going without dinner herself. The girl sat beside her mother, ate the pitiful soup, and thought, “Oh, my poor mother! Even in death, she left me her food. Who will give me theirs next?” This episode illustrates the harsh living conditions of people from the lower classes, as well as their defenselessness and vulnerability in the face of an uncertain future.

Gender Gender issues are central to this work. Many authors of the period – particularly during the height of the *Hujum* (Attack) women’s liberation movement – examined the plight of Uzbek women, discrimination against their human rights, unequal marriages, and domestic violence. However, the author takes a different perspective, focusing on societal attitudes toward women in an unusual and highly sensitive situation: rape. How does society treat women in such circumstances? Why does it often consider women more culpable than men? Why are women blamed? In addressing this issue, Cholpon is ahead of his contemporaries. He challenges deeply ingrained notions about women’s behavior, particularly the belief that if a woman is raped, she is somehow guilty or has provoked the act. Such assumptions reveal the pervasive bias that the woman herself is responsible for the man’s behavior. Cholpon’s approach aligns closely with contemporary feminist perspectives on gender issues.

Illustrative moment: The girl’s mother died. She was buried, and her passing went almost unnoticed. Yet soon the town was alive with whispers – rumors that the girl had been carrying on an affair. While her mother’s death drew little attention, gossip about her supposed dishonor spread quickly. In time, the truth emerged: she had not been involved with anyone. O’Imasboy had deceived her, inviting her to his home under the pretense of buying all her flatbreads for an event. There, he violated her. For five years, she had baked flatbreads to support herself and her ailing mother. Throughout those years, she had not even exchanged a flirtatious word with anyone. She was entirely innocent. Yet who would defend her? The silent walls and windows of O’Imasboy’s house, and the abandoned basket she left behind, bear witness to the truth – but they are lifeless and cannot speak. And so, what remains for her to do? This episode illustrates the profound injustice in the girl’s treatment, grounded in deeply internalized societal norms and subconscious biases toward women perceived as dishonored.

Public indifference In his story, Cholpon addresses a social issue that deeply concerns him. He laments his colonized homeland under Russian rule and dreams of national independence, while condemning the indifference and passivity of the people – a theme he explores in many of his poems and literary works. This concern is also reflected in *Baker Girl*, where later critics have identified a central, though not immediately obvious, underlying idea. Society remains a silent observer, offering no compassion as the protagonist struggles to preserve her dignity; it ignores her suffering even after her mother’s death, leaving her alone with shame and poverty. Yet this same society shamelessly accuses the girl of moral depravity and claims the right to judge her for an event for which she bears no responsibility. In light of such moral failure, the narrative ultimately questions whether this crowd can truly be called a people.

Illustrative moment: The girl’s mother dies and is buried quietly, unnoticed by the wider community. The old woman had no one, and no one mourns her except the girl. In a homeland inhabited by innumerable people, no one cares to learn how the old woman died or how she was laid to rest; instead, the town chooses to gossip about the girl’s supposed “affair”. Rumors spread, and public judgment falls upon her. Two years later, the poor girl has been married and divorced twice. Once young, beautiful, pure, and filled with modest hope for happiness, she has now lost everything. This episode highlights the public’s moral indifference to individual suffering, revealing how collective apathy contributes to the neglect and marginalization of one of its own members.

JUSTICE

Crime and Punishment The story depicts a brutal crime whose motive is neither money nor revenge, nor personal grievance, but animalistic lust combined with a desire for domination. The criminal is portrayed as cold-blooded and cruel. When O’Imasboy urges the girl to quickly get up and compose herself before the women of his household return, it becomes clear that he has planned the

crime in advance, deliberately waiting for the right moment. He knows the girl is defenseless, with only an elderly, ailing mother to rely on. Most disturbing is society's indifference to such violence: the victim is blamed, while the perpetrator remains unnoticed and unpunished. Patriarchal attitudes readily justify his actions, allowing O'lmasboy to remain calm, cynical, and sarcastic. Although he is ultimately punished at the end of the story, this outcome is atypical for the period, when similar crimes were often ignored or deliberately concealed. The triumph of justice thus reflects the author's moral ideal and deep empathy for the heroine.

Illustrative moment: A show trial is underway for a man accused of raping a young woman, a village baker. The mosque courtyard is overflowing with people. Boys sit in the trees, watching the spectacle. The prosecutor presents the charges, and the defense attorney attempts to defend the accused. When the defendant is given the floor, he denies everything and protests his innocence. Suddenly, a young woman appears without a burqa, holding a folder. The entire crowd stares at her. She is agitated. She asks to speak; they give her the floor, but she cannot. The people wait. She begins: "I was a baker. For five years I baked bread, sold it, and cared for my elderly mother. One day... one day..." She cannot continue. She gasps and trembles. Suddenly, she screams wildly and faints. At the same moment, another scream pierces the air—the voice of the criminal; he, too, collapses. They are led away, and the trial is adjourned. The trial resumes, and this time the girl recounts what happened. O'lmasboy can no longer deny his guilt. This episode portrays the triumph of justice in an intensely emotional and dramatic way, suggesting the author's personal desire to see evil unmistakably exposed and punished.

PSYCHOLOGY

Anxiety The story portrays anxiety from multiple perspectives. The girl feels profound anxiety about her future after the events that befell her. O'lmasboy experiences a milder form of anxiety, worried that his actions might be exposed, and so he carefully masks his true nature behind a façade of piety and respectability. At the same time, the author implicitly conveys concern for the future of her country, highlighting a society so indifferent to injustice that such events can occur unnoticed.

Illustrative moment: The mother dies. The poor girl, who has no one left except her dying mother, thinks, "The days ahead will be darker than nights without a moon". She imagines herself wandering the streets as a tramp, indiscriminately seeking the attention of men – receiving kisses from the "loving" and cruel insults from the "unloving". As the Sufi began calling the faithful to prayer, her mother breathed her last. Now the girl was like a fledgling, orphaned before it had learned to fly. The episode lays bare the girl's dread of a dark, uncertain future, her soul trembling with the helpless anxiety of one utterly alone and unprotected.

SEXUALITY

Desire / Lust In the story, a girl becomes a victim of a man's desire. O'lmasboy, driven by his cruel and animalistic lust, forcibly satisfies himself. Although extramarital relationships are socially condemned, a man's desire that violates a woman's will is rarely judged with the same severity. To him, a defenseless girl from the lower social strata is merely an easily accessible object for fulfilling his urges. After committing the act, O'lmasboy views himself as triumphant and shamelessly gloats over the humiliated girl. In contrast, for the girl, the experience is horrifying and degrading, completely shattering her life.

Illustrative moment: The Sufi's call to prayer stirred O'lmasboy, prompting him to rise. He approached the girl, who lay motionless, her eyes wide and filled with profound sorrow. Their gazes met. The proud man let out a harsh, cold, and derisive laugh. In response, the girl turned away in deep revulsion. O'lmasboy regarded her with insolent pride, then opened the window, allowing light to flood the room. The girl hastily covered herself with a blanket and rose. Their eyes met once more, but O'lmasboy merely turned his head and laughed again with smug satisfaction. This time, burdened by despair and pain, the girl looked directly into his eyes and whispered weakly, "What have you done?" The man laughed even more brazenly and replied with arrogant indifference, "So what? At least it was wonderful". The girl recoiled in disgust, and with trembling lips murmured, "Let this "miracle" disappear". Mistaking her words for flirtation, the man laughed cheerfully and walked toward the door. As he opened it and left, large tears began to stream down the girl's face. This episode demonstrates the stark contrast in how the two characters interpret the same event: O'lmasboy perceives it as a source of pride and

masculine triumph, whereas the girl experiences it as a violation marked by shame, disgust, and psychological devastation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think society in the story chooses to blame the girl rather than the perpetrator?
2. How would you describe the contrast between the two main characters, and what does it reveal about power and morality?
3. After O'Masboy commits the crime, the scene is marked by silence, interrupted only by the cooing of a turtledove and the sounds of children playing. How do you interpret this atmosphere, and what message might the author be conveying?
4. Do you feel that the delayed justice at the end of the story is meaningful, satisfying, or problematic? Why?
5. Are you aware of other literary works, like 'Baker Girl', that address sexual violence? How do these works approach the theme differently?