

Night and Day (1936)

Abdulhamid Cho'lpon

OVERVIEW

Author Abdulhamid Cho'lpon (1893-1938) stands out as one of the most striking and tragic figures in 20th-century Uzbek literature. He emerged during a period of rapid transformation when Uzbek literature began to break free from centuries-old traditions, primarily dominated by poetry that adhered strictly to ancient Arabic versification. As a prominent reformer of his era, Cho'lpon boldly experimented with new genres – such as the novel, drama, and short story – within a European context. His three poetry collections – *Awakenings* (1922), *The Springs* (1924), and *The Secrets of Dawn* (1926) – feature poems regarded as some of the finest examples of new Uzbek poetry. While Cho'lpon is celebrated as a lyric poet who reformed traditional poetry and laid the groundwork for new Uzbek literature, his prose also demonstrates his mastery of a new literary genre. Tragically, during Stalin's "Great Purge" (a campaign of political repression), he was accused of treason, resulting in his imprisonment and eventual execution, marking a profound loss for Uzbek literature.

Novel *Night and Day*, published in 1936, departs from traditional narratives in Uzbek literature to explore the complexities of the human experience. Cho'lpon masterfully weaves socio-political themes into the personal narrative of a young girl named Zebi. The plot unfolds through Zebi's experiences, with every event and character intricately connected to her story, reflecting the complex social, political, and moral issues of the era. This work is considered the second most important novel in the history of Uzbek literature, following the contributions of Cho'lpon's collaborator, Abdullah Qodiriy. With *Night and Day*, Cho'lpon strengthens the realistic method in prose, immersing readers in the complex lives and inner worlds of his characters while highlighting the social dynamics of his time.

Background Abdulhamid Cho'lpon (1893–1938) wrote during a tumultuous period in Turkestan (modern-day Uzbekistan), which transitioned from a Russian tsarist colony to a Soviet territory. This region was marked by underdevelopment, primarily serving as a source of raw materials, while conservative religious ideologies exacerbated divisions and stagnation. Against this backdrop, the younger generation found hope in the Jadid educational movement, inspired by the Turkish Tanzimat Reforms. Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Jadids were Muslim modernist reformers advocating for political, religious, and cultural change. They promoted Western science, secular education, and gender equality while opposing colonialism and calling for independence. Born into a wealthy merchant family and educated in both traditional and European systems, Abdulhamid was profoundly influenced by Jadid ideas. He viewed education as essential for progress and literature as a means for spiritual awakening. However, he recognized that true change could not occur solely through education under colonial and traditional governance.

After the turbulent consolidation of Soviet power, Cho'lpon, like many Jadid activists, was pushed out of political activism and redirected his talents toward literature. In his novel *Night and Day*, he addresses gender inequality through the story of a marginalized Uzbek girl, while also exploring the pivotal socio-political ideas of the Jadids.

CHARACTERS

<i>Zebi</i>	A young, naive, and innocent girl
<i>Akbarali mingboshi</i>	Zebi's husband, a wealthy municipality official
<i>Miryoqub</i>	Akbarali's assistant, a clever and cunning entrepreneur
<i>Razzoq-sufi</i>	Zebi's father, a man consumed by religious ignorance
<i>Poshshahon</i>	Akbarali's middle wife, a self-serving and devious woman

SYNOPSIS

The novel, set in early 20th-century Turkestan, tells the story of Zebi, a young girl forced into marriage. Three intertwining narratives unfold: Zebi's, Akbarali's, and Miryokub's, each addressing pressing socio-political issues of the era, including gender inequality, Russian colonialism, and moral crises – all skillfully woven into Zebi's fate.

The story begins in the spring of 1915, introducing 15-year-old Zebi. Her friend Saltanat invites her on a rare outing, a chance to escape her father's strict control. However, Zebi's excitement quickly turns to anxiety over obtaining permission. Her father, a strict adherent to Muslim customs, believes a girl's role is confined to marriage and household duties.

Zebi's mother helps her obtain permission from her father, on the condition that she must not sing in front of *nomahram* ("unfamiliar men"). Upon arriving in the village, Zebi experiences a taste of freedom, charming the locals with her enchanting voice. News of her talent reaches Akbarali, a wealthy official with three wives. Captivated by Zebi, he decides to take her as his fourth wife, influenced by jealousy among his senior wives.

Zebi finds herself married to a stranger twice her age, a man she perceives as frightening. In her desperation, she pretends to faint to avoid his advances, but soon realizes her efforts are futile. Initially, Akbarali's first two wives treat her kindly, seeking to manipulate her against their rival, Sulthonhon. However, Zebi's innocence wins Sulthonhon over.

As Akbarali contemplates leaving his wealth to Zebi, his wives grow uneasy. Poshshahon, determined to eliminate Zebi, poisons her teapot. Unaware of the danger, Zebi serves her husband from the poisoned teapot, leading to his tragic death. Convicted of murder, she is sentenced to seven years of exile in Siberia, leaving her family shattered and her mother descending into madness over their loss.

SCENES

Dreams of Spring The novel opens with a vibrant depiction of spring, a season that fills Zebi with delight and stirs dreams of escape from her town. As she revels in the beauty around her, she feels the weight of an impending arranged marriage – a prospect she dreads. Matchmakers frequently visit her home, and by societal standards, Zebi has reached a marriageable age. Despite her efforts to suppress her anxieties, the pressure of traditional customs looms over her, casting a shadow of inevitability on her future.

A Breath of Freedom In a moment of solidarity, Zebi's friend Saltanat suggests they visit relatives in a nearby village, offering a fleeting reprieve from their stifling surroundings. With the gentle encouragement of Zebi's compassionate mother, they successfully persuade her father to grant permission for the trip. For Zebi, this feels like the unlocking of her cage, a chance to breathe freely and savor the promise of adventure that lies beyond her current confines.

Journey to the Village The girls' journey to the village in a cart, driven by a young man named Ulmasjon, who secretly harbors feelings for Zebi. As they ride along, Ulmasjon shyly asks Zebi to sing. Initially, she hesitates; her father had forbidden her from singing in the presence of unfamiliar men. But with gentle encouragement from her friends, she eventually finds her voice.

Singing Once she begins singing, her melodic tones captivate everyone around her, and she cannot help but continue. Upon their arrival, the girls are warmly welcomed into local gatherings, where Zebi enchants the villagers once more with her singing. In the midst of the festivities, Ulmasjon and Zebi manage to steal a few private moments together, and for the first time, Zebi feels an unfamiliar yet delightful attraction toward him. Soon, word spreads through the village about Zebi and her extraordinary voice.

Conspiracy Akbarali's two older wives, Hadichahon and Poshshahon, conspire to exact revenge on the youngest wife, Sulthonhon. The clever and cunning Poshshahon devises a plan to suggest that Akbarali take yet another bride, this time a girl from the city. She knows that Akbarali desires more than mere beauty; he longs for someone who can entertain him in ways his current wives cannot. Poshshahon's aim is to make Sulthonhon experience the jealousy and heartache she herself has endured. The two wives craft a scheme: they will invite Zebi to visit, orchestrating a moment where Akbarali can hear her sing, believing

this will capture his interest. To ensure their plan unfolds seamlessly, they enlist the help of the cunning Miryoqub, asking him to persuade Akbarali to consider Zebi as his next wife. With the groundwork laid, Miryoqub begins to set their intricate plan into motion, unaware of the emotional turmoil that will soon ensue.

Plan Completed Akbarali mingboshi returns from a meeting with the tsarist official, having faced complaints from local rural officials about his unfair distribution of irrigation water, which has allowed him to take the lion's share for himself. As always, Miryoqub claims to understand the issue and assures Akbarali that he will handle it. In a casual tone, he mentions that Akbarali will soon be getting married. Surprised, Akbarali questions the need for another marriage, especially since he has recently wed his third wife. However, when Miryoqub speaks of a girl from the city with an extraordinary voice, Akbarali's curiosity is immediately ignited.

Return to the City Zebi returns to the city, her heart glowing with happiness, unaware of the hidden games played behind her back and the uncertainties that await her. Her friend Saltanat learns of Akbarali's intentions through a relative, but she chooses to keep this troubling news to herself, unwilling to dim Zebi's joy. As the cart driver, Ulmasjon, leaves the girls on a winding road, Zebi is the last to leave. They exchange no words, yet both harbor the same longing for the journey to stretch on indefinitely.

Newspaper Critique Akbarali finds himself at the center of controversy. The newspaper article condemns his decision to close the new Jadid school, accusing him of misallocating funds that should support education and instead directing them toward his personal entertainment and the renewal of his wives. Not content with his three wives, Akbarali now plans to marry a fourth. The truth behind the school's closure, however, is more complex. It is orchestrated under the influence of tsarist officials who recognize the threat posed by an enlightened populace aware of their rights. The tsarist government fears that the emergence of such schools in their colony could ignite a desire for change. Amidst the turmoil, Miryoqub reassures Akbarali, promising to find someone to write a counter-article that critiques the original author. Ironically, it is revealed that the writer is a Jadid teacher from the very school Akbarali has shut down.

Engagement Miryoqub's initial attempt at matchmaking falters when Zebi's father firmly refuses, declaring he will not marry off his daughter to a man who neither prays nor associates with respectable company, preferring instead the company of brothels. Akbarali laughs, confident that Miryoqub will find a way to navigate this setback.

Trapped by Fate In time, Miryoqub successfully persuades Razzoq-sufi by offering a bribe through his spiritual mentor, Ishan. With this newfound approval, Akbarali plans a lavish engagement celebration, certain it will be a grand affair. Razzoq-sufi is elated by the generous gifts that come his way. However, the atmosphere is heavy with sorrow. Zebi's mother mourns the impending marriage, and Zebi herself is consumed by despair, her spirit crushed under the weight of her fate. She becomes like a cold, lifeless statue, trapped in a reality she cannot escape.

Wedding Zebi is brought to Akbarali's opulent home, where the courtyard buzzes with women. Poshshahon tries to soothe Zebi, urging her to accept Akbarali's proposal. Meanwhile, Sulthonhon, the youngest and third wife, schemes to heighten Zebi's fear and distaste for her future husband. She orchestrates a scene with two women planted to gossip loudly about Akbarali's unappealing appearance. As the cruel words reach Zebi's ears, she feels the ground slip away beneath her, and she faints, collapsing into her mother's arms. The atmosphere becomes tense, and Akbarali's older wives find themselves in a precarious position; the wedding cannot proceed under such distressing circumstances. Reluctantly, they agree to postpone the wedding night, leaving an air of tension.

Resistance Sulthonhon, distraught over the threat to her status as Akbarali's favored wife, is determined to protect her position. In her desperation, she turns to her clever and resourceful maid, Umrinsabibi, for help. Drawing on connections from Zebi's first visit to the village, Umrinsabibi devises a plan to empower Zebi to resist Akbarali's advances. Each evening, as Akbarali approaches, Zebi follows Umrinsabibi's guidance and pretends to have an epileptic seizure.

In the Brothel By the fifth night of Zebi's feigned "epileptic seizures," Akbarali's anxiety begins to surface. To distract him, Miryoqub, ever the resourceful friend, proposes a trip to the city. However, to Akbarali's surprise, they find themselves at a brothel, much to his delight. As they settle in, Akbarali confides in

Miryoqub, revealing a startling truth: he feels no sexual attraction toward Zebi. Instead, he admits he is enchanted by her voice. Miryoqub, taken aback by this unexpected revelation, advises Akbarali to indulge his desires at the brothel and return to Zebi “cleansed.” He explains the protocol: women will enter, Akbarali should pour vodka for everyone, and then he can choose one. With those instructions laid out, Miryoqub excuses himself, leaving Akbarali to navigate the night on his own.

Whispers of Redemption Miryoqub has already chosen a girl for himself. While Akbarali lingers in the main room, Miryoqub retreats to his private chamber, a luxurious space far better furnished than Akbarali’s own. There, he summons a young and beautiful girl named Maria, whom he specifically selected before Akbarali’s “show.” As he awaits her arrival, Miryoqub learns from the brothel owner about Maria’s tragic story. Coming from a respectable family, her life took a devastating turn due to betrayal, leading her to the brothel. Desperate for money, Maria longs to reunite with her brother, who lives in Germany. She dreams of starting anew, yearning for a chance to repent for her sins and escape the confines of her current life.

The Offer of Escape Miryoqub finds Maria asleep and orders her to be woken up, stating he doesn’t want to start things in bed. He offers her a two-month trip to Crimea, promising her enough money to reunite with her brother afterward, but only on the condition that she be with him exclusively. To ensure her comfort and security, he plans to move her to the city’s finest hotel. Maria agrees, but with a firm request: she asks that he not touch her until she can learn to trust him. Miryoqub accepts, feeling a profound shift within himself. As love for a “fallen” woman begins to transform Miryoqub, a battle rages inside him – one between his former self, motivated solely by self-interest and desire, and the other, the emerging man capable of genuine love and nobility.

Miryoqub in the House of Noyib To’ra Miryoqub visits *Noyib To’ra* (the name the locals used for the Tsar’s administration representative, whose real Russian name was Fyodr), a Russian colonial official, bringing along a historical manuscript that captivates the official’s interest. As they speak, Noyib To’ra shares his concerns about the dire situation in Tsarist Russia: the country struggles in an ongoing world war, and revolutionary movements are rising, calling for the empowerment of the people. This is all new information to Miryoqub. Curious about Akbarali’s affairs, Noyib To’ra asks Miryoqub for details. In response, Miryoqub recounts the circumstances surrounding him, including his fourth marriage. While Noyib To’ra doesn’t fundamentally oppose polygamy, he feels that the burdens it carries are unnecessary, suggesting instead that it might be wiser to keep a mistress. Miryoqub nods in agreement.

Secrets Behind the Window During Noyib To’ra’s visit to his mistress, his cook, Zunnun, approaches Miryoqub with a request for advice. Zunnun expresses a desire to marry but needs his master’s permission to proceed. Miryoqub suggests he seek help from Noyib To’ra’s wife. However, Zunnun shakes his head, saying that isn’t possible. In a surprising twist, Zunnun reveals a hidden truth: he has been secretly involved with Noyib To’ra’s wife. To prove it, he urges Miryoqub to hide and watch through the window. From his vantage point, Miryoqub witnesses the couple sharing a kiss. As he observes, a thought strikes him: “No wonder the empire is collapsing.”

A Door Only for Him Miryoqub arranges for Maria to stay in a first-class room, providing her with a passport under a different name to facilitate her escape from the brothel. Grateful for his help, Maria asks if she can kiss him on the forehead, like a sister would her brother. Despite the warmth of her closeness and the temptation it brings, Miryoqub remains steadfast in his promise. He informs her that he will be away for five days, and upon his return, they will travel together to Crimea. Maria thanks him sincerely, and as he prepares to leave, he urges her not to open the door for anyone. Content, Miryoqub knows that this door will open only for him.

A Birthday Surprise On Zunnun’s birthday, Miryoqub visits to celebrate. Zunnun invites Noyib To’ra’s wife, who arrives with her mother and child. As the festivities begin, she regales everyone with tales of her noble lineage, discussing her family’s charitable work and praising her husband as a valiant fighter. After a while, the mother takes the child home, telling her daughter she can stay behind. With a knowing wink at Miryoqub, Zunnun also excuses himself, leaving the two alone. In that intimate moment, the woman and Miryoqub engage in a sexual encounter. When Miryoqub wakes up, she is already preparing to leave. As she gets ready, he casually suggests, “We can meet again,” to which she responds with cheerful agreement.

Miryoqub's Inner Struggle Within Miryoqub's heart, a tumultuous battle rages between conscience and desire. His conscience, manifesting as a relentless prosecutor and investigator, condemns him for his actions. Although he acknowledges his guilt, he finds solace in the thought that he is still better than the malicious Akbarali. Yet the prosecutor's voice persists, reminding him that unlike Akbarali, he betrays not only his own values but also the trust of his patron, engaging in an affair with Akbarali's wife. Miryoqub is confronted with the uncomfortable truth: his relationships with these women are driven by personal gain. He harbors ambitions surrounding Poshshahon, fantasizing that if Akbarali were to die, he could marry her and claim a significant portion of his inheritance. Through his connection with Noyib To'ra's wife, he believes he can also improve his standing with the officials of the Tsarist government.

The Return and the Unspoken Promises Miryoqub and Akbarali return to the village, greeted by Hadichahon's joyful announcement that Zebi has agreed to sing. Respecting Akbarali's wishes, Miryoqub vows not to pressure Zebi until she feels ready. However, he soon heads home to speak with his wife, as he plans to leave for Crimea with Maria. Upon his arrival, he finds his wife in tears, lamenting his frequent absences and the lack of attention he gives her.

On the Way to Crimea As Miryoqub and Maria travel by train to Crimea, a handsome, well-dressed man begins to frequently pass their compartment. Initially, Miryoqub feels a pang of jealousy, fearing the man is interested in Maria. To his surprise, the stranger is actually intrigued by him. Introducing himself as Sharafiddin, a successful businessman and member of the Jadid movement, he speaks passionately about the progressive ideas within the movement. Sharafiddin encourages Miryoqub to enroll his children in Jadid schools, where they can later pursue education in Germany, France, England, or America. Learning about Maria, he suggests that she help raise the children, as she is more educated than his Muslim wife.

Unveiling Hearts in Moscow As Sharafiddin monopolizes Miryoqub's attention, Maria begins to feel abandoned and resentful. Overwhelmed with despair, she weeps, prompting Miryoqub to console her. In that moment, they can no longer hide their feelings for each other. Upon arriving in Moscow, Miryoqub books a room at a Crimean sanatorium and boldly announces to Maria that he is divorcing his wife to marry her. He plans to bring his son from his first marriage along, with Maria helping to raise him. Elated, Maria readily agrees. Later, Miryoqub visits the Nogai Mosque in Moscow and asks the imam to conduct their wedding ceremony. Both are filled with joy at the prospect of their new life together.

Sultonhon's Scheme Meanwhile, Akbarali's younger wife, Sultonhon, is consumed by jealousy. On Zebi's wedding day, she confides in her parents about her desire for a divorce, but they refuse, fearing Akbarali's wrath. Determined to take revenge, Sultonhon devises a plan. When Akbarali's new wife arrives, she is moved from her lavish room to a small, secluded one – a change Sultonhon secretly welcomes. Emboldened, she pens a love letter to Akbarali's young secretary, Hakimjon, inviting him to meet. Although initially hesitant, they soon begin secret meetings in Sultonhon's room. She relishes the power she wields over her rivals, plotting her next moves with cunning determination.

Conversation Akbarali mingboshi convenes a meeting to relay an order from the colonial authorities: the village must recruit local boys to serve as police. The villagers are responsible for arming these recruits and contributing to their salaries. Although confused, the local officials comply with Akbarali's directive.

Evening Guest That evening, a Tatar inspector is invited to dinner. During their conversation, the inspector introduces Akbarali and Hakimjon to the concept of pan-Turkism, a political movement that emerged in the 1880s among Turkic intellectuals across regions like Kazan, the South Caucasus, and the Ottoman Empire (modern-day Turkey). This movement aims for the cultural and political unification of all Turkic peoples. The inspector declares that colonial Russia is the true enemy of Turkestan. As the conversation unfolds, Hakimjon begins to recognize Miryoqub's potential and Akbarali's limitations. Although Akbarali agrees with the inspector, he expresses concern that the tsarist authorities might overhear their discussion.

The Seeds of Rebellion Akbarali proceeds with the order, increasing the number of local recruits to impress the authorities. He makes an unannounced visit to the village of Qumariq, where he tours mosques and instructs imams to preach messages of peace while warning against discord. The imam complies, praising Akbarali in his sermon. However, two wealthy villagers, Umaraliboy and Yodgorho'ja, criticize Akbarali, accusing him of neglecting prayer, drinking alcohol, and womanizing. Umaraliboy boldly declares

that if he were in Akbarali's position, he would close the teahouses to force people to pray and punish those who do not. This sparks a heated argument, with Umaraliboy insulting the crowd and pushing the village closer to rebellion.

Reluctant Submission Pleased with himself, Akbarali feels confident that his trip to the village showcased his authority. He is also satisfied with how things turned out with Zebi. Despite her initial disgust, she eventually acquiesces and engages in an intimate encounter with Akbarali. By the second day, her repulsion fades, and she begins to accept the situation more readily.

Akbarali's Attempts to Avert a Quarrel Akbarali receives urgent news of a quarrel at the Qumariq mosque and quickly gathers his men to head to the village. Upon arrival, he discovers that the villagers are upset with two wealthy men, Umaraliboy and Yodgorho'ja, who have seized much of the land, monopolized irrigation water, and treated others with disdain. The villagers are fearful of their power. As Akbarali begins his investigation, Yodgorho'ja storms in, hurling hysterical insults at him. Enraged, Akbarali orders Yodgorho'ja's arrest and imprisonment.

The Situation in Qumariq is Getting Worse With winter settling in and the first snow falling, Akbarali finds himself in a precarious position, worried about the consequences of Yodgorho'ja's imprisonment. He receives a letter from Miryoqub, offering assistance through Zunnun, who can help resolve the issue via Noyib To'ra's wife. This news provides some relief. However, a young man soon returns from the village with alarming news: the situation has escalated. The sons of Umaraliboy and Yodgorho'ja attempt to free Yodgorho'ja from prison and seek revenge for Umaraliboy's beating. A violent clash erupts, resulting in the death of one of the wealthy men's sons and numerous injuries.

Beneath the Surface In desperation, Akbarali realizes he urgently needs Miryoqub's support. While sitting with Zebi, he drinks and sings in a terrible voice, as his wives laugh outside the door. Only Poshshahon, although she smiles, is consumed by inner turmoil. Her plans for revenge against Sultonhon have failed, and Miryoqub has left for Crimea with a Russian woman. As Akbarali intends to leave his entire inheritance to Zebi, she becomes a threat that Poshshahon feels compelled to eliminate. With this in mind, Poshshahon decides to poison Zebi by contaminating her teapot, which contains holy water blessed for pregnancy.

Akbarali in Despair Akbarali visits Noyib To'ra, who informs him that Umaraliboy and Yodgorho'ja have filed a complaint against him with the district mayor, who is displeased with Akbarali's actions. No one can help him now, and the mayor has ordered the arrest of all who oppose the wealthy men. Akbarali protests, calling the situation unfair, but the mayor replies that the tsarist government protects respected individuals. He advises Akbarali to resign and take a break. Desperate to maintain his position, Akbarali follows Miryoqub's advice and turns to Zunnun for help. After consulting with Noyib To'ra's wife, Zunnun suggests offering a substantial bribe, to which Akbarali readily agrees.

Death of Akbarali Akbarali returns home late at night to find Zebi asleep. Confused and intoxicated, he calls for food, then pours himself vodka and greedily devours the meal. Disturbed and nauseated by his behavior, Zebi steps outside for some fresh air. When she returns, her husband is asleep, so she lies down beside him and soon drifts off herself. Awakening, Akbarali asks her for water. In her haste, Zebi accidentally pours him water from a kettle that contains holy water, which Poshshahon has poisoned. Almost immediately, Akbarali begins to feel unwell; he tears at his clothes, gasps for breath, and quickly succumbs.

Zebi's Trial Zebi finds herself on trial for her husband's murder, facing a dismissive prosecutor and lawyer. The proceedings move swiftly. Zebi answers all questions honestly, but when the judge accuses her of killing Akbarali, she exclaims that she would rather die than have harmed him. Confused and oblivious to the gravity of the situation, she fails to grasp what is unfolding around her. The prosecutor goes so far as to accuse her of involvement with "*Young Sart*" activists ("*Sart*" refers to the Turkic-speaking urban class in Central Asia) fighting against the Tsarist government, demanding the death penalty while her lawyer remains silent. As the court deliberates, Zebi believes her innocence is evident and anticipates her release. Instead, she is sentenced to seven years of exile in Siberia.

Revenge Word of the incident reaches Zebi's father, who learns from the imam about the murder of municipal official Akbarali mingboshi by his wife. In despair, he seeks guidance from his spiritual mentor, Ishan, hoping to find a way to save his daughter. However, Ishan refuses to offer any sympathy, denouncing him as the father of a murderer. Deeply offended, Razzoq-sufi accuses Ishan of greed and deception. In response, Ishan labels him insane and orders his punishment. Razzoq-sufi is plunged into icy water and flogged with a whip. After several days, he regains consciousness. Three days later, Ishan is found dead, and Razzoq-sufi vanishes without a trace.

Qurvonbibi's Lament Meanwhile, Zebi's mother, Qurvonbibi, loses her sanity. She wanders the streets without a burqa, wearing torn clothes, sharing tales of Zebi – how beautifully she sings and sews, raving about her daughter's beauty while desperately asking where she is. Relatives attempt to take her away for treatment, but their efforts prove futile. The novel concludes with a haunting song by the distraught Qurvonbibi, lamenting Zebi, who has been sold by her father at Ishan's behest.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ZEBI

Zebi's story is one filled with trials and emotional complexity. Although her journey covers a short period, it is marked by events that bring both joy and sorrow. From an unwanted marriage to exile, Zebi's life is shaped by hardship and submission, yet her inner qualities shine through despite these challenges.

Tolerant – At the heart of Zebi's character lies her profound tolerance of her circumstances. She quietly submits to the will of others – be it her father, her husband, or the unjust decisions of the court. This tolerance is most evident when she resigns herself to her fate after being coerced into marrying Akbarali. In a moment of reflection, she contemplates, "I must accept my fate. Oh God, to whom can I complain when You've left me too?" This acceptance becomes her refuge, a means of coping with a reality she feels powerless to change.

Kind – In the face of adversity, Zebi's kindness remains unscathed. Her compassion extends even to those who wrong her, revealing the depth of her character. Sultonhon, Akbarali's third wife, initially confronts Zebi with hostility but is soon softened by her warmth, ultimately embracing her in a moment of unexpected tenderness. Likewise, Poshshahon, who contemplates poisoning Zebi, is overwhelmed with guilt upon receiving her caring words. Zebi's innate kindness transforms her into a sympathetic figure, drawing others to her even in her darkest hours.

Naïve – Zebi's simplicity often leaves her unaware of the challenges surrounding her. This is especially evident during her trial, where she fails to grasp the gravity of her situation and the weight of the accusations against her. She believes that her purity is evident to all, reacting to the unjust charges with the bewilderment of a child, oblivious to the harsh realities that encircle her.

AKBARALI

Akbarali is a character lacking in intelligence, appearance, or leadership skills. His rise to municipal official relies on dubious methods and personal connections, with his assistant Miryoqub managing his affairs. For Akbarali, power is a means of indulgence, leading to his downfall. Although his death at the novel's end is an accident, the loss of his position marks a fate akin to physical demise.

Abrasive – Akbarali's abrasive and condescending behavior is particularly pronounced toward those he perceives as beneath him, including women and individuals of lower social standing. His harsh demeanor is not rooted in genuine authority but rather in his inherent weaknesses and inability to think clearly or manage effectively. To compensate for his lack of capability, he adopts an abrasive demeanor.

Impulsive – Lacking the ability to think rationally, Akbarali often makes quick, impulsive decisions that lead him into trouble. It is typically the clever Miryoqub who resolves his issues, as Akbarali is easily swayed by his manipulations. For instance, when a newspaper criticizes him for squandering his wealth on entertainment, including his penchant for polygamy, his immediate reaction is one of vengeance, contemplating a physical attack on the journalist. Only through Miryoqub's intervention does he come to recognize the foolishness of his initial impulse.

Sexist – Akbarali’s fascination with women reflects not so much a physical desire as an attempt to mask his insecurities and assert himself as a powerful, “real” man. Yet his numerous marriages and frequent visits to brothels do little to alleviate his sense of boredom and inner emptiness, revealing the complexity of his relationships with women. His marriage to Zebi, for instance, is not driven by lust but rather by an admiration for her singing voice. Even when Zebi initially rebuffs his advances, Akbarali expresses a willingness to wait, insisting that his feelings are not base or lustful; her voice alone brings him solace. In a peculiar way, he treats her tenderly out of this admiration. His complicated feelings toward women underscore that his desires are not merely physical; they are intertwined with his internal struggle against his own insecurities and his need for control.

MIRYOQUB

Miryoqub is a man of contradictions, embodying two distinct personalities throughout the novel. On one hand, he is fiercely ambitious, driven by a relentless desire for profit and personal gain. His enterprising nature and selfish pursuits make him a figure of power behind the scenes, always looking for ways to advance his own interests. On the other hand, beneath this facade of opportunism, Miryoqub is self-reflective and capable of moments of nobility and deep emotion. He wrestles with his conscience, showing that while his external actions are often calculating, there is an inner struggle that reveals a more complex and conflicted character.

Ambitious – Miryoqub is the true mastermind behind Akbarali’s affairs. With 15 years of experience, he has honed his skills in navigating the complexities of power and finance, making himself indispensable. Miryoqub’s intelligence allows him to step in where Akbarali fails, efficiently resolving problems and managing the business. His strategic approach ensures he is always several steps ahead, although his motivation isn’t merely loyalty. Miryoqub’s cunning nature ensures that he personally benefits from every deal, making him a key manipulator in the background of Akbarali’s operations.

Selfish – While Miryoqub is the one who keeps Akbarali’s affairs running smoothly, his actions are driven by self-interest. It remains unclear exactly how much of Akbarali’s wealth ends up in Miryoqub’s hands, but his self-serving nature is undeniable. Even though he resolves all of Akbarali’s issues, it is clear that his ultimate goal is personal gain, making his loyalty questionable and his character morally ambiguous.

Reflective – Miryoqub’s sharp intellect and capacity for self-reflection frequently stir his conscience. His thirst for profit and selfishness clash with his sense of honesty, though the former often prevails. Despite this, Miryoqub is capable of harshly criticizing himself and his actions, especially during moments of deep introspection. For instance, he mercilessly reproaches himself for his affair with Akbarali’s middle wife, Poshshahon, and, in a moment of humility, even considers himself morally lower than Akbarali, whom he ironically calls “honest” by comparison.

Compassionate – The more noble aspects of Miryoqub’s character prevent him from exploiting the girl from the brothel with whom he falls in love. By the end of the novel, after meeting the Jadid activist Sharafiddin, Miryoqub undergoes a significant transformation. His conscientious side triumphs, and he commits himself to following the path of the Jadid reformers, dedicating his efforts to the betterment of the country. From a moral perspective, he experiences purification as well – he marries Maria, rescuing her from moral decline and proving his capacity for redemption.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Colonialism Set against the backdrop of 1915, the events of the novel unfold during a time when the First World War raged across the globe, casting a long shadow over Russia’s colonies. The war’s effects were acutely felt in Turkestan, exacerbating an already challenging political and economic landscape. These tumultuous conditions directly and indirectly shape the fates of the characters in the novel. Most, especially the villagers, struggle with extreme hardship, while the protagonist, Zebi, finds herself effectively sold to a wealthy man. The colonial policies cultivated corruption and cronyism, as the Tsarist government favored local officials who lacked intelligence and independence. Loyalty to the Tsar overshadowed competence. Zebi’s husband, Akbarali, who possesses neither intelligence nor managerial skill, becomes

a *mingboshi* – a municipal official – through the payment of a hefty bribe to Tsarist authorities. In the hands of such individuals, power is wielded not to serve the people, but to fulfill personal desires.

Gender Gender emerges as the central issue in *Night and Day*, where all the main female characters endure varying degrees of male pressure – be it from a father or a husband. Their unhappiness is palpable, as societal rules dictate that women must fully submit to men. The protagonist, Zebi, finds herself stripped of any rights to express her desires or resist. Although she attempts a silent rebellion – pretending to faint to keep her unloved husband at bay – this fleeting defiance quickly gives way to resignation.

In contrast, other female characters in the novel strive to combat the oppression around them. Yet, in the early 20th century, when patriarchal views dominated, their protests often remained hidden. Resistance to male tyranny frequently takes the form of infidelity. For instance, the youngest wife, Sul-tonhon, feeling replaced by Zebi and denied a divorce, seeks revenge by becoming her husband's secretary's mistress. Meanwhile, the middle wife, Poshshahon, harbors a secret love for Akbarali's assistant, Miryoqub.

Entrepreneurs At first glance, the novel seems to center primarily on the challenges faced by women in the early 20th century. However, the characters surrounding the protagonist also carry significant ideological weight, allowing the author to paint a rich and nuanced picture of the harsh realities of that era. The secondary storyline is intricately linked to Zebi through the character of Miryoqub, a representative of the emerging bourgeoisie. Although Zebi never directly encounters him, Miryoqub plays a decisive role in shaping her fate.

Miryoqub embodies the contradictions of capitalism, where personal gain often takes precedence over ethical considerations, yet paradoxically contributes to societal advancement. In this unforgiving system, the weak are frequently sacrificed for success. Resourceful as an entrepreneur, he navigates a bureaucratic landscape that often hinders his ambitions, resorting to bribes and gifts to achieve his goals. As Akbarali's assistant, he manages Akbarali's finances and fulfills his smaller desires in pursuit of his own larger ambitions.

Miryoqub adheres to strict measures to achieve his goals, not hesitating even when they require the sacrifice of others. Initially, he uses money to persuade Zebi's father to marry her off, and later he works to secure Akbarali's inheritance for himself and his lover, Poshshahon, ensuring Zebi is removed from their path. Despite his morally ambiguous actions, the author's sympathy for Miryoqub is palpable, suggesting that the prosperity of society relies on individuals like him. By the end of the novel, Miryoqub undergoes a transformation, experiencing a form of purification that hints at redemption.

Jadids Cho'lpon was deeply committed to the ideals of the Jadids, yet when the novel was written, power had firmly shifted to the Bolsheviks. The Jadids' aspirations for independence clashed with the interests of the new government, which labeled the movement as anti-government, resulting in the arrest and expulsion of many Jadid members. In such a repressive environment, Cho'lpon could not openly express his views, which is why the theme of the Jadids is not fully developed in the novel.

However, the writer subtly weaves Jadid ideas into several dialogues between characters. These conversations emphasize the importance of enlightenment, critique social vices such as polygamy, and support the idea that the wealthy should direct their resources away from luxury and entertainment, focusing instead on education and progress – elements they deemed essential for the nation's development.

Toward the end of the novel, Miryoqub encounters a Jadid figure on a train while traveling to Crimea with Maria, a girl from a brothel. This meeting inspires him with Jadid ideals, marking a moment of personal transformation, particularly in his feelings toward Maria.

Religious beliefs Cho'lpon's attitude toward religion is intricately nuanced. Coming from a religious family and well-versed in religious teachings, he stands apart from some of his younger contemporaries who harshly criticized religion. He recognizes a genuine faith in God that is free from hypocrisy, while opposing dogmatism and condemning the greed of those who exploit faith for personal gain. This critique is vividly illustrated in the characters of Zebi's father, Razzoq-sufi, and his spiritual mentor, Ishan.

Initially, Razzoq-sufi refuses to give Zebi to Akbarali, citing the latter's lack of prayer and indulgence in alcohol as violations of basic Islamic principles. However, when Miryoqub intervenes and bribes Ishan,

Razzoq-sufi finds himself unable to defy his mentor. Ishan justifies Akbarali's behavior by claiming that, as an official, he serves the people, helps the poor, and punishes criminals. He even argues that one day of Akbarali's service is worth a thousand years of prayers from similar Sufis. It is only after Zebi is unjustly accused and punished that Razzoq-sufi experiences a moment of enlightenment.

Through these characters, Cho'lpon portrays the complexity of attitudes toward religion in the early 20th century, a time when traditional values were increasingly under threat.

RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage *Night and Day* unflinchingly portrays the harsh realities faced by women in early 20th-century Turkestan. The novel vividly illustrates how marriage often became a trap, confining women to oppressive and deeply unhappy lives. Zebi's forced marriage to Akbarali, a much older and repugnant man, lays bare the profound inequality that women endured.

While Akbarali's other wives, Poshshahon and Sultonhon, may appear to possess more agency, their attempts at resistance – whether through scheming or secret affairs – ultimately prove futile. Polygamy, accepted as a social norm, only intensifies their suffering, as each wife competes for her husband's favor. Although they occasionally bond over their shared misfortune, they remain imprisoned by a society that values wealth and power over their dignity. In this portrayal, the institution of marriage becomes not a source of love or fulfillment, but rather a tool of control and subjugation.

Sexuality The novel opens with Zebi gripped by fear over her impending marriage, a decision she is powerless to resist. This immediately reveals a society where women are objectified, and their worth tied to fulfilling male desires and bearing children. Her value is inseparably linked to her sexuality and her ability to perform these duties. Fathers, like Zebi's, view their daughters as commodities, where beauty and desirability dictate their "price" in marriage arrangements. Whether it's Akbarali's wives or the brothel girl whom Miryoqub falls for, the women in this society are all ensnared by these rigid roles.