

People of War / Urush odamlari (1988)

Nazar Eshonqul (1962-)

OVERVIEW

Author Nazar Eshonqul, born on June 15, 1962, in Tersota, Kashkadarya region, is a prominent Uzbek writer. He graduated from the journalism department of Tashkent State University in 1986 and worked for the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan, the newspaper *Writer*, and the literary magazine *World Literature*. Renowned for blending Eastern and Western literary traditions, he authored notable works such as *Urush odamlari* (People of War) (1988), *Momoqo'shiq* (Native Song) (1989), *Yalpiz hidi* (The Smell of Mint) (1996), *Maymun yetaklagan odam* (A Monkey Led by a Man) (2001), *Shamolni tutib bo'lmaydi* (The Wind Cannot Be Caught) (2004), *Qora kitob* (The Black Book) (2008), and *Shaftoli guli* (Peach Blossoms) (2011).

Novella The novella *People of War*, published in 1988, brought fame to the young writer. In Uzbek literature, the late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by the emergence of new literary movements that departed from the Soviet style and drew inspiration from Western literary trends of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the writer was a leading figure in this trend, *People of War* remains firmly rooted in realist traditions – a characteristic that distinguishes it from his later works. Critics have praised the strength of his realism, noting that, as a member of the post-war generation, he vividly depicts the wartime period.

Background The author is intimately familiar with the setting, his native village. The narrative incorporates local legends and reflects the social and cultural characteristics of the community, including regional dialect and slang. **The novella** is set in a remote mountain village during World War II, where the enduring influence of long-held traditions shapes the community's worldview. These deeply rooted customs form the foundation of the narrative's central conflict, highlighting the interplay between individual behavior and cultural norms.

MAIN CHARACTERS

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| Normat | A soldier recently returned from war, former horseman and farmer |
| Anzirat | Normat's wife |
| Mirzaqul | Chairman of the village council |
| Biidi momo ('grandmother') | Normat's elderly aunt |
| Sharif chavandoz ('horseman') | Normat's friend, professional horseman who also fought in the war |
| Hanifa | Anzirat's neighbor, woman of almost the same age |

SYNOPSIS

The events take place in the mountain village of Tersota, Uzbekistan, during World War II. At the end of the war, Normat, presumed dead, returns to the village, having lost one leg. He is overjoyed to resume his former life. But soon, his neighbor, a gossipy village woman, discovers that his wife, Anzirat, is pregnant by another man. She tells Normat's aunt, Biidi. Faithful to old traditions, Biidi informs Normat and urges him to punish his wife severely. Normat brutally beats her and leaves home. Anzirat falls seriously ill, and the neighbor cares for her. It turns out that, while Normat was away at war, the chairman of the village council, Mirzaqul, had begun to show attention to her. When Anzirat received news of her husband's death, he seized the opportunity and seduced her. After Normat's return, Mirzaqul fears that their secret will be revealed, but, at the same time he cannot forget Anzirat. Normat lives in the house of Biidi's late son. He wants to return to his family for the sake of the children, but his aunt opposes it, calling him unmanly and a worthless person who has lost his dignity. Meanwhile, Mirzaqul, who thanks to his friends' help avoided going to war, is called up to the front. He wants to see Anzirat one last time and say goodbye to her.

Biidi tells Normat that she saw his wife's lover enter his house. Enraged, Normat rushes to Anzirat with a gun. Meanwhile, Mirzaqul kneels, begging Anzirat for forgiveness. Seeing them together, Normat, consumed by rage, shoots them both. A few days later, the police find his body beneath the rocks at the foot of the mountain.

SCENES

Normat's Return In early December 1944, Normat returns to the village of Tersota from the war, having lost a leg. His fellow villagers gather at his house. They have slaughtered an old but fat goat, and the smell of soup hangs in the air. Mostly, they are old men, women, and children playing outside. People joke and laugh about trivial things; the old women dance, and then the girls join in. Normat sits on pillows, enjoying the merriment of his fellow villagers.

An Offer Declined When the guests leave, his friend Sharif approaches and asks him to work as a foreman. The collective farm chairman has offered him the position. Normat declines, saying he misses the land and wants to take up farming. He sees his friend out.

Home Reunited Normat enters the bedroom. His son and daughter are asleep. His wife sits silently, lost in thought. When he calls her, she answers coldly. Normat hugs her and asks why she doesn't smile or speak, why she isn't happy about his return. Suddenly, Anzirat bursts into tears. Normat is confused, but she tells him she had received a letter about his death. Normat calms down, relieved, for he had feared she would react to his lost leg. Anzirat looks at him, as if feeling sorry for him, and goes to dim the lights.

A Distant Warmth Normat hasn't completely lose his leg; only his heel has been amputated, and he can walk with a prosthesis. He eagerly awaits spring, when he can plant again. He grows bored and restless, tormented by the feeling that his wife has become a stranger. At last, he asks her, "Would you be happy if I had really died?" Anzirat bursts into tears. Normat doesn't understand. Suddenly, she says she wants some *chukar* (partridge) meat. Normat feels a quiet joy – it reminds him of Anzirat before the war, of her favorite dish.

Hunting and Homecoming Normat goes into the gorge between the mountains to hunt *chukars*. When he sees the familiar hills and the spring, his heart fills with joy. By evening, he has hunted only two *chukars*. When he returns, the household is celebrating: the children cuddle with their father, and Anzirat watches lovingly as her husband enjoys himself with the children and laughs.

The Gun and Duty One day, Sharif arrives on horseback with a gun. He says that the deserter Hotam, who has been in hiding for three years, has returned to the village and must be caught. Normat is at a loss; he doesn't want to take up a gun again. But Sharif insists that the village council chairman wants him to help capture the deserter. Reluctantly, Normat agrees.

The Shot in the Ravine The six villagers who came to catch the deserter, including two soldiers, split up: four pursue the deserter Hotam from the village, while Mirzaqul and Normat wait by the ravine to intercept him. Suddenly, Normat hears the shouts of soldiers and sees a man with a rifle running straight toward him. He recognizes his fellow villager. Normat begs him to surrender, but the man refuses. Then Mirzaqul fires, and the deserter falls dead. Seeing the fresh body and the spreading pool of blood, Normat begins to convulse, his body betraying the incurable trauma of war.

Biidi Momo, the Village Matriarch Biidi momo, Normat's aunt, is a respected woman in the village, known for her strong will and sharp tongue. Widowed at a young age, she has raised two sons on her own and considers herself responsible for the entire village, one of its founders. She often intervenes in others' affairs, earning both respect and resentment. Her sons grow into proud, honest men. The elder marries a girl who elopes with him. Biidi resists but finally agrees, though she dislikes her gentle daughter-in-law. The younger marries the girl she chooses, and Biidi feels content, for this is the bride she always dreamed of.

Biidi Momo's Loss Biidi Momo's sons leave for war from the very beginning. One day, two men arrive, the village council secretary and the postman. They remain silent, and Biidi Momo senses that something is wrong. First, she is informed of the death of her eldest son. The eldest daughter-in-law turns pale, while the youngest sighs with relief and begins to weep for her husband's brother. Yet the guests do not leave.

Enraged, Biidi snaps, “Say what you came to say,” calling the secretary by his nickname, Hernia. Insulted by her rudeness, the secretary announces the death of her second son as well. The daughters-in-law weep bitterly, but Biidi angrily scolds them for showing tears in front of these “worthless” people. And still, they disobey her.

The Neighbor’s Revelation Anzirat is cleaning the house when a neighbor stops by. The neighbor invites her to visit another neighbor who has just given birth. Anzirat asks her to wait a moment while she finishes her work. She uses insect repellent and suddenly feels ill, beginning to vomit. The neighbor takes care of her, helps her lie down, checks her belly, and tells her that she is pregnant. Anzirat says she is one month along, but the neighbor is surprised and skeptical.

The Outrage A neighbor runs to Biidi momo and tells her about Anzirat, who claims to be one month pregnant but is lying. She is actually three months pregnant, and her husband has only recently returned from the front. Biidi becomes furious. They rush to Normat, who is working in the fields, and tell him what has happened. Normat flies into a rage. He bursts into the house, drags Anzirat out of the room, and begins beating her. People gather, and Biidi urges them to throw stones at her. But no one listens. Only one old woman weakly tosses a stone, cursing Anzirat, but no one follows her.

Intervention and Control Normat tries to hang Anzirat by her hair, using it as a noose. Her neighbor Hanifa defends her, shouting that he might kill her. Normat’s friend Sharif arrives and says, “Why make a scene without clarifying anything?” He orders the crowd to disperse. Biidi tries to continue her tirade, but no one pays attention. Anzirat lies unconscious on the ground, and several young women lift her and carry her to her room. Normat wants to follow, but Biidi stops him, saying, “You will live with me; your wife is a prostitute”. Normat reluctantly obeys.

Life Without Her Husband (Anzirat recalls how it all happened) Anzirat remembers being left alone with two children after her husband went to war, spending her days working on the collective farm and doing men’s work, since all the men had gone to the front and only the elderly men, women, and children remained in the village. She remembers how exhausted she was and how she struggled to feed her family. She recalls the day the collective farm took away one of her cows, and how the second died from a snake bite, making her life even harder. At night, she would cry and long for her husband.

Unwanted Kindness Three years of hardship pass. Suddenly, the chairman of the village council, Mirzaqul, begins to help her. Sometimes he brings flour. Anzirat is at first confused but soon realizes that his help seems innocent. He explains that he is simply supporting the family of a front-line soldier. Moreover, he is a distant relative. In the winter, Anzirat receives a letter informing her of her husband’s death.

A Mother’s Helpless Night One day, Anzirat’s daughter suddenly falls ill. She develops a fever and lies with her eyes closed. The house is cold, and Anzirat struggles to find firewood to light the stove. She runs to the neighbors and begs for some, but there are no men left in the village to gather wood. The village healer orders chicken soup; yet chicken is too expensive, and she cannot afford it. All their money has been given to support the front. All night, Anzirat sits beside her daughter and weeps in silence.

An Unexpected Kindness For two days, Anzirat’s daughter has barely opened her eyes. In desperation, Anzirat goes to Mirzaqul to ask for help. He greets her warmly, saying it is his duty to help the family of a front-line soldier. He orders his assistants to bring a chicken and gives it to her. Anzirat is happy and deeply grateful. Mirzaqul asked her to come to stableman Khalil’s house tomorrow to pick up the second chicken.

Visit to Khalil’s House Anzirat runs home, makes soup, and feeds her daughter. The girl soon recovers, and Anzirat thanks God. The next day, she goes to Khalil, the stableman, to get another chicken. Khalil lives alone in a small house, is often away, and is rarely at home.

An Unexpected Temptation When Anzirat arrives at Khalil’s, she is met by Mirzaqul. He gives her the promised chicken and flirts, praising her beauty. Confused but flattered, she is stunned when he suddenly embraces her. She resists, but his strength and persistence leave her no choice but to submit to his lust.

Drifting with the Current Anzirat does not understand how it happened, and she despises herself for it. Yet the awareness that her guilt can never be forgiven opens the way for future encounters. She tries to find excuses: what happened, happened, it was not her fault. She tells herself she did it for her children.

Besides, her husband died in the war. These thoughts calm her somewhat. She is weary of life's burdens, of the constant responsibility for her family. Mirzaqul's support relieves her of this heavy weight, and she begins to drift with the current.

The Return The unexpected return of Normat, long presumed dead (as often happened during the war), turns Anzirat's world upside down. She is at a loss, unsure what to do. Trying to pretend that nothing has happened, she soon realizes that her husband has become a stranger to her and that true happiness will never return. A sense of dread grows within her heart; she feels that something terrible is about to happen.

A Father's Visit One day, while Anzirat is busy sewing, Normat suddenly calls out to her. She feels a jolt of fear, but when she sees her father entering, the fear turns into pain. She longs for his kindness. Unable to hold back, she breaks down and cries for a long time, as if trying to pour out all the thoughts that have tormented her. Her father, however, misunderstands her distress; having lost two sons at the front and his wife soon after, he believes her tears come from sorrow, not guilt. As he prepares to leave, he gently reassures her, "Forget the past; everything will be all right". But she seems to think his words carry a hidden meaning. Overcome with emotion, she interrupts him and quickly rushes to say goodbye.

The Burden of Shame Anzirat justifies herself with cruel thoughts, believing he should be grateful that she stays with him, even though he is a cripple. His constant complaints irritate her, but when he speaks of the war, of remorse and dreams of doing good, shame overwhelms her, her own selfish, petty thoughts now feel base and unforgivable.

Ambition and Opportunism When Mirzaqul hears that Normat has returned from the war, he feels terrified. With the help of his connections, he manages to avoid military service and stays in the village. When he becomes chairman of the village council, he at first tries hard to make a good impression. He knows how to deal with people, especially women. A skilled leader, he motivates others to supply the front with food and presents himself well to his superiors. But soon, he begins using his position for personal gain. He pays particular attention to women whose husbands are fighting at the front.

Mirzaqul's Misjudgment When Mirzaqul learns of Anzirat's husband's death, he begins showing her special kindness. Having achieved his desire in Khalil's house, he believes he has completely conquered her and that she is captivated by him. But he is wrong. No matter how much Anzirat submits to him, she always weeps and curses him afterward. Strangely, this only deepens his attachment to her. Normat's unexpected return shatters everything.

Mirzaqul's Obsession Mirzaqul is jealous of Normat. He cannot understand why such a beautiful woman belongs to a lame man who has lost his former strength and charm. After Normat's return, Mirzaqul no longer sees Anzirat and begins to miss her. He wanders around her house at night. One day, he finally sees her chopping ice to get water. He approaches her and tells her that he misses her and wants to marry her if she leaves her husband, that's what she wanted, isn't it? Anzirat refuses and begs him to leave her alone, pleading with him never to see her again. Then she runs home. Mirzaqul hoarsely shouts after her that he will never let her go.

Before the Front At the end of the war, an investigation begins into those who evade military service. Mirzaqul's friend, who once helped him avoid conscription, is sent to the front. Mirzaqul, too, is forced to volunteer to escape punishment. He hears that Anzirat has been beaten by her husband, has suffered a miscarriage, and is now gravely ill. At first, he is alarmed, but when he realizes she has said nothing, he calms down. His heart fills with a strange tenderness, and he longs to see her one last time, to say goodbye before leaving for the front.

Rumors and Doubt Rumors of Anzirat's infidelity spread throughout the village. Normat withdraws from everyone and spends his days alone in Biidi's house, now empty after their son's death in the war. He can hardly believe what has happened. The pain of his wife's betrayal torments him deeply. Her former playfulness and charm, which once delighted him, now seem like the behavior of a frivolous woman. His friend Sharif visits and tries to lift his spirits, saying, "Maybe it's not true; no one saw anything". A faint hope stirs in Normat's heart that perhaps the rumors are false.

After the Illness After a long illness, Anzirat finally rises from bed and begins to walk again in the spring, as the days grow warmer. She is extremely thin and weak. Her neighbor, Hanifa, cares for her. Rumors reach her father, and he declares that she is no longer his daughter. Anzirat is devastated by her father's rejection. She dreams of her mother and senses something terrible approaching. The children do not understand. Her son, Kholmat, doesn't go to school because of bullying and isolation, as his mother is called a whore. Feeling guilty, Anzirat begs him not to believe the rumors.

Breaking Point Suddenly Kholmat runs into the room, followed by a woman from the village carrying a willow switch. The woman strikes Kholmat with the switch; he begins to cry. Anzirat is furious. How dare she hit her son in front of her? It emerges that the woman's son told Kholmat that his mother is a prostitute, and Kholmat struck him back. Anzirat desperately defends her son, but the woman screams that Anzirat is a real harlot. In an instant Anzirat loses her temper: she seizes an axe and shouts that they should leave her alone, asks whether she is the only one so sinful and whether they are all so innocent, and warns that if the woman does not stop she will hack her to death. The woman hurries away but continues to revile her. Anzirat feels deeply humiliated and cries for a long time.

Rekindled Spirits In the spring, after taking the medications prescribed by the village paramedic, Anzirat begins to recover quickly. Young, mischievous women from the neighborhood come to visit her. They entertain her with jokes, gradually rekindling her love of life.

A Chance Encounter Normat goes hunting in the mountains. He rarely hunts and mostly just strolls. He is accustomed to solitude, but he misses his children terribly. One evening, he stumbles upon a small village. One of the villagers, noticing him and realizing he is lost, invites him into their home and shares a modest dinner with him.

A Tale of Sorrow A man has four small children and appears to be single. He tells Normat his story: while he was at the front, his wife was married off to a wealthy man. Returning in despair, he found his wife exhausted from hard work. The children immediately ran to him, and he took them back. He lives with his wife as if nothing had happened, for the sake of the children. Yet his wife suffers deeply, feels guilty, and soon falls ill and dies. The man feels guilty, believing he should have openly told her that he does not blame her. Normat sees something similar in this story to his own life and decides to return home to live with his family.

A House Heavy with Silence Normat enters Biidi's house and finds her with her second daughter-in-law, who is packing and preparing to leave. Biidi is angry, while the daughter-in-law, in tears, says she waited four years for her husband, but he died, and she doesn't want to waste away in this house. Biidi replies sarcastically that if she has found herself a lover, she should leave before disgracing her. The daughter-in-law bursts into tears. At that moment, the first daughter-in-law enters, exhausted, her clothes smeared with mud and manure. She asks Biidi for advice. The younger daughter-in-law looks at her with irritation. Seeing that Biidi is in a bad mood, the elder daughter-in-law quickly withdraws. Feeling awkward, Normat also wants to leave.

Shattered Pride Biidi stops Normat and asks why he has come. Normat hesitantly replies that he wants to return to his family and asks Biidi to help him reconcile with his wife. Suddenly, Biidi becomes enraged and begins screaming hysterically, "Is he even a man? Does he really miss his unfaithful wife? Has he lost all dignity?" In a fit of fury, she grabs her youngest daughter-in-law by the hair and drags her toward him, shouting that if he wants a woman, he should take her, for she wants a man, too. Normat is stunned and speechless. Biidi keeps mocking him, saying that his wife will continue seeing her lover and that he will be the one guarding them. Deeply offended, Normat storms out in anger.

Spring and Soil Spring has arrived, and the days are growing warmer. Normat goes out into the fields to clear a plot for sowing. The snow is melting, and the earth eagerly soaks it in. The land waits for its master. His heart fills with joy – he will be able to labor on soil untouched by war. He imagines himself sweating in the sun, joyfully continuing to plow. He plans to buy an ox for the work. After visiting his friends among the horsemen, he returns humming an incomprehensible melody, his love for life and longing for it fully returning.

Shattered hopes Normat returns home and is surprised to find Biidi there. She tells him that his wife's lover has come to see her, and if he doesn't believe her, he will see it with his own eyes. With deep pain, Normat feels his recent dreams and hopes crumble. He grabs her by the throat and threatens to kill her if she is lying. Blinded by rage, he runs toward Anzirat. Later, realizing the danger, Biidi rushes after him in fear, but she trips over a rock, hits her head, and loses consciousness.

A Farewell of Forgiveness Anzirat puts the children to bed and moves to close the open door, but freezes – Mirzaqul is standing on the threshold. He says he has come to say goodbye, as he is leaving for war. Anzirat asks him to leave, but he continues, insisting that she is not like other women. He has known many women, whom he considered mere entertainment, but when he met her, he truly fell in love. He kneels and begs her to forgive him. For Anzirat, who had long been despised and insulted, these are the first warm words she has ever heard. She begins to cry and tells him she forgives him, that she does not blame him, she only asks him to go.

The Last Judgment Normat bursts in with a rifle and instantly understands the betrayal. Consumed by hatred, he accuses Mirzaqul of sending men to war to exploit their wives, then strikes him. Turning on Anzirat, he condemns her deceit. A war vision overwhelms him; shouting "Fascists!" he shoots them both dead.

Blood on the Earth The sound of a gunshot brings Biidi back to her senses. She rushes to Normat's house and, upon arriving, sees Anzirat and Mirzaqul lying in pools of blood, while the children, Kholmat and Khojar, cry and cling to each other. She begins screaming, "Oh, people! Normat has shot his wife!" Three days later, the police arrive at the scene. They find Normat's body beneath the rocks at the foot of the mountain: his forehead and arms are crushed, and his body has been torn apart by wolves.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

NORMAT

Normat is a tragic figure shaped by the devastating consequences of war. His character reflects both his individual traits and the influence of deeply ingrained social norms to which he is subject. He embodies the qualities of a traditional hero; he is brave and resilient on the battlefield, yet he is unable to withstand the trials that await him in peacetime.

Kind-hearted Normat is tormented by his conscience over the people he killed during the war and resolves never to take a life again. When a deserter is caught, he refuses to shoot him, longing instead for peace and renewal. He dreams of cultivating wheat and giving the harvest away freely. Yet, despite his deep humanity, he is consumed by jealousy and pain over his wife's infidelity. Beneath this anger, however, lies a yearning for forgiveness and reconciliation. When he sees his little daughter asking a neighbor for yogurt, his heart fills with compassion and sorrow, a quiet reflection of the gentleness that endures beneath his suffering.

Hardworking Normat loves to work. Before the war, he earned a good living as a horseman, competing in local contests. After the war, he dreams of returning to the fields and living a peaceful life. He longs for the days of physical labor, imagining himself sweating in the fields and taking joy in his work. For him, work is not a burden but a source of meaning and happiness.

Peace-loving Normat longs for a quiet and honest life after years of brutal war. When he sees his native land—the mountains, trees, spring, and large rocks familiar from childhood—he rejoices, feeling that there is no war here, that this peaceful land truly belongs to him. He thinks, "I would not trade my peaceful life for anything. I will carry in my arms my wife and those who awaited my return."

Impulsive Although Normat is a man of firm moral principles, his emotions frequently overpower his sense of reason. Upon learning from Biidi that his wife is pregnant by another man, he reacts with uncontrollable fury, brutally beating her with the intent to kill. This act starkly contrasts with the earlier Normat, who had been tormented by guilt over the enemies he killed during the war. Later, when he returns home filled with a renewed desire for peaceful labor and creation, the news of his wife's lover's visit once again provokes an intense, irrational rage that culminates in tragedy.

ANZIRAT

Anzirat is a beautiful young woman who becomes a victim of circumstances she cannot control. Within her, two opposing forces, the call of natural desire and the weight of social convention, are locked in continual struggle. Ultimately, she bears the suffering caused by both.

Romantic Anzirat is a romantic by nature. Before marriage, she dreamed of a prince on a white horse, and when Normat married her, it felt as if that dream had come true. But the war thrust her into a life of hardship and constant struggle for survival, which she finds deeply unfair. Aware of her beauty, she believes she deserves love and cannot imagine a life without it. Therefore, she accepts Mirzaqul's passion, though not without suffering and remorse. Paradoxically, Mirzaqul ultimately comes to love her sincerely.

Honest Despite her betrayal, Anzirat remains honest at heart. She constantly regrets her actions and feels guilty toward her husband and children. Although she sometimes tries to justify herself, her sense of honesty prevents her from deceiving others or acting unjustly. In her relationship with Mirzaqul, she neither expects gifts nor pretends to love him.

Conflicted Full of contradictions, Anzirat is easily influenced, and her decisions often change depending on the circumstances. At times, she harshly judges her husband to justify her actions, seeing him as a one-legged cripple who should be grateful for her presence. But when she encounters Normat's sincerity toward her and the children, her heart is filled with confusion and humility. When she first became involved with Mirzaqul, she despised both him and herself, yet continued to accept him.

BIIDI MOMO

Biidi momo is an elderly woman, a staunch guardian of the nation's centuries-old moral and ethical foundations. She unwittingly becomes a key figure in the Normat family's tragedy, embodying the conflict between unshakable traditions and human compassion. Her actions, dictated more by tradition than by personal feelings, demonstrate the harsh consequences of strict adherence to social norms, demonstrating how traditions can both shape and destroy lives.

Strong Biidi is a resilient woman. Widowed at a very young age with two children, she raised them alone. She is unafraid of hardships and always strives to survive. She takes pride in never asking for help or begging. During the harsh and dangerous times of the civil war, she managed her household calmly and was not afraid to venture into the mountains to collect firewood, even in areas where skirmishes were frequent. When she learned of the deaths of her two sons, she found the strength to suppress her grief, hiding the deep pain of her loss from other.

Hardworking Biidi values work and believes that anything can be achieved through effort. Tireless and diligent, she handles every task as well as any man, enabling her to endure the most difficult times, including hunger and food shortages. People often saw her busy with some task alongside her sons, wearing her late husband's robe tightly tied at the waist. Even after the loss of her sons, and despite her old age, this quality has never left her.

Domineering Since Tersota village was founded relatively recently, it was located close to the founders. Biidi was one of the village elders and therefore considered herself entitled to participate in all village projects. If she was not warned, she would get angry. Many disliked her harsh tongue and reproaches, but everyone obeyed her out of fear and because she often solved problems so effectively.

Conformist Biidi strictly adheres to the moral traditions of her ancestors, who highly valued concepts such as fidelity, virtue, masculine pride, and patience. Yet in her, these principles often devolve into cruelty and violence, erasing her humanity. At the same time, she appears to take out her bitterness, born of misfortune, a harsh fate, and a youth filled with hardship, on others. Her relentless insistence that Normat punish his wife stems from her commitment to tradition, while simultaneously concealing the pain of her own subjugation to its rigid constraint.

THEMES

Society

War is the central theme of the story, leaving a deep mark on the lives of all the characters. Among them are Normat, who returned from the war crippled both physically and mentally; Anzirat, punished and isolated by society for the sin forced upon her by the harsh conditions of war; Biidi momo, whose loss of two sons has hardened her and turned her bitter toward the world; and Mirzaqul, who exploits the hardships of the time to satisfy his own desires. In the author's interpretation, war becomes a severe test that the characters are unable to withstand. He proceeds from the premise that circumstances shape people's characters, and that under different conditions they would behave differently. The inhumane nature of war creates conditions in which human weaknesses and vices are laid bare.

Illustrative Moment: Anzirat feels that the war has broken her husband; he has become grumpy and irritable, constantly talking about the war, whether necessary or not. But when he says, "Do you know what war is? It's what prevents people from earning an honest living, from plowing the land and sowing. It takes away everything that belongs to us," and when he dreams of growing grain and giving it away to everyone for free, she feels ashamed of her own irritation. She secretly cries and tells herself, "The war is to blame for everything. If there hadn't been a war, I would have been a faithful wife and would always be by my husband's side, sharing his joys". In that moment, she sees him not as a grumbler, but as a victim of circumstances beyond his control, and her own remorse reveals how deeply war affects even those who remain at home, sometimes tearing families apart from within.

Gender In the novel, women are expected to strictly follow traditional norms regarding their place in society. First, they must obey the will of their father, and later, that of their husband. A woman who loses her husband in the war is forbidden even to dream of remarriage; such a desire is considered shameful. Infidelity is met with severe punishment. No one condemns a husband for brutally beating his wife; instead, she is isolated, blamed, and humiliated.

Illustrative Moment: Anzirat is gravely ill after being beaten by her husband, and her neighbor, Hanifa, cares for her. The news that her father has disowned her has struck her deeply, worsening her condition. She has lost a great deal of weight, her eyes are sunken, her body has taken on a bluish hue, and she is barely recognizable. Young women from the village come to visit, carefully avoiding any mention of Normat. One day, a young woman named Sora arrives. Seeing how much Anzirat has changed, she runs out of the house, **crying and cursing** the war that has brought them so much suffering. In despair, she calls out to God, "Oh God, why are you punishing us women?" This episode illustrates the deeply ingrained attitude toward women, shaped by the centuries-old traditions that still dominated the society to which the protagonist belonged.

RELATIONSHIP

Betrayal The author examines the topic of marital infidelity from two perspectives: that of age-old beliefs and that of human weakness and vulnerability shaped by circumstances. This is conveyed through the characters of Anzirat and Biidi. Anzirat understands the gravity of her actions, but she is unable to control her physical desires. Biidi, who strictly adheres to traditional notions of fidelity, harshly condemns her and demands punishment. When Normat's humanity awakens, he strives to forgive the betrayal, but the social and moral norms ingrained in his subconscious, which deem infidelity unforgivable, prevail, leading to tragedy.

Illustrative Moment: Normat goes to Biidi and tells her that he wants to return to his wife. He pities the children: if his wife has lost her way, God knows and will judge her, but the children are not to blame. Biidi suddenly becomes enraged: "How can you return to that harlot? Are you even a man?" Normat insists that he will return regardless. Then Biidi shouts: "Yes, go to her! She'll bring a lover into your home, and you'll stand guard for them! If your father were alive, he would throw himself off the mountain in shame because of you!" Deeply offended, Normat leaves, shaking with fury. Biidi shouts after him: "May the spirits of your ancestors curse you!" This scene shows how deeply internalized norms of honor, fidelity, and patriarchal pride shape Biidi's worldview, leaving no room for compassion or forgiveness.

Sexuality In the novella, sexuality is a central theme, as the main conflict revolves around female infidelity. During wartime, when women are particularly vulnerable, they often become targets of sexual exploitation. Mirzaqul, having become the village elder, uses his authority to pursue his desires, and Anzirat, who had already drawn his attention before the war, becomes vulnerable to him, giving him access without her genuine consent. The society depicted in the novel views sexuality through the lens of prohibition and shame, especially when it involves infidelity. Sexuality is often represented in village discourse as crude and humiliating, reflecting social hierarchies, language ideologies, and the dominant moral norms that govern the community.

Illustrative Moment: When Anzirat enters the house, she sees Mirzaqul there. He smiles and says he took a nap while waiting for Khalil. Mirzaqul wants to light the stove, and Anzirat, grateful for his help, begins to do it herself. He hands her the chicken. As they talk, he asks about her life. Anzirat replies that she is managing somehow. Mirzaqul tells her that with her beauty, she could attract kings. Embarrassed yet flattered, Anzirat says that no one needs her beauty. Mirzaqul insists that there are people who value it, that he is captivated by her, and he suddenly embraces her. Anzirat is taken aback. She resists and scolds him, but in the end, she yields to his will. This scene demonstrates the vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society, where beauty becomes both a tool of attraction and a means of manipulation.

PSYCHOLOGY

Guilt In the novella, the author explores the psychology of a woman consumed by guilt. After her betrayal, Anzirat falls into deep despair, haunted by persistent fear. Even the most innocuous words of those around her feel like accusations. She attempts to justify herself, searching for arguments in her defense, yet guilt continually dominates. She lives under a constant sense of impending danger, uncertain how to avert it.

Illustrative Moment: After her husband's return, Anzirat feels as if she is treading on sharp edges, unable to find steady ground. Tormented by memories of her own betrayal, she wishes the present would fade like a dream so she could awaken again as an honest and faithful wife, in another place and among strangers. She considers leaving, but fears that explaining herself to Normat will raise questions that expose her secret. She believes the villagers know about her affair with Mirzaqul; she interprets their silence as hidden mockery, and even ordinary words and gestures feel like veiled accusations. She withdraws into herself, becoming increasingly resentful of those around her. At times, the joy of her husband and children briefly draws her in, but she quickly grows suspicious, imagining that their calm, along with Normat's silence, is merely the deceptive stillness before an imminent catastrophe. This description reveals the heroine's inner experiences associated with violating the moral rules of her community, showing how deeply her guilt, fear, and self-doubt are shaped by the strict social norms that surround her.

FLAWS

Anger Normat's anger is more than just a personal reaction; it is deeply shaped by his wartime experiences, physical suffering, and cumulative emotional exhaustion. Returning from the front wounded and psychologically scarred, he struggles to reintegrate into civilian life. His injury leaves him powerless and with low self-esteem, and this wounded masculinity heightens his sensitivity to social cues, particularly changes in his wife's attitude. At first, his anger manifests itself in subdued or indirect ways, for example, when Anzirat recoils from his festering leg wounds, he experiences an epileptic-like reaction, and for a time, he refuses to speak to her out of resentment. However, upon learning of his wife's infidelity, long-suppressed pain and unresolved trauma erupt with destructive force, escalating his emotional struggle into open aggression.

Illustrative Moment: Normat returns home and is met with an unexpected sight: Biidi momo is there. Dressed in a long black *chapan* (traditional robe) with her hair loose, she is praying. Normat is at a loss. Biidi tells him that his wife's lover has come to see her. She admits she has known about it all along, she was sure he would come, watched patiently, and finally caught them. "You're lying!" Normat growls. "See for yourself", she smirks. "Maybe they've already slept together. Do you know who it is? I won't tell you, you'll see for yourself". Normat's heart fills with unbearable pain; he feels his hopes and recent dreams crumble. He grabs Biidi by the throat and threatens to kill her if she is lying. Suddenly, a sharp pain shoots through his head. Consumed with rage, he rushes toward Anzirat. Behind him, Biidi screams, "Go on, kill them! And then kill me!" In this episode, the narrative reveals the profound and often devastating psychological impact

of touching a person's deepest emotions, illustrating how the resulting rage can distort personal relationships and ultimately lead to tragedy.

Revenge In the novella *People of War*, revenge emerges as a central and tragic theme, closely linked to personal betrayal and the psychological trauma of conflict. Normat's revenge is driven both by his wife Anzirat's infidelity and by her betrayal at the hands of Mirzaqul, who starkly contrasts with the idealistic Normat. The trauma of war intensifies his sense of injustice, rendering his reaction violent and uncontrollable. Initially, he clings to a glimmer of hope that the betrayal might be untrue, accompanied by compassion for his children and his wife, who has lost her way. However, once he comprehends the full extent of the betrayal, which contradicts the purity of his aspirations, his anger erupts into aggressive action, culminating in the murder of Anzirat and Mirzaqul.

Illustrative Moment: The door swings open, and Normat bursts in, a rifle in hand. He sees Anzirat pressed against the wall and Mirzaqul standing beside her, dazed. Filled with hatred, he screams at Mirzaqul: "You separated me from my children! That's why you sent us to war while you stayed behind to use our wives for your lust!" He strikes him with his rifle. Then he turns to Anzirat and reproaches her in a savage voice: "Did you trade me for this scoundrel? And continue to lie to me?" Suddenly, a bloody vision of war flashes before his eyes. In a rage, he screams, "Fascists!" and fires, first at Mirzaqul, then at Anzirat, killing them both. This act of revenge reflects not only personal betrayal but also the profound moral and emotional upheaval wrought by the war.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who is the main culprit behind the protagonists' tragedy?
2. How would you rate Biidi's character? Does she deserve respect or condemnation?
3. Is Anzirat really as frivolous as most around her believe?
4. What do you think of Normat's frequently changing attitude toward his wife's infidelity?
5. Do circumstances influence people's behavior, or is it more related to individual characteristics?