THE PHILOSOPHICAL ESSENCE OF JADID ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. This paper explores the philosophical essence of the Enlightenment ideas developed by the Jadids of Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that Jadidism was not only a socio-political or educational movement but also a coherent system of philosophical views on the human being, knowledge, morality, society and history. The study reconstructs the intellectual sources of Jadid thought in classical Eastern philosophy, Maturidi theology and Sufi ethics, and identifies its key categories – the human being, reason, progress, nation, freedom and morality – on the basis of the works of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Abdulla Avloni and Abdurauf Fitrat. A comparative analysis with the European Enlightenment and Muslim reformism reveals the distinctive character of the Jadid project, which sought to harmonize reason and faith, individual development and social responsibility, national identity and universal values.

Keywords: Jadidism, Enlightenment, philosophy, anthropology, epistemology, reason, progress, nation, freedom, morality, Central Asia.

Introduction. The Jadid movement is usually studied as a phenomenon of cultural, educational and political history. However, behind the practical activities of the Jadids – the opening of schools, the publication of newspapers and the staging of plays – there was a deep philosophical vision of the human being and society. Revealing this vision allows us to understand Jadidism as an original stage in the development of Central Asian philosophical thought rather than as a mere borrowing of foreign ideas.

Historiography has accumulated a substantial body of research on the Jadids. Western scholars, notably Adeeb Khalid and Edward Allworth, have analyzed the movement in the context of cultural reform and national identity, while Uzbek researchers, including Begali Qosimov, have reconstructed the biographies and works of the Enlighteners. At the same time, a systematic philosophical analysis of Jadid thought – its anthropology, epistemology, ethics and philosophy of history – remains an open research task. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to filling this gap.

Methodology. The study is based on the historical-philosophical method, the principle of the unity of the historical and the logical, and comparative analysis. Methodologically, it draws on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, according to which tradition is not a dead past but a living "effective history" that is continually reinterpreted from the horizon of the present [4]. This approach makes it possible to read Jadid texts both in their historical context and in dialogue with contemporary philosophical questions.

Intellectual sources of Jadid thought. Jadid philosophy grew out of several intellectual traditions. The first was classical Eastern philosophy, above all the teaching of al-Farabi, who linked human happiness with knowledge, virtue and life in a just society. The second was the rational theology of the Maturidi school, founded in Samarqand, which recognized human reason as a legitimate source of knowledge capable of distinguishing good from evil. The third was Sufi ethics, especially the Naqshbandi tradition of Bukhara, which valued both inner spiritual discipline and active participation in worldly life. Finally, the memory of the region's medieval scientific flourishing served the Jadids as proof that Islam and science are compatible. These sources were complemented by ideas coming from the Ottoman Empire, the Volga-Ural region and Europe, which the Jadids reinterpreted creatively.

Philosophical anthropology. At the centre of Jadid philosophy stands the human being, understood as a creature capable of perfecting himself through

knowledge and moral effort. This view continues the classical Eastern ideal of the perfect human being (insan-i kamil). Abdulla Avloni systematized this approach in his ethical work "Turkiy guliston yoxud axloq", classifying human qualities into virtues and vices and stressing that a person's worth is determined by upbringing and moral conduct rather than by origin or wealth [8]. For Avloni, the human being is not a fixed given but a project that is realized through education, which is why he regarded upbringing as a matter of "life or death" for the nation.

Fitrat developed this anthropology in a more dynamic direction. In "Rahbari najot" he considered the duties of the human being towards his body, his soul, his family and society, thereby presenting human existence as a hierarchy of interrelated responsibilities [9]. In the treatise "Oila" he paid particular attention to the family as the first environment in which personality is formed and emphasized the need to respect women and to educate children. Thus, Jadid anthropology combined the ideas of human perfectibility, moral responsibility and social embeddedness.

Epistemology: reason and the critique of blind imitation. A central philosophical idea of the Jadids was the rehabilitation of reason. Fitrat, in "Munozara" and "Rahbari najot", sharply criticized blind imitation (taqlid), superstition and dogmatism, and argued that true religion calls on people to think, to work and to acquire knowledge [9]. This position is close to Immanuel Kant's famous call to "have the courage to use your own understanding" [2]. Yet, unlike much of the European Enlightenment, the Jadids did not oppose reason to faith; instead, they sought to purify religious life from superstition through reason, relying on the internal Islamic concept of independent reasoning (ijtihad).

This feature acquires particular significance in light of the critique of the Enlightenment formulated by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who showed that reason detached from moral ends may turn into an instrument of domination [4]. The Jadids, by contrast, never separated knowledge from morality: for them, the purpose of

reason was the moral and social improvement of the human being. In this respect, their model of enlightenment may be described as ethically oriented rationality.

The Jadids developed a distinctive philosophy of history based on the opposition between decline and renewal. They interpreted the backwardness of their society as the result of ignorance and the neglect of knowledge, and they regarded progress (taraqqiy) as achievable through education, the press and social reform. History, in their view, was not predetermined: the future of the nation depended on the conscious efforts of its members [12]. This activist understanding of history is comparable to the views of Middle Eastern reformers such as Muhammad Abduh, who also linked the revival of Muslim societies with intellectual renewal [13].

The concept of the nation (millat) occupied a key place in Jadid social philosophy. Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and his associates understood the nation as a community of shared language, culture and destiny, whose survival required educated and responsible citizens. The press played a decisive role in shaping this new national consciousness, creating what Benedict Anderson called an “imagined community” of readers [6]. In Behbudi’s articles and in his drama “Padarkush”, ignorance appears not merely as a personal failing but as a social danger that destroys families and communities.

The ideas of freedom and justice were closely connected with the concept of the nation. For the Jadids, freedom meant above all the liberation of the mind from ignorance and superstition, and then the liberation of society from injustice and arbitrary rule. In the later period of the movement, especially after 1917, these ideas acquired an openly political character and were associated with demands for autonomy and self-government [5].

The ethical dimension permeates all aspects of Jadid thought. Avloni’s classification of virtues and vices, Fitrat’s doctrine of duties and Behbudi’s moral dramaturgy all proceed from the conviction that knowledge has value only when it

serves the good. Patience, diligence, honesty, love for the homeland and readiness to serve the community were regarded as the most important qualities of an enlightened person [3]. This understanding of morality as the foundation of enlightenment distinguishes the Jadid project and makes it relevant for contemporary debates on the ethical dimensions of education and modernization.

A comparison of the Jadid and European Enlightenments reveals both common features and fundamental differences. Both movements affirmed the authority of reason, opposed ignorance and superstition, regarded education as the main instrument of social improvement and believed in the possibility of progress. Both also relied on the printed word as a means of forming public opinion [10]. In this sense, the Jadids may legitimately be regarded as representatives of an Enlightenment tradition.

The differences, however, are no less significant. First, a considerable part of the European Enlightenment developed in opposition to ecclesiastical authority, whereas the Jadids sought to renew religious life from within, relying on the Islamic concepts of knowledge (‘ilm) and independent reasoning (ijtihad). Second, the European Enlightenment placed the autonomous individual at the centre, while the Jadids always considered the individual in connection with the family and the nation. Third, the Jadid Enlightenment developed under colonial conditions, so the ideas of knowledge and progress were inseparable from the task of national self-preservation [7]. These differences show that Enlightenment is not a single European model exported to other regions, but a universal aspiration of human thought that takes different forms in different cultural contexts.

From this perspective, the Jadid experience contributes to a broader philosophical discussion about the plurality of paths to modernity. It demonstrates that a society can modernize while preserving its spiritual identity, and that rationality and tradition need not be mutually exclusive. This conclusion has theoretical value for

comparative philosophy and practical value for societies seeking to combine modernization with the preservation of their cultural heritage.

The Jadids did not express their philosophical ideas only in treatises; they widely used literature, poetry and drama. Behbudi's "Padarkush", Fitrat's dramas and the poetry of the Enlighteners transformed abstract ideas about knowledge, morality and the nation into vivid images accessible to a broad audience. Behbudi described theatre as an "ibratxona", a house of instruction, which shows that for the Jadids art had an educational and moral function [8]. In this sense, Jadid aesthetics was closely connected with ethics: beauty was valued insofar as it served the awakening of conscience and reason.

The question of language also acquired philosophical significance. The Jadids regarded the native language as the bearer of national culture and the main instrument of thought. Fitrat devoted considerable attention to the purification and development of the Turkic literary language, while Behbudi argued that, alongside their native language, young people should master other languages in order to participate in the intellectual life of the world [9]. Language was thus understood as the link between national identity and openness to universal knowledge.

From the standpoint of philosophical hermeneutics, the Jadid legacy is not a closed chapter of the past but a living tradition that enters into dialogue with the questions of the present [14]. In contemporary Uzbekistan, where reforms in education, culture and the religious sphere are being carried out, the Jadid synthesis of reason and faith, national identity and openness to the world provides a valuable conceptual model. In particular, the Jadid idea that ignorance is the main source of social evil, and that enlightenment is the most effective means of overcoming it, retains its significance in the struggle against religious extremism and in the education of young people in the spirit of tolerance and critical thinking [15].

At the same time, a responsible interpretation of this heritage requires avoiding two extremes: reducing it to a set of historical facts stored in museums, and mechanically adapting it to current ideological needs. A genuinely philosophical reading seeks to preserve the essence of Jadid ideas – their humanism, rationality and ethical orientation – while creatively applying them to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion. The analysis shows that the philosophical essence of Jadid Enlightenment ideas lies in a synthesis of several principles: the perfectibility of the human being, the authority of reason, the unity of knowledge and morality, the idea of progress, and the responsibility of the individual towards society. Rooted in classical Eastern philosophy, Maturidi theology and Sufi ethics, and open to the intellectual achievements of other civilizations, this synthesis distinguishes Jadidism from both traditional scholasticism and the secular strand of the European Enlightenment. The Jadid legacy therefore represents an original contribution to the history of philosophy and an important intellectual resource for the spiritual renewal of contemporary Uzbekistan.

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