

## THE IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL VISION OF JADID INTELLECTUALS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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**Abstract:** This article explores the ideological foundations and political perspectives of the **Jadid intellectual movement** that emerged in Central Asia under Russian colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As reformist thinkers, the Jadids sought to modernize society through education, revive Islamic values in a rational framework, and promote national identity. While initially focused on cultural and pedagogical reform, many Jadids eventually adopted political positions calling for autonomy, constitutionalism, and national sovereignty. The article analyzes their evolving thought and its long-term impact on Central Asian identity, modernization, and political aspirations.

**Keywords:** Jadidism, political thought, ideology, reform, nationalism, autonomy, Central Asia, Russian colonialism.

The **Jadid movement** emerged in the context of Russian imperial expansion into Turkestan, where local Muslim populations were subjected to foreign control, cultural suppression, and educational stagnation. In response, a new generation of reform-minded intellectuals arose, committed to reviving their societies through modern knowledge, critical reasoning, and a renewed sense of Islamic and national identity.

The emergence of the Jadid movement should be understood not only as a cultural phenomenon but also as a reaction to the sociopolitical disintegration faced by the Muslim communities of Central Asia under Russian imperialism. The Tsarist regime's policies of administrative centralization, linguistic Russification, and economic exploitation weakened traditional power structures and alienated the local population from their religious and cultural institutions.

In this context, Jadid intellectuals perceived themselves as **moral guardians and civilizational reformers**. Their task was not simply to adapt to the modern world but to **reshape society from within**, by drawing on the ethical foundations of Islam and combining them with modern science, literature, and civic ideals. They rejected fatalism and passivity, calling instead for **active engagement**, social consciousness, and national revival.

Moreover, the Jadid project was part of a larger pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic intellectual awakening that stretched from Istanbul to Bukhara, from Cairo to Kazan. While rooted in the local realities of Turkestan, their thought reflected global currents of Muslim reformism and anti-colonial resistance. The ideological depth of their work—especially in political theory, national consciousness, and educational reform—makes them key architects of modern Central Asian identity.

The Jadids—figures such as **Mahmudkhuja Behbudi**, **Abdulla Avloniy**, **Abdurauf Fitrat**, and **Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhanov**—advocated not only educational reforms but also broader **sociopolitical change**. This paper explores the **ideological underpinnings** and **political outlook** of these intellectuals as they moved from cultural reform to demands for national self-determination.

This study draws on:

- **Textual analysis** of Jadid writings: newspapers, plays, essays, schoolbooks, and political manifestos.
- **Historical contextualization** within the frameworks of Russian colonial policy and Muslim reform movements globally.
- **Comparative approach**: placing Jadid thought alongside contemporaneous reform movements in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and South Asia.
- **Postcolonial theoretical lens**: understanding Jadidism as a form of anti-colonial resistance.

Primary sources include *Taraqqiy*, *Shuhrat*, *Sadoi Turkiston*, and published works of Jadid figures. Secondary sources include academic studies by Adeeb Khalid, Edward Allworth, and regional historians.

The ideological and political worldview of Jadid intellectuals can be categorized as follows:

#### *Educational Modernization as Ideological Core*

- Jadids believed that ignorance and superstition were the main causes of societal decline.
- They introduced “**usuli jadid**” (**new method**) schools emphasizing critical thinking, science, and the native language.
- Education was seen as the path to both **spiritual renewal** and **political awareness**.

#### *Rational Islam and Moral Reform*

- While loyal to Islamic traditions, Jadids opposed fanaticism and backward religious practices.
- They promoted **ijtihad** (independent reasoning) and aligned Islamic values with modernity and progress.
- Moral education and social ethics were central themes in their curricula and literature.

#### *Rise of Political Consciousness*

- Initially non-political, the Jadid movement evolved into a **national awakening** force.
- By the 1910s, many Jadids demanded **autonomy within the Russian Empire**,

**representation in government, and cultural rights.**

- The **Kokand Autonomy** (1917–1918) was the culmination of this political vision, though it was short-lived.

#### *Nationalism and Anti-Colonial Sentiment*

- Jadids redefined “**millat**” (**nation**) in cultural, linguistic, and political terms.
- Their writings fostered national identity among Uzbeks, Tajiks, and other Central Asian peoples.
- Resistance to Russification and Soviet collectivism later sharpened their nationalist rhetoric.

The ideological evolution of the Jadid movement reveals a **strategic shift** from cultural to political reform. Initially cautious under Tsarist censorship, Jadids focused on **education as resistance**. However, the chaos following the 1917 Russian Revolution allowed them to articulate bolder political ambitions.

Their unique approach combined **Islamic reformism, nationalism, and modern pedagogy**, making them one of the most influential intellectual movements in Central Asian history. Unlike radical revolutionaries, Jadids sought **gradual transformation** through societal enlightenment, press freedom, and civic responsibility.

Their legacy is especially visible in post-Soviet nation-building, where former Soviet republics, such as Uzbekistan, now honor Jadid thinkers as **founding fathers of national revival**. Their call for moral integrity, critical education, and political autonomy remains relevant amid modern debates on identity, globalization, and cultural continuity.

The Jadid political vision evolved in **phases**, influenced by both external events and internal debates. Initially cautious under the autocratic pressures of the Russian Empire, Jadid thinkers prioritized education and moral improvement over direct political confrontation. However, the collapse of the Romanov dynasty in 1917 opened political space for **bolder ambitions**. During this revolutionary period, Jadids called for **autonomous governance, Muslim representation, and local control over education and legal institutions**.

Their advocacy for **constitutionalism, federalism, and civil rights** reveals a sophisticated understanding of modern political ideas. Far from being reactionary or nostalgic traditionalists, Jadids saw modern political institutions as compatible with Islamic and Turkic values. For example, Fitrat argued that “**shura**” (**consultation**) in Islam was a precedent for **parliamentary democracy**, while Behbudi saw the **press and public debate** as tools for awakening the masses.

Nevertheless, ideological differences also emerged within the Jadid ranks. Some, like Behbudi, remained cautious about full political independence, while others, such as Chokaev and Fitrat, became increasingly radicalized, supporting full sovereignty and integration with broader pan-

Turkic or pan-Islamic political movements. These tensions reflected the complex and rapidly changing conditions in Central Asia, where Jadids had to navigate between **colonial domination**, **Bolshevik ideology**, and **traditionalist opposition**.

Tragically, the rise of Soviet power led to the **brutal suppression** of the Jadid movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Accused of nationalism, pan-Turkism, and counter-revolutionary activity, many leading Jadids were executed or imprisoned during Stalin's purges. Despite this repression, their writings and ideas survived underground and later resurfaced in the post-Soviet period, where they were reinterpreted as **symbols of intellectual courage and national dignity**.

The Jadid intellectuals of Central Asia were pioneers of a **multifaceted ideological project**—a vision that merged education, spirituality, and political agency. Their movement reflected the aspirations of a colonized people seeking dignity through knowledge, morality, and self-determination.

Although many Jadids were tragically repressed during Stalinist purges, their thought laid the foundation for future struggles for independence and modern statehood. Today, their political and ideological legacy continues to inspire educational reform, national pride, and cultural renaissance in the region.

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