



## **DEVOTEES ON THE PATH OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND FREEDOM**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the courageous struggle of Central Asian intellectuals and reformers who dedicated their lives to preserving national identity and attaining political freedom during the colonial rule of the Russian Empire and early Soviet regime. Focusing on the Jadid movement and the wider context of national awakening, the paper discusses how these devoted individuals combined educational, cultural, and political strategies in their fight for dignity and independence. Their legacy remains vital in the shaping of modern Uzbek and Central Asian national consciousness.

**Keywords:** national pride, freedom, Jadidism, resistance, Turkestan, colonialism, identity.

Throughout history, the defense of national pride and the pursuit of freedom have united peoples under foreign domination. In Central Asia, particularly in Turkestan, the late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by increasing cultural and political repression by the Russian Empire. As indigenous identity was threatened, a new generation of thinkers, educators, writers, and political figures emerged. They became known not merely as intellectuals, but as **devotees**—selfless individuals committed to the liberation and dignity of their people.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were a time of profound political and cultural upheaval in Central Asia. The incorporation of Turkestan into the Russian Empire not only dismantled indigenous political systems but also disrupted centuries-old Islamic educational and judicial institutions. In their place, the colonial administration imposed new structures aimed at pacifying and assimilating the population.

In this context, the emergence of a reformist intelligentsia was both a response to repression and a manifestation of national revival. These reformers, known as the Jadids, believed that only through enlightenment, modern education, and cultural renewal could their people regain agency and dignity. Their mission was not only pedagogical but profoundly political: to build a society that could resist domination not with weapons, but with knowledge, unity, and pride in its cultural heritage.

The struggle of these individuals was rooted in deep historical consciousness and a vision for a free future. They drew inspiration from both Islamic tradition and modernist currents in the Muslim world, especially the Ottoman Empire and the reformist press in Crimea. This fusion of heritage and innovation made their movement uniquely adaptive and influential.

By framing education, literature, and political activism as forms of national defense, these patriots laid the intellectual and moral foundation for future independence movements. Their efforts symbolized a collective assertion: that a colonized people, however silenced, could still shape their destiny.

This article aims to examine the contributions and sacrifices of these devoted figures, particularly within the context of the Jadid reformist movement, the 1917 Turkestan Autonomy, and the broader struggle against imperial subjugation. Their actions exemplify how national pride and the desire for freedom can inspire generations to resist, reform, and rebuild.

The research employs a multidisciplinary approach combining:

**Historical analysis:** examining the colonial policies of the Russian Empire and their effects on Central Asian societies.

**Biographical method:** analyzing the lives and works of key figures such as Mahmudkhuja Behbudi, Abdurauf Fitrat, Abdulla Avloniy, and Fayzulla Khojayev.

**Textual analysis:** studying newspaper articles, speeches, and literary texts produced by reformers.

**Postcolonial theory:** interpreting the resistance as part of broader anti-colonial movements.

Primary sources include Jadid publications such as *Taraqiy*, *Sadoi Turkiston*, and literary plays, alongside modern historiographical works on colonialism and national identity in Central Asia.

The study reveals several significant aspects of the role played by these devotees:

- **Educational Reform as Resistance:** The Jadids viewed modern education as a tool for awakening national consciousness. By establishing new-method schools and writing textbooks in the native language, they resisted Russification and cultural erasure.
- **Cultural Revival and Literary Activism:** Through plays, essays, and poetry, figures like Behbudi and Fitrat addressed issues of identity, backwardness, and the need for unity and self-determination.
- **Political Engagement and the Kokand Autonomy:** In 1917, reformist leaders declared the Turkestan Autonomy in Kokand, establishing a short-lived but symbolic government representing national will.
- **Martyrdom and Repression:** The Soviet regime soon branded many of these intellectuals as enemies of the state. By the 1930s, most were executed or exiled. Their fates reflect the brutal cost of resisting imperial ideologies.
- **Enduring Legacy:** Despite their tragic ends, these figures remain symbols of courage, integrity, and patriotism in Uzbekistan's national history.

The concept of national pride in the Central Asian context was not merely emotional—it was strategic. For the Jadids and their contemporaries, asserting cultural identity was an act of resistance. Their vision was clear: only an educated, self-aware nation could resist colonization and chart its own future.

While some prioritized enlightenment through literature and school reform, others engaged directly in politics, seeking to institutionalize freedom. Their differences in methods did not divide them; instead, they complemented a broader liberation movement rooted in sacrifice and idealism.

Their commitment was not abstract. Most of them knew that their ideas would bring persecution. Yet they persisted, not for personal gain but for collective dignity. Such devotion has become a model for later generations navigating independence, cultural preservation, and nation-building.

The self-sacrificing nature of these reformers elevates them beyond the status of ordinary educators or politicians. Their vision of a dignified, self-reliant, and culturally rich society was not limited to the elite; it aimed to uplift the entire nation. They viewed every literate child, every informed citizen, as a step toward freedom.

Importantly, the Jadids did not reject religion or tradition — they reinterpreted it in the context of modern needs. They believed Islam, far from being an obstacle, could serve as a source of renewal and unity when aligned with rationalism, science, and ethical progress. Their writings frequently blended Quranic values with calls for civic responsibility, women's education, and political representation.

However, their peaceful approach did not shield them from persecution. As the Soviet regime consolidated power, these thinkers were deemed threats to ideological conformity. The very qualities that made them leaders — independent thinking, mass influence, and commitment to national identity — became grounds for repression.

Despite this, the long-term impact of their work cannot be overstated. The post-independence cultural policies of Uzbekistan and neighboring countries often invoke the legacy of Jadid thinkers. Their names are associated with integrity, reform, and patriotism. In contemporary education, media, and public discourse, they serve as reminders of what it means to devote one's life to the moral and intellectual upliftment of a nation.

Their story also resonates globally. In an age where cultural homogenization and political authoritarianism pose new threats, the Jadids' example offers a timeless lesson: national pride and freedom are sustained not just by state institutions, but by the courageous voices of those who dare to imagine a better future — and work tirelessly to realize it.

Today, the words and deeds of these patriots still resonate in public memory, educational curricula, and national narratives in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia.

The fight for national pride and freedom in Turkestan was led by a courageous and selfless generation of thinkers, educators, and political actors who placed the needs of their people above personal safety. These devotees of the homeland not only challenged colonial oppression but laid the ideological foundation for future independence.

Their sacrifices serve as a reminder that freedom is never given—it is earned through vision, education, cultural resilience, and unwavering courage. As Uzbekistan continues to shape its national identity in the modern world, the spirit of these early freedom-seekers remains a guiding light.

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