

# Jadidism In Turkestan In The Early Twentieth Century

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**Abstract:** This article examines Jadidism as a cultural, educational, and social reform movement of the Muslim intelligentsia in Turkestan in the early twentieth century. The study explores the historical prerequisites for the emergence of Jadidism, its ideological foundations, and its principal areas of activity, including educational reform, the development of the periodical press, and the formation of a new cultural environment. Particular attention is paid to the leading figures of the Jadid movement and their contribution to the modernization of Muslim society, as well as to the resistance they encountered from traditionalist religious circles and the colonial administration of the Russian Empire. The article highlights the role of Jadidism in shaping national consciousness among the peoples of Turkestan and assesses its significance for subsequent socio-political and cultural transformations in the region. It is argued that Jadidism constituted a crucial stage in the cultural modernization of Central Asia and laid the foundations for the emergence of a modern national intelligentsia in the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Jadidism; Turkestan; early twentieth century; Muslim intelligentsia; educational reform; enlightenment; periodical press; national consciousness; modernization; Central Asia.

**Introduction:** Jadidism constituted a reformist current within the social and cultural life of the Muslim communities of the Russian Empire, emerging at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The movement was primarily oriented toward the modernization of traditional educational practices and the renewal of social thought. The term Jadidism originates from the Arabic phrase *usul-i jadid*, literally “new method,” and was initially applied to denote educational institutions that implemented reformed curricula and innovative pedagogical approaches.

In Turkestan, Jadidism emerged as a distinct phenomenon, combining educational reform, the development of national consciousness, and social ideas, while simultaneously challenging both the tsarist administration and traditional religious circles. As a cultural and educational movement spanning the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jadidism reflected the profound transformations occurring within Muslim societies of the Russian Empire. Due to Turkestan’s geographic location, ethnic diversity, and complex political conditions, the movement assumed unique characteristics, exerting a significant influence on the educational system, the development of the press, the formation of cultural identity, and the

emergence of a modern national intelligentsia.

The relevance of studying Jadidism in Turkestan lies in the need to reassess the historical role of educational and cultural reform movements within the broader context of social and cultural modernization, as well as their contribution to the formation of modern society. The historiography of the issue encompasses works by Russian, Uzbek, and foreign scholars who have analyzed both the general principles of Jadidism and its regional manifestations. Nevertheless, the majority of studies tend to focus on specific aspects, such as educational reform or the press, while comprehensive regional analyses remain fragmented.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Turkestan was undergoing profound socio-political transformations resulting from its incorporation into the Russian Empire and the implementation of a colonial model of governance, which significantly influenced the internal development of the local Muslim society. Muslim communities were largely organized around madrasas and traditional religious institutions, which played a crucial role in preserving cultural values but were unable to respond effectively to the challenges of modernization and the growing demand for secular literacy. This social and educational

void created favorable conditions for the emergence of the Jadid movement—reformers who sought to combine Islamic values with modern educational practices.

The ideology of Jadidism was grounded in the perceived necessity of renewing the Muslim ummah through the modernization of education, culture, and social life. Jadids advocated for a comprehensive reform of the educational system, rejecting the exclusive reliance on the classical madrasa as outdated and promoting the inclusion of secular subjects such as arithmetic, history, and geography, as well as innovative pedagogical methods, including instruction in the native language rather than solely in Arabic. Their critique of the traditional religious system was not anti-religious; on the contrary, they sought to synthesize faith and modern science, maintaining that without educational renewal, society would be condemned to stagnation.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a period of profound transformation in the socio-political and cultural life of the Muslim regions of the Russian Empire. Among the most significant intellectual and cultural phenomena of this era was the Jadid movement, which sought to reform traditional Muslim society through enlightenment, educational renewal, and the introduction of modern knowledge. In Turkestan, Jadidism assumed particular importance, developing within the context of the Russian Empire's colonial policies, the region's socio-economic underdevelopment, and the sharp tensions between traditionalism and modernization.

The significance of studying Jadidism in Turkestan is determined by the need for a comprehensive understanding of the processes of cultural modernization in Central Asia and the role of the Muslim intelligentsia in the formation of national consciousness. The Jadids emerged as the first bearers of societal reform ideas, which subsequently influenced the development of education, the press, literature, and public thought throughout the region.

The aim of this article is to analyze the emergence, ideology, and activities of the Jadid movement in Turkestan in the early twentieth century, as well as to assess its historical significance. The study employs historical-comparative, problem-chronological, and analytical methods, drawing on materials from the periodical press, archival sources, and the works of both domestic and foreign scholars.

Following the incorporation of Turkestan into the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century, the region came under colonial administration. The economic policies of the tsarist

authorities were primarily oriented toward the exploitation of natural and labor resources, which contributed to the persistence of social inequality and hindered the development of the local population. The majority of the Muslim society remained engaged in traditional forms of economic activity, while literacy levels were extremely low.

The educational system in Turkestan relied predominantly on traditional maktab and madrasas, where the curriculum focused on religious disciplines and did not provide for the systematic study of secular sciences, thereby limiting graduates' opportunities for social adaptation. While these institutions played a crucial role in preserving Islamic culture, they did not prepare specialists capable of responding to new social and economic realities. The absence of instruction in the natural sciences, geography, history, and mathematics rendered madrasa graduates largely uncompetitive in an increasingly modernizing world.

At the same time, contacts between the Muslim population of Turkestan and other regions of the Russian Empire, as well as the broader Muslim East, intensified. Through trade, pilgrimage, and education in cities such as Kazan, Istanbul, and Cairo, members of the local intelligentsia became acquainted with ideas of reform and modernization, creating the intellectual foundation for the emergence of the Jadid movement.

The core of Jadidist ideology was the conviction that the Muslim society could be renewed without abandoning its religious values. Members of the Jadid movement believed that Islamic tradition could be harmoniously integrated with the achievements of science and technological progress, and that the social backwardness of Muslim communities was primarily the result of dogmatism and resistance to reform. They advocated rational thinking, the development of a critical approach to knowledge, and the active participation of Muslims in public life.

In Turkestan, Jadidism developed under the influence of the ideas of the Crimean Tatar educator Ismail Gasprinski, who advocated the creation of a unified Turkic cultural space and the modernization of education. His newspaper, *Tercüman*, became a significant platform for disseminating reformist ideas among the Turkestani intelligentsia.

One of the key areas of Jadid activity in Turkestan was the reform of the educational system. Unlike traditional maktab, Jadid schools employed the phonetic method of literacy instruction, which significantly accelerated the process of learning to read and write. Instruction was conducted in the students' native languages, while Arabic was taught as a separate subject.

The curricula of Jadid schools included secular subjects such as arithmetic, geography, history, and the basics of the natural sciences. This approach contributed to the development of a broader worldview among students and prepared them for active participation in contemporary public life. Particular emphasis was placed on cultivating a sense of responsibility for the welfare of society and the nation.

Despite resistance from conservative religious circles, the number of Jadid schools in Turkestan gradually increased. These institutions became centers for the formation of a new intelligentsia, which later played a significant role in the cultural and political development of the region.

A crucial instrument for disseminating the ideas of Jadidism was the periodical press. At the beginning of the twentieth century, newspapers and journals began to be published in Turkic languages throughout Turkestan, addressing issues such as education, culture, the status of women, and social progress. The Jadids' journalism was characterized by a critical stance toward societal backwardness and by calls for the renewal of society.

These printed publications played a key role in shaping public opinion and uniting supporters of reformist ideas. Through the press, the Jadids not only informed readers about events in the wider world but also fostered a new understanding of the role of the individual and society in the historical process.

The development of Jadidism in Turkestan was closely associated with the activities of several prominent members of the Muslim intelligentsia, who combined pedagogical, journalistic, and social engagement. These figures played a pivotal role in disseminating reformist ideas and shaping a new cultural landscape in the region.

One of the most significant figures of Turkestani Jadidism was Mahmudkhodja Behbudi—a prominent educator, journalist, and playwright. He regarded education as the primary instrument for social renewal and actively advocated for the reform of schools and madrasas. In his writings, Behbudi emphasized the necessity of studying secular sciences and the native language, while also criticizing the dogmatism of religious authorities [1, p. 112].

Abdulla Avloni, an educator and public figure, played a significant role in the development of Jadid pedagogy. His works on education and morality became a methodological foundation for the new schools. Avloni maintained that education should cultivate not only knowledge but also the civic responsibility of the individual [2, p. 87].

Among other notable figures of the movement was Munavvar-Qari Abdurashidkhanov, who was actively involved in organizing Jadid schools and in publishing activities. He advocated the introduction of new textbooks and the development of national culture, viewing education as the cornerstone of social progress [3, p. 54].

The activities of these and other Jadids contributed to the formation of a new intellectual elite in Turkestan, oriented toward the synthesis of traditional Islamic values and the achievements of modern civilization.

Despite their significant contribution to the cultural development of the region, Jadidism faced considerable opposition from both traditionalist circles and the colonial administration. Conservative theologians and members of the clergy perceived the Jadids as a threat to the established religious order and accused them of departing from Islamic traditions.

The primary focus of criticism from traditionalist circles was the introduction of secular subjects and new teaching methods, which, in their view, undermined the authority of religious knowledge. In several cases, this led to the closure of Jadid schools, persecution of teachers, and bans on the publication of educational materials [4, p. 203].

Equally significant was the pressure exerted by the authorities of the Russian Empire. The colonial administration regarded the activities of the Jadids with suspicion, perceiving their educational initiatives as a potential threat to political stability. Censorship, administrative restrictions, and the arrest of activists considerably complicated the operations of Jadid organizations and their publications [5, p. 146].

Nevertheless, despite considerable resistance, the Jadid movement continued to develop, demonstrating its profound social relevance and importance for the Muslim society of Turkestan.

One of the most significant outcomes of the Jadids' activities was the formation of national consciousness among the peoples of Turkestan. Through educational reform, the development of literature, and the press, the Jadids fostered an awareness of cultural and linguistic commonality, as well as the necessity for independent historical development.

Particular importance was attached to the use of the native language in both education and journalism. This not only enhanced access to education but also reinforced a sense of national identity. The Jadids regarded language as a key element of culture and a means of societal consolidation [6, p. 91].

In the cultural sphere, Jadidism manifested itself in the development of national dramaturgy, poetry, and

journalism. Theatre and literature became instruments of social critique and enlightenment, reflecting issues such as inequality, ignorance, and the need for reform. Thus, Jadidism laid the groundwork for subsequent national liberation and cultural movements of the twentieth century.

Jadidism in early twentieth-century Turkestan represented a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, playing a key role in the cultural and intellectual modernization of the region. Initially emerging as an educational reform, it gradually evolved into a broad social movement encompassing the spheres of culture, the press, and public thought.

The activities of the Jadids contributed to the formation of a new intelligentsia, the rise of literacy levels, and the development of national consciousness. Despite opposition from traditionalist circles and the colonial authorities, Jadidism exerted a long-term influence on the historical development of Turkestan.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the analysis of the Jadid movement provides a broader understanding of the mechanisms of cultural and social transformation in the Muslim societies of Central Asia and allows for a renewed assessment of the contribution of educational and reformist initiatives to the historical development of the region.

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