

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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YEARS OF BLOODSHED / KANDUU JYLDAR (1935)

Aaly Tokombaev (1904-1988)

Reference: Tokombaev, A. (1991). *Kanduu jyldar*. Uchkun.

OVERVIEW

Author

Aaly Tokombaev was born in 1904 in Kaiyngdy village, Kemin district. In 1922, he was admitted to the Soviet Party School in Tashkent, and from 1923 to 1927 he studied at the Central Asian Communist University named after V. I. Lenin.

In 1927, he began working as head of the district department of public education in the Chuy District, an early Soviet administrative unit in present-day Kyrgyzstan.

From 1927 to 1929, he served as editor of the newspaper Kyzyl Kyrgyzstan. Between 1930 and 1931, he worked in Moscow at the Central Publishing House as editor of the Kyrgyz section.

From 1931 onward, he became chief editor of Kyrgyzmambas. Between 1934 and 1949, he chaired the Board of the Writers' Union of Kyrgyzstan, while also serving as editor-in-chief of the journal Soviet Kyrgyzstan and as director of the Institute of Language, Literature, and History of the Kyrgyz branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In 1955–1956, he was editor-in-chief of the satirical journal Chalkan. From 1962 to 1978, Tokombaev contributed to the nine-volume Concise Literary Encyclopedia on Kyrgyz literature.

During the Stalinist purges, he was falsely accused of nationalism, membership in a “Social-Turan Party,” and espionage for Japan. He was imprisoned from November 1937 to June 1939, and all his previously published works were destroyed. He was released on June 4, 1939.

In 1988, after his death, Tokombaev's works were officially rehabilitated. In 2007, a national literary prize named after him was established to honor achievements in prose, drama, poetry, and journalism.

His poem “*The Time of October's Arrival*” was published in the first issue of the first Kyrgyzstani newspaper Erkin-Too on November 7, 1924. His first poetry collection, *About Lenin*, was published in Tashkent in 1927 and later revised and reissued as *Lenin* in 1936.

Tokombaev's works were widely translated into Russian and other languages, including Ukrainian, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, and Lithuanian, and some were published abroad. He also translated works by Samuel Marshak, Abai Kunanbayev, and Jambul Jabayev into Kyrgyz.

He was one of the authors of the Kyrgyz SSR State Anthem and contributed to Kyrgyz translations of the USSR anthem and *The Internationale*. His novel *Before Dawn (Tang aldynda)* received the Toktogul State Prize of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1967. He was a member of the USSR Writers' Union since 1934, Tokombaev was awarded the title of People's Poet of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1945.

Novel

Years of Bloodshed (Kanduu Jyldar) is the first part of A. Tokombaev's historical verse novel *The Coming Dawn (Tang Aldynda)*. The first part of the novel, *Years of Bloodshed*, was published in 1935 and reissued in 1940. The second part appeared in 1947. Tokombaev continued to work on the novel for many years, revising its content, expanding its historical material, and incorporating the results of further research. A substantially revised version was published in 1962.

Background

The novel holds an important place in the history of Kyrgyz literature and is considered one of the major early works to portray the 1916 uprising in verse. Its historical and literary significance was further recognized in 1967, when Tokombaev received the Toktogul State Prize of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The novel's reception, however, was shaped by the political climate of the Soviet era. Although it had gained considerable popularity, the work also brought serious political consequences for its author.

Tokombaev was arrested and accused of "nationalism" in connection with the novel.

Tokombaev's many years of work on the novel demonstrate his careful attention to historical detail and his commitment to continually refining the text. In this sense, *Years of Bloodshed* is not only a literary portrayal of the events of 1916 but also an important work in the development of historical writing in Kyrgyz literature.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Alymkul: A brave poet and fighter who supports his people and takes an active part in the uprising.

The Narrator: The author himself, who recounts the events and occasionally expresses his views.

Er Junush: Alymkul's close friend who supports the people during the uprising and migration.

Kanat Han: A self-serving leader who puts his own interests above those of his people.

Pristav (Governor): A ruthless Tsarist official who represents the colonial administration.

Bugay Molur: A Dungan leader who is the first to oppose the Tsarist military recruitment order.

Cholponkul: A Solto leader who cooperates with the Tsarist authorities.

Ashym: A popular leader who stands with the people during the uprising.

Jantay: A Solto leader portrayed as a negative character.

Kydyr: A leader who remains on the side of the people.

Kumushay: A legendary poor woman associated with the first well in Kochkor.

SYNOPSIS

The novel portrays the growing tensions in Turkestan under Tsarist Russian rule following the decision to conscript local young men into the army. Although some groups initially resist the order, local officials loyal to the Tsarist administration actively assist in enforcing it. The Dungan leader Bugay Molur refuses to comply and is promptly punished and imprisoned.

The policy soon reaches the Kyrgyz communities. Local officials compile lists of young men for military service, with poor families bearing much of the burden. Their sons are selected for conscription, while wealthier families manage to keep their own children out of the army. This unequal treatment fuels growing resentment among the population and contributes to the unrest that eventually erupts into an uprising.

At first, Kyrgyz fighters achieve several victories against the authorities. Their resistance, however, cannot withstand the better-equipped regular troops sent to suppress the rebellion. Once the uprising is defeated, fighters and civilians alike are forced to abandon their homes and flee toward China, taking only what they can carry.

The ensuing flight becomes a devastating ordeal. Pursuing Tsarist troops fire on the fleeing population, killing large numbers of people and leaving their bodies scattered across a stretch of nearly forty kilometers. Amid the violence and chaos, the novel's protagonists Alymkul and Er Junush distinguish themselves through their courage and save the lives of many others. The exodus to China thus becomes one of the most tragic episodes in the novel's portrayal of the Kyrgyz people's experience.

SCENES

Uprising

The Governor's Order The governor entered the hall, where the local officials and village elders were waiting in silence. Through an interpreter, he announced that lists of young men had to be prepared for the Tsarist army. No one answered immediately. The men looked at one another, knowing what the order meant for their families. Their sons and brothers could soon be taken away. The governor waited impatiently. His voice was cold and commanding, leaving no doubt that he expected obedience. Fear settled over the room as the officials realized that refusal could have serious consequences.

Bular Moguy's Refusal Bular Moguy, the Dungan leader, finally stood up. He looked directly at the governor and refused to prepare a list. His voice remained firm. The Dungans had once fled China to escape oppression, he said, but that did not mean they would now surrender their freedom to the Russians. He demanded that his people be left in peace. The governor's expression changed immediately. His face tightened with anger as Bular Moguy continued to speak. The room fell silent. Everyone understood that the Dungan leader had openly challenged the authority of the governor.

The Arrest The governor could no longer contain his anger. He ordered his men to arrest Bular Moguy and send him to Almaty. Soldiers moved toward him, but Bular Moguy did not resist. He stood calmly as they took him away. The other leaders watched without speaking. His arrest sent a clear warning to anyone who might consider refusing the order. The governor returned to his seat and demanded the lists once again. This time, the officials remained silent. One by one, they began to comply, afraid that they might suffer the same fate as Bular Moguy.

Cholponkul Hands Over the List Cholponkul stepped forward with a list in his hands and placed it before the governor. The names were those of men between eighteen and forty-five who were to be taken into the Tsarist army. Other local leaders soon followed and presented their own lists. The governor looked over the names with satisfaction. Outside the hall, however, families were waiting anxiously. Each name represented someone's son, brother, or husband. For poor families, losing a young man meant losing one of the main sources of labor and support. Fear spread quietly from one household to another.

Fear in the Villages The local officials began pressuring families to surrender their young men. Those who protested risked arrest or exile. Mothers held their sons close, while fathers tried to conceal their anger. Rumors spread that anyone refusing the order would be punished. Instead of protecting their communities, some local leaders cooperated with the Tsarist authorities. Their actions deepened the people's resentment. The villagers felt increasingly trapped. They were expected to obey the authorities, pay heavy taxes, and surrender their sons without question. What had begun as an official order was becoming a source of widespread fear.

The Burden Falls on the Poor The unequal treatment of rich and poor became impossible to ignore. Wealthy families could often protect their sons by offering money, livestock, or other property. Poor families had no such option. They were forced to surrender the young men on whom their households depended. Mothers watched wealthy neighbors keep their children at home while their own sons were taken away. Anger grew stronger with each passing day. The difference between those who could protect themselves and those who could not became a painful reality. The people were beginning to realize that the burden was falling overwhelmingly on them.

The Loss of Land The people were losing more than their sons. Their most fertile fields and valuable irrigation lands were also being taken away. Families who had worked the same land for generations suddenly found themselves without control over it. Losing the land meant losing their livelihood. Yet there was little protection against those who had the authority and power to take it. The wealthy stood close to the administration, while ordinary villagers remained vulnerable. As their land, labor, and possessions disappeared, frustration turned into desperation. The people began to feel that their entire way of life was being pushed aside.

Around the Fire At night, villagers gathered around the fire and spoke quietly about what was happening. Someone would begin a sorrowful song, and the others would listen. Alymkul's voice often rose above the silence. His songs spoke of unity and resistance. He compared the people to a lake: calm when still, but capable of becoming a powerful force when its waters rise. His words gave the listeners courage. For a moment, their fear seemed to disappear. They began to believe that if they stood together, those who oppressed them could no longer control them so easily.

The Taxes The demands placed upon the people continued to grow. Taxes took away much of what families managed to produce. They were required to give money, furs, felt socks, and other goods, while each yurt—the traditional portable dwelling of the Kyrgyz—also carried its own tax burden. For poor families,

these demands were extremely difficult to bear. The villagers saw their land being taken, their sons being demanded, and their possessions being collected. Each new obligation left them with less. The pressure became unbearable, and resentment toward the authorities continued to spread throughout the countryside.

A Time of Hardship The people felt that they were living through increasingly difficult times. Complaints were dangerous because those with power could silence anyone who spoke too openly. Land could be taken, money could disappear, and there was little chance of receiving justice. Wealthy local figures knew how to protect themselves, while ordinary villagers remained exposed. Men spoke bitterly in the evenings, women worried about their children, and young people listened carefully. The atmosphere was changing. Fear was still present, but beneath it something stronger was beginning to grow. The people were becoming increasingly unwilling to accept their situation.

Preparing the Weapons The villagers began repairing anything that could be used in a fight. Sickles, axes, swords, and scythes were taken to craftsmen to be sharpened and repaired. Wooden poles were fitted with spears, while blacksmiths worked deep in the forests beneath the Tien Shan mountains. Young men stood beside the furnaces, hammering heated iron as sparks filled the darkness. No one needed to explain why the weapons were being prepared. The people were beginning to expect violence. They were no longer simply waiting for the next order from the authorities. They were quietly preparing themselves for resistance.

The Investigations The authorities began targeting those who refused to obey. Local leaders who tried to unite the people were accused of stealing horses. The accusations were used as a pretext for opening investigations and arresting those who challenged the administration. Some were threatened with imprisonment or exile to Siberia. The people understood that the authorities wanted to remove anyone capable of organizing resistance. At the same time, young Kyrgyz men began taking official seals from local administrators and preventing them from holding meetings. The confrontation was becoming more direct, and the possibility of an uprising was growing.

The Uprising Resistance soon spread beyond individual villages. News arrived from different parts of Turkestan that people were rising against Tsarist rule. Reports came from Samarkand and Almaty, while Merke and Chaldybar were surrounded by Kazakh and Kyrgyz fighters. Rumors also spread that Tashkent had fallen into rebel hands. The news travelled quickly through the communities. Some wealthy figures tried to join the people in order to protect their reputation, while others chose to flee. The growing rebellion gave ordinary people the courage to believe that they were part of something much larger than their own villages.

Cholponkul and Jantay Not all local leaders supported the people. Cholponkul and Jantay, leaders of the Solto tribal group, accepted the Tsar's order and agreed to provide young men for military service. Their decision angered many villagers. People expected their leaders to defend their communities, not assist the authorities in taking away their sons. They therefore came to be portrayed as figures who placed their own interests above those of the people. Their position contrasted sharply with that of Kydyr, who remained close to the community, and Kanat Khan, whom the people would later choose as one of their leaders.

Kydyr and Kanat Khan Kydyr remained among the people and listened to their concerns. Kanat Khan also became increasingly important as the situation deteriorated. Young men gathered around him and looked to him for leadership. When resistance finally erupted, the people themselves chose Kanat Khan to lead them. Fighters began preparing for battle. Rifles, swords, and spears were gathered, and the strongest horses were selected. Small groups were formed and sent to different areas. There was fear everywhere, but there was also determination. The young men knew that the coming struggle would be dangerous, yet many were ready to fight.

The Fighters Gather The young fighters prepared as best they could. They collected rifles, swords, and spears and selected their strongest horses. They organized themselves into groups and waited for the fighting to begin. Their courage was strong, but their weapons were limited. Some Russian settlers joined the Tsarist forces, while some Kyrgyz changed sides. Ammunition was also scarce. The government troops

possessed modern weapons and greater military resources. As the fighting intensified, this difference became increasingly important. The Kyrgyz fighters continued to resist, but they were facing an enemy with far greater military strength.

Kanat Khan's Words Before the battles, Kanat Khan spoke about the ancestors who had lived before them. He remembered the ancient generations and emphasized their shared heritage. He dreamed of the Kyrgyz becoming known throughout Turkestan as a courageous people. He also spoke of the Ottoman Turks and the connections he believed united the Turkic peoples. Religion and education were important to him. He wanted his people to become educated while preserving their faith and traditions. His words encouraged the young fighters. For them, the struggle was not simply about the battle before them. It was also about the future of their people.

The Battle The fighting soon became fierce. Kyrgyz fighters faced the Tsarist troops at close range, while gunfire filled the valleys and mountains. Alymkul and Junush fought at the front, refusing to stay behind the others. Horses panicked, men shouted, and the sound of weapons echoed across the battlefield. The rebels fought with determination, but the government forces had more soldiers and better weapons. Additional troops arrived from other regions, gradually changing the course of the fighting. The Kyrgyz fighters were forced to retreat. Their courage remained strong, but victory was becoming increasingly difficult.

The Prisoners Many rebels were eventually captured. In the mountains, 517 fighters were taken prisoner and brought to a detention center in Aksu. There they were treated with extreme cruelty. Russian settlers insulted and beat the prisoners, showing them little mercy. Men who had fought for their communities were now helpless behind locked doors. Their wounds and exhaustion were ignored. Even after the fighting had ended, violence continued. The prisoners had lost their freedom, but they had not escaped the suffering that had followed the uprising. Their captivity became another painful chapter in the tragedy unfolding around them.

The Order to Burn As the uprising spread, the Tsarist authorities responded with increasing brutality. Governor Folbaum ordered his troops to destroy the gathered Kyrgyz and burn their villages. Soldiers moved through the countryside while families desperately searched for places of safety. The conflict had spread far beyond isolated communities. Villages were threatened, homes were destroyed, and people were forced to abandon everything they had known. The violence pushed the population toward a desperate decision. Remaining in their homes was becoming increasingly dangerous, and the road toward China began to appear as their only possible means of survival.

The Captured Weapons In the Issyk-Kul region, the rebels managed to capture 170 rifles and nearly forty thousand rounds of ammunition. The weapons were distributed among different groups of fighters. For a short time, this gave the resistance greater strength. Yet the captured weapons also caused disagreements. Wealthy men and village leaders wanted to take some of them for themselves, while several fighters refused to surrender their arms. They believed the weapons should remain with those who were actually fighting. The dispute revealed the tensions within the community at a moment when unity was more important than ever.

Kanat Khan's Defeat The Tsarist forces continued their advance with fresh troops and modern weapons. The rebels were exhausted, short of ammunition, and increasingly isolated. Some men changed sides, while others were forced to withdraw. Kanat Khan tried to hold his fighters together, but the situation became impossible. Their resistance gradually collapsed. The fighters retreated through the valleys and mountains, unable to withstand the larger and better-equipped army. Eventually, Kanat Khan was captured. The man chosen by the people to lead them now found himself in the hands of the authorities, while those who had followed him faced an uncertain future.

Migration

The Exodus Begins After the uprising was defeated, the Kyrgyz people began their desperate exodus toward China. Families gathered whatever they could carry: animals, food, clothing, and a few household possessions. There was little time to prepare. Mothers held their children close, while elderly people struggled to keep pace with the moving crowds. Behind them were their homes, fields, and villages; ahead lay

an uncertain future. They were not leaving because they wanted to. They were being driven from their homeland by violence and fear. The long tragedy of Urkun had begun.

The Great Exodus The exodus became a long and painful journey through the mountains. The crowds passed through Talaa-Bulak, Buchuk, and Ortok-Too on their way toward China. Families became separated in the confusion. Animals panicked and disappeared, while children cried from hunger and exhaustion. Mothers tried desperately to protect them. Some people carried bundles on their backs, while others led their animals by ropes. The roads were filled with frightened families moving together. Nobody knew what awaited them across the border. They could only continue forward, hoping that they would survive the journey.

Kumushay's Grief Among the people on the road were elderly men and women, mothers with children, and families who had already lost relatives. Kumushay witnessed the suffering around her and wept. People searched desperately for loved ones who had disappeared in the confusion. Mothers cried for their children, while children called for their parents. Families were being torn apart as the great migration continued. Yet there was no time to stop and mourn. The survivors had to keep moving. Every step carried them farther from their homes and deeper into an uncertain future.

The Karakol Mountains In the mountains near Karakol, the refugees came under attack. In Pokrovka village, around eight hundred Kyrgyz yurts were burned. Smoke rose above the settlements as people tried to escape. Among those moving through the mountains was a group of thirty fighters led by Alymkul and Junush. The refugees were exhausted and frightened. Many ordinary people had no firearms and carried only spears or swords. The Tsarist soldiers, however, were armed with automatic rifles. When the troops approached, gunfire suddenly filled the mountains, and the frightened crowd scattered in every direction.

Alymkul and Junush Alymkul and Junush turned toward the soldiers instead of running. Their small group of fighters opened fire and tried to hold the troops back. Around them, families struggled to escape through the mountains. Alymkul remained calm even in the midst of chaos. Junush fought beside him and encouraged the frightened men. Together, they helped create a chance for others to survive. The fighting was intense. Gunfire, shouting, and the cries of terrified families filled the air. While the refugees continued their journey, Alymkul and Junush remained behind with their fighters, facing the advancing troops.

The Killing Ground The fighting continued for almost twenty-four hours. From Karabatkak to Santash, including the Tup region, bodies were scattered across nearly forty kilometers of land. The scale of the destruction was overwhelming. Children were left without parents, and women were left widowed. The survivors could hardly recognize the places they had passed through. The dead remained where they had fallen, while wolves and birds gathered around the bodies. The landscape itself seemed transformed by the violence. Yet those who survived could not remain there. They had to continue the journey toward China.

Across Ak-Oguz At last, the exhausted refugees reached the Ak-Oguz Pass. Their clothes were torn, their animals were weakened, and many families had lost someone along the way. They had left behind their homes, fields, possessions, and the lives they once knew. Slowly, the long line of people crossed the mountains and entered Chinese territory. There was little sense of victory. Behind them lay a homeland marked by violence, death, and loss. Ahead was an uncertain future. The survivors continued forward in silence, carrying with them the memories of the tragedy they had endured.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Alymkul

Alymkul is one of the most vivid characters. He is more than a warrior fighting against the Tsarist forces; he is also a poet, singer, friend, and a man deeply connected to his people. His character is revealed through both his words and his actions. Around the fire, people listen to his sorrowful songs, while on the battlefield he stands among the fighters facing the enemy. Later, during the difficult journey toward China, he fights to protect those fleeing from their homeland. These different sides of his personality make him a

complex and human figure. Alymkul can be understood through four qualities: courageous, compassionate, resilient, and cheerful.

Courageous Alymkul's courage is most clearly revealed in the scenes of direct fighting with the Tsarist troops. He does not remain behind the other fighters or try to protect himself from danger. Instead, he takes his place in the front ranks and fights alongside Junush. Even when the fighting becomes increasingly violent, Alymkul continues to face the enemy. After the uprising collapses, his courage is shown once again during the migration toward China. Alymkul and Junush lead a group of thirty fighters through the mountains while the Tsarist soldiers pursue the fleeing population. He knows that they are heavily outnumbered and poorly equipped, yet he continues to fight. His courage is therefore expressed through action, especially when the lives of others are at risk.

Compassionate Alymkul is compassionate because he is deeply affected by the suffering of ordinary people. This quality appears particularly clearly in the scenes around the fire, where people gather to listen to his songs. His songs speak about the people's suffering and encourage them to remain united. He gives voice to feelings that many people are unable to express themselves. His compassion is also evident during the migration to China. While families are struggling to escape, Alymkul does not think only about his own survival. Together with Junush and the other fighters, he tries to protect the fleeing people from the pursuing Tsarist troops. His concern for others therefore goes beyond words. He turns his sympathy into action and risks his own life for people who need protection.

Resilient Alymkul's resilience becomes particularly striking after the violent battles. Many young fighters are killed or wounded, and the men around him are physically and emotionally exhausted. Yet Alymkul manages to remain standing and continues to encourage those around him. One scene is especially revealing: after three young fighters die from their wounds, the narrator describes Alymkul as remaining cheerful and even laughing, despite the "hellfire" burning inside him. His reaction does not suggest that he feels no grief. Rather, it shows his ability to carry his suffering without allowing it to destroy his strength. He understands that giving in to despair would affect the people around him as well. His resilience allows him to continue fighting and supporting others even when the circumstances seem hopeless.

Cheerful Alymkul's cheerful nature is striking because it exists alongside so much suffering. Even during the darkest moments, he can smile, laugh, and maintain a sense of liveliness. The scene following the deaths of three young fighters demonstrates this particularly well. Although the men have just experienced loss and the atmosphere is filled with pain, Alymkul remains cheerful. His laughter is not a sign that he is indifferent to death. Instead, it seems to be the way he keeps himself and others from falling completely into despair. His cheerful personality also makes him approachable and strengthens his relationship with the other fighters. In a world dominated by fear and violence, Alymkul's ability to preserve his joy becomes a quiet form of strength.

Kanat Khan

Kanat Khan is one of the most complicated figures. His character develops through several important scenes, and these scenes create a tension between his image as a leader and the narrator's criticism of him. Before the uprising, Kanat Khan has already been preparing himself for resistance against Russian rule. When the rebellion begins, the people choose him as their leader, and young fighters gather around him. His speeches reveal his admiration for the Turkic past, Islam, and the unity of his people. Yet later, during the flight to China, the narrator accuses him of leaving the people behind. Through these contrasting moments, Kanat Khan emerges as patriotic, determined, influential, and controversial.

Patriotic Kanat Khan's patriotism is most clearly expressed in the scenes before the fighting, when he speaks about the history and identity of his people. He reminds the Kyrgyz that their ancestors lived before them and refers to Tagay as a great ancestor. He also dreams of following the path of their forefathers and becoming known as the warriors of Turkestan. In another speech, he speaks admiringly of the Ottoman Turks and argues that the Kyrgyz should not remain behind other Turkic peoples. His words show that his idea of patriotism is closely connected with history, cultural identity, and religion. His decision to

join the uprising gives these words a practical meaning: he is prepared to risk his life for the cause he speaks about.

Determined Kanat Khan's determination is shown through the long preparation that precedes the uprising. The novel presents his decision to resist Russian rule as something he has considered for years rather than a sudden reaction to the events of 1916. When the opportunity for rebellion finally appears, he does not remain on the sidelines. The people choose him as their leader, and preparations for battle begin around him. Young men collect rifles, spears, and swords, while the best horses are selected for the fighters. Kanat Khan continues to lead even when the rebels face a much stronger and better-equipped Tsarist army. The eventual defeat does not erase the fact that he remains committed to the struggle until his forces are overcome.

Influential Kanat Khan's influence is demonstrated by the fact that the rebels themselves choose him to lead them. This is important because his authority does not initially come only from his position or wealth; the people actively place their trust in him. Once he becomes their leader, young Kyrgyz men prepare for battle under his direction. His speeches also reveal why he is capable of influencing others. When he speaks about their ancestors, Turkic identity, religion, and the future of the people, he presents the uprising as something larger than a military conflict. His words give the struggle a sense of historical and cultural meaning. However, the same influence later becomes part of the narrator's criticism, because the narrator suggests that Kanat Khan ultimately fails the people who trusted him.

Controversial Kanat Khan becomes controversial because the novel places his leadership beside accusations of betrayal. The strongest example appears during the migration to China after the uprising is defeated. Kanat Khan and his family initially travel with the fleeing population, but the narrator claims that his own people quietly separate from the main migration and leave without openly informing the others. This scene sharply contrasts with his earlier role as the leader of the rebellion. The man who had spoken about standing with his people during their suffering is now accused of abandoning them when their situation becomes most desperate. As a result, Kanat Khan cannot be understood simply as either a hero or a villain. His characterization is shaped by the tension between his earlier leadership and the narrator's later condemnation of his actions.

Cholponkul

Cholponkul is one of the leaders of the Solto clan. His character is mainly revealed during the conflict between the local people and the Tsarist authorities. When the Governor asks the local leaders for the names of young men who are to be taken into the army, Cholponkul gives him the list. The list contains the names of men between eighteen and forty-five. In the same scene, Bular Moguy refuses to provide a list and is arrested. Cholponkul responds differently. He accepts the Governor's demand and takes part in the recruitment of young men.

Cooperative Cholponkul's cooperative nature is clear in the scene where the Governor asks the local leaders for a list of young men. Cholponkul has a list ready and hands it to the Governor. He does not refuse or argue with him. His cooperation becomes even clearer when compared with Bular Moguy, who refuses to give a list and openly defends his people. While Bular Moguy is arrested for refusing, Cholponkul helps the Governor carry out the recruitment. This scene shows Cholponkul actively cooperating with the authorities rather than resisting them.

Obedient Cholponkul is also obedient when faced with the Governor's order. He follows the request and gives him the names of men between eighteen and forty-five. He does not question why these men are being taken or challenge the Governor's authority. Bular Moguy, however, refuses to follow the same order and accepts the consequences. The contrast between the two men makes Cholponkul's obedience particularly clear. He chooses to follow the order even though the recruitment affects families in his own community.

Self-Interested Cholponkul's self-interest can be seen in his decision to cooperate with a system that places a heavy burden on poor families. In the novel, wealthy families can protect their sons from

military service by giving money or property, while poor families have to send their sons. Cholponkul does not challenge this arrangement. Instead, he provides the Governor with the list of young men. The scene does not tell us directly what Cholponkul is thinking, so his motives should not be overstated. However, his actions show that he does not risk his own position by opposing the system.

Unsympathetic Cholponkul can also be described as unsympathetic because he does not show concern for the young men or their families when he gives the list to the Governor. The recruitment causes fear among the people, and poor families face the possibility of losing their sons. Yet when Cholponkul is given the chance to oppose the order, he does not speak for them. Instead, he hands over the names. His lack of resistance in this scene shows that he does not act out of sympathy for the families who will suffer because of the recruitment.

THEMES

Oppression: Injustice, and the Suffering of Ordinary People

The suffering of ordinary Kyrgyz people grows as the Tsarist authorities tighten their control over the villages. When the Governor orders the local leaders to prepare lists of young men for military service, Cholponkul gives him a list containing the names of men between eighteen and forty-five. These men are taken from their families and sent to serve in the army. Bular Moguy refuses to provide a list because he does not want his people to be forced into military service. He is arrested for his refusal. The difference between the two men shows the pressure placed on local leaders and the consequences of resisting the authorities.

The burden is not shared equally. Poor families have to give their sons, while wealthy families can protect their children by giving money or property. A poor mother or father has little choice when officials demand a son for the army. The people also lose productive land and access to valuable areas. Their lives become harder as they face taxes, military recruitment, and pressure from both Tsarist officials and local leaders.

Fear spreads through the villages. Some families hide their sons, while others begin preparing whatever weapons they can find. Sickles, axes, swords, and other tools are repaired and turned into weapons. The people understand that refusing the authorities may bring arrest, exile, or violence.

The situation eventually turns into open fighting. Villagers and fighters face better-equipped Tsarist troops, and many are killed. Villages are burned, families are separated, and people are left without protection. The violence does not stop with the fighters. Women, children, and elderly people also suffer.

After the uprising fails, the people leave their homes and move toward China. They carry their belongings and animals with them, but the journey is filled with fear and confusion. Children cry, mothers struggle to care for them, and families lose one another along the way. Many people die before reaching safety. Their suffering is caused not by a single battle, but by a long period of pressure, inequality, violence, and displacement.

Illustrative Moment: People move toward China carrying whatever they can save. Children cry as their mothers try to keep them close. Animals become frightened and scatter, while families struggle to stay together. Behind them are their homes, fields, and villages; ahead lies an uncertain future. The journey becomes harder as violence follows them. Some people are killed, others disappear, and many families are separated. There is no sense of safety even after leaving their villages. The scene shows how political oppression reaches into ordinary life. Losing a home means losing security, family members, possessions, and the familiar world in which people once lived.

Resistance: Rebellion, and Betrayal

Resistance grows as the pressure from the Tsarist authorities becomes harder for the people to endure. When the Governor demands lists of young men for military service, some local leaders cooperate, while others refuse. Bular Moguy refuses to give a list and openly tells the Governor that his people should be free. He is arrested for his refusal. Cholponkul, however, gives the Governor his list. The difference between them shows the conflict between resistance and collaboration within the local leadership.

As the authorities continue to pressure the people, resistance begins to spread through the villages. Young men take control of the seals used by local officials so that official documents cannot easily be approved. Meetings of the local authorities are disrupted. People also begin preparing for a possible uprising. Sickles, axes, swords, and other tools are taken to blacksmiths and repaired. Some men attach spears and bayonets to wooden poles. In the mountain forests, blacksmiths work to produce weapons. These actions show that resistance is gradually becoming organized.

The rebellion then spreads to different parts of the region. News arrives that fighting has begun in several towns. Kazakh and Kyrgyz groups surround settlements, and weapons are captured and distributed among the fighters. In some places, fighting becomes direct and violent. The people are no longer simply refusing orders; they are openly confronting the Tsarist forces.

Betrayal also becomes part of the conflict. Some wealthy local leaders first move with the people to protect their own position, while others flee. Cholponkul and Jantay are criticized for following the Tsarist order and providing soldiers instead of standing with the people. Their actions create a sharp contrast with those who take risks during the uprising.

The rebellion eventually faces serious disadvantages. The Tsarist troops have modern weapons and reinforcements, while the rebels have limited military equipment. Some local people also change sides. The resistance is defeated, and the people are forced to flee toward China. The struggle therefore ends not only in military defeat but also in separation, displacement, and loss.

Illustrative Moment: In the villages, people begin taking their ordinary farming tools to the blacksmith. Sickles, axes, and swords that were once used for daily work are repaired and prepared for fighting. Some men fix spears and bayonets onto long wooden poles. Inside the blacksmith's workshop, the fire burns while young men work the metal with hammers. Outside, the fear of the authorities remains, but something has changed. The people are no longer simply waiting for the next order. They are preparing themselves to resist. At the same time, local leaders must choose whether to stand with their people or cooperate with those in power.

Leadership: Unity of people:

The need for unity first appears when people begin meeting together and discussing the pressure they face. Around the fire, they talk about the taxes, forced recruitment, and treatment of the people. Their conversations lead to the idea that they must stand together if they want to resist. This shared understanding gradually turns into action. Young men begin repairing sickles, axes, swords, and other tools, while blacksmiths work on weapons in the mountain forests. These scenes show ordinary people moving from fear toward collective resistance.

As the uprising spreads, leadership becomes more important. Alymkul and Junush take part in the fighting and remain with the people during dangerous moments. Kydyr is also associated with the leaders who stand on the side of the people, unlike Cholponkul and Jantay, who cooperate with the Tsarist authorities. The contrast between these figures shows that leadership in the conflict is closely connected to the decision of whom to support.

Kanat Khan's role develops further when the people choose him as their leader. The fighters organize themselves, collect weapons, select horses, and prepare for battle. His leadership gives the resistance a clearer structure, but the scenes also show how difficult it is to keep a movement united. Some Kyrgyz change sides, wealthy people try to protect their own interests, and the fighters lack enough weapons and military supplies.

The final battles reveal both the strength and weakness of this unity. Alymkul and Junush fight alongside the people, while Kanat Khan leads the resistance against better-equipped Tsarist troops. Despite their courage, the rebels cannot match the modern weapons and reinforcements of the Tsarist army. The uprising is eventually defeated. Even so, the scenes of preparation, cooperation, and fighting show how ordinary people and their leaders come together when they are pushed into a common struggle.

Illustrative Moment: During the fighting in the mountains, Alymkul and Junush lead a group of about thirty fighters while the larger population continues moving toward safety. The group faces Tsarist soldiers who are armed with automatic rifles. Many of the ordinary people have no firearms and carry only spears and swords. When the soldiers approach, Alymkul and Junush do not leave the people behind. They fight back, and a fierce battle begins. The scene places leadership in a dangerous situation: the two men are

not directing the struggle from a safe distance but are physically sharing the danger faced by those around them.

Exodus: Loss of Homeland

After the uprising is defeated, the people leave their villages and begin moving toward China. The journey takes them through Talaa-Bulak, Buchuk, and Ortok-Too, where the group has to travel through difficult terrain while carrying food, belongings, and animals. The movement is chaotic, and staying together becomes increasingly difficult. The people are leaving not because they have chosen a new place to live, but because the violence has made their homes unsafe.

The journey becomes even more dangerous in the mountains. In the Karakol area, Alymkul and Junush lead a group of fighters while the larger population continues its journey. The fighters try to protect the fleeing people as Tsarist troops pursue them. The difference in weapons is severe: many Kyrgyz fighters have only spears and swords, while the Tsarist soldiers have automatic rifles. Fighting breaks out as the two sides meet, making the escape even more dangerous.

The destruction left behind shows what the people are losing. Villages and settlements are no longer places to which they can safely return. Families are broken apart during the violence, and many people are killed. The journey therefore involves more than crossing a border. It separates people from the places, possessions, and communities that formed their lives.

The passage into China does not immediately bring security. The survivors arrive after a journey marked by violence and loss, carrying whatever they were able to save. They have crossed into another country, but the homes and communities they left behind cannot simply be recovered. Exile changes their relationship with their homeland: the places where they once lived become memories rather than places they can return to.

Illustrative Moment: The scene at Pokrovka village captures the destruction of homeland itself. Around eight hundred Kyrgyz tents are burned. The settlement that once sheltered families is reduced to ashes, leaving the people with nothing to return to. The burning tents also represent the destruction of an entire way of life. Homes, belongings, and the familiar surroundings of the community disappear together. The image is especially significant because the people are already being driven from their land. Their departure is therefore followed by the physical destruction of the places they have left behind, making exile permanent rather than temporary.

History: National Identity

National identity is closely connected to memory, ancestry, and the history of the Kyrgyz people. This becomes especially clear in Kanat Khan's speeches before the fighting. He does not speak only about the immediate conflict with the Tsarist forces; he places the struggle within a much longer history.

In one speech, Kanat Khan reminds his people of their ancestors: "We are the descendants of Tagay, our great ancestor." By referring to Tagay, he presents the Kyrgyz as a people with a long and shared past. The reference is important because he uses ancestry to strengthen the connection between the people standing together in the present and those who came before them.

He then turns to the history of the wider Turkic world. He speaks of the Ottoman Turks and says that they are like the Kyrgyz. He mentions Jarkymbay, who studied in Istanbul and learned about the customs of the people there. This reference takes his understanding of identity beyond the Kyrgyz community and connects it with other Turkic peoples.

Kanat Khan also recalls Timur when he calls on his people to follow the path of their ancestors and become as strong as Timur. The historical figure becomes an example of strength and greatness. In another part of his speech, he says, "We are also the children of a Turkic ancestor; we should not remain behind." Here, Turkic ancestry is directly connected with the desire to become stronger and more educated.

Religion is another part of his understanding of identity. Kanat Khan speaks about sacrificing his life for his faith and says that he wants his people to receive an education. He also describes standing beside his people when they rise against oppression. His words bring together ancestry, Turkic identity, religion, education, and service to the community.

These speeches show that Kanat Khan understands the present struggle through the memory of the past. His references to Tagay, Timur, the Ottoman Turks, Istanbul, and Islam give the conflict a broader historical and cultural meaning.

Illustrative Moment: Kanat Khan's speech takes on a personal tone when he speaks about serving his people and his faith. He says that he is ready to sacrifice his life for his religion and wants his people to become educated. He also asks who among the Kyrgyz could serve the people and their faith as he does. These words reveal how he understands his responsibility as a leader. His idea of identity is not limited to ancestry or political struggle; it also involves education, faith, and service.