

EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL MODERNITY

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Abstract: The Jadid movement, which arose among Muslim communities in the Russian Empire during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, sought to overcome social and cultural stagnation through reform. At the core of this movement was a commitment to education, viewed as the primary means to enhance literacy, critical reasoning, and social progress. This article explores the structure and methods of Jadid schooling, situating these reforms within their historical context and assessing their outcomes and societal impact. The analysis reveals that Jadid educational initiatives were crucial in forming a modern Muslim intelligentsia capable of responding to the challenges of the modern era.

Keywords: Jadidism, Jadids, education reform, Muslim communities, literacy, social modernization, Central Asia, Russian Empire

Introduction. For centuries, education was a central institution in Muslim societies, shaping religious practice, social norms, and cultural continuity. Traditional madrasas focused mainly on religious instruction, emphasizing memorization of texts and moral training. By the nineteenth century, however, this system increasingly failed to address the needs of society. Students often spent years memorizing religious texts without understanding their content, while subjects such as mathematics, geography, and natural science were largely absent.

The integration of Muslim regions into the Russian Empire introduced new political, economic, and cultural challenges. Colonial administration, technological developments, and contact with European societies highlighted the limitations of traditional education. Muslim intellectuals recognized that the old system could not prepare young people for modern social and economic life. In response, the Jadid movement emerged as a reformist project aiming to modernize education and society.

The concept of *usul al-jadid* ("new method") originally referred to phonetic literacy instruction but evolved into a comprehensive educational approach. Jadid reformers aimed to combine religious knowledge with secular subjects, modern teaching techniques, and moral education. This article investigates the structure, content, and impact of Jadid education, addressing the question: how did the Jadids' educational system differ from traditional models, and what effect did it have on Muslim society?

Historical Context and Limitations of Traditional Education. Jadid reformers observed that traditional madrasa education relied heavily on rote memorization and limited practical knowledge. Students often spent years reading texts without developing analytical skills or understanding contemporary social realities. Subjects essential for engagement in modern society, such as mathematics, geography, history, and natural sciences, were largely ignored.

The stagnation of traditional education contributed to broader social and economic disadvantages. Muslim communities were unable to compete with emerging European-influenced societies in areas such as trade, administration, and technology. This realization became a central motivation for educational reform among the Jadids.

Principles of Jadid Education. Jadid education emphasized understanding over memorization. Learning was intended to develop reasoning, analytical thinking, and moral responsibility. Religious education remained central but was complemented with secular knowledge, reflecting the reformers' belief in the compatibility of Islam with science and

progress. Schools were designed to serve the broader community by producing individuals capable of contributing to social modernization. Education was seen as a public good, essential for cultural renewal and the development of a competent and morally responsible citizenry.

Curriculum Reform. The curriculum of Jadid schools represented a significant departure from traditional models. In addition to religious instruction, schools taught reading and writing using phonetic methods, arithmetic, geography, history, and natural science. Instruction increasingly took place in local languages, while Arabic remained part of religious education.

This approach improved accessibility, comprehension, and practical knowledge, preparing students to engage with both their cultural heritage and contemporary society.

Teaching Methods and Organization. Jadid schools introduced structured classroom settings, printed textbooks, lesson plans, and the use of blackboards. Teachers encouraged comprehension and discussion rather than rote repetition. These innovations shortened the time required for basic literacy and made education more engaging for students.

The focus on effective teaching methods, organized classrooms, and trained teachers marked a substantial modernization of the educational process.

Formation of a Modern Intelligentsia. Graduates of Jadid schools often became teachers, writers, journalists, and social activists. By spreading reformist ideas, they contributed to cultural and social modernization. The new educational system thus created a socially aware, critically thinking elite capable of leading community development.

Discussion. Jadid education was a systemic reform, challenging traditional pedagogical methods and redefining the social purpose of schooling. Schools became spaces not only for knowledge transmission but also for cultivating civic awareness, intellectual independence, and social responsibility.

Despite opposition from conservative religious authorities and suspicion from colonial administrations, Jadid schools expanded in urban areas and influenced cultural life beyond education. By integrating religious and secular knowledge, the Jadids provided a model for modern Muslim identity that preserved tradition while fostering engagement with contemporary society.

The success of Jadid schools highlights the transformative potential of education when aligned with social reform. It also illustrates the challenges of balancing cultural preservation with modernization in societies undergoing rapid change.

Conclusion. The Jadids' educational system was instrumental in modernizing Muslim communities within the Russian Empire. By broadening curricula, introducing progressive teaching methods, and emphasizing comprehension and critical thinking, Jadid reformers transformed traditional schools into engines of social progress. This movement nurtured a new generation of intellectuals capable of navigating contemporary social, political, and cultural challenges, highlighting education's transformative potential. Jadidism's approach to education serves as a historical illustration of how reform-minded schooling can promote intellectual, social, and cultural advancement while maintaining strong ties to tradition.

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