

Jadidism Among Tatars:

An overview of the Stages of Development

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The Concept

Jadidism was a movement that aimed at modernizing the Tatar Muslim society. The issue of *Jadidism* is a key one in understanding the Tatar history of 18th-20th Century. 'Jadid' is the Arabic word for 'new' and historians have taken the term 'Jadidism' from *usul-i jadid*, meaning a 'new method' of teaching in schools, though its significance extended far beyond education.¹ In fact *Jadidism* was a drive for cultural, social, political and religious renewal among Tatar Muslims in the Russian empire from late 18th to early 20th century. The *Jadidis*, under the influence of modern ideas, intended to change the outlook of Muslims towards religion, education, the gender sphere and politics.² *Jadidis* approached Islam not only as a religion but also as a culture that united the spiritual and temporal aspects on a religious foundation. In doing so, they also stressed the need for a solution to the tension between Islam and their socio-political milieu.³ *Jadidis* normally referred to themselves by the Turkic terms *taraqqiparvarlar* 'progressives', *ziyalilar* 'intellectuals', or simply *yäzläär/yoshlar* 'youth'.⁴

'*Jadid*' became a synonym for 'reform' which the reformers advocated in place of the 'old' *qadim*, while '*qadim*' meant a conservative opposed to change. These terms also suggested a generational divide: the *jadidis* were, on the whole, younger men with a futuristic outlook, whereas leading *qadimis* were an older generation who embraced 'tradition'.⁵ It was also recognized that the *jadidis* "had been advancing ideas of 'Europeanized' enlightenment and reformed religion." A movement of more practical trend, the circle of participants it involved was much wider including progressive clergy, teachers, students; a large part of

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entrepreneurs, etc.⁶ Thus *jadidism* was a major historical event in the life of the Muslims of erstwhile USSR in general and that of Tatar Muslims in particular. It began as a religious reform movement, seeking to break with the conservative traditionalism and, without repudiating what was fundamental, to render Islam capable of surviving in a modern world.⁷

Stages of Development

Development of the phenomenon of *Jadidism* is to be considered against the broader background of the reformative processes among the Tatars from 18th-20th century. In general it is quite problematic to emphasize clearly marked stages within the Tatar reform movement (*Jadidism*). The fact is that the Tatar society extensively relates to the east, where due to number of conditions, the overlapping of different stages of society's transformation took place. The stages of *Jadidism* reflect qualitative steps of Tatar's nation-building, which is made up of three stages: the stage of "Muslim" nation development (18th – mid 20th century); the stage of "ethnic" (ethno-cultural) nation formation; the stage of formation of Tatar "political" nation (first two and a half decades of 20th century). Although these stages in general follow each other, they can be mutually confused because of the continuously changing definition of *Jadid* phenomenon. For example, when religious reformation was dominating the first stage, the segment of subsequent cultural reformation existed within its limits. Important cultural transformation continued during the last stage but, reformatory searches in the field of theology were yet not over.⁸ Some significant theological discussions among Tatars were still ongoing at the beginning of 20th century, when major cultural reforms took place and the activity of *Jadidist* politicians began.⁹

Therefore, it is not surprising that there exist definite alternative versions between researchers, both in dating *Jadidism's* initial period and in allocation of definite stages to this phenomenon. Antipathy and ambiguity in its assessments are connected with both

the complexity of the phenomenon and the fact that ideological elevations were always attempted to be given to *Jadidism*.¹⁰

For Tatars the period between the 18th and first decades of 20th century may be defined as an era of reformation. *Jadidism* actually started from the idea of reform in religious outlook, slowly penetrated into cultural sphere and finally made its way into politics. Thus *Jadidis* emphasize three stages of *Jadidism*'s emergence among Tatars: religious (theological), cultural and political reformism. If *Jadidism* will be connected to the activity of Gasprinskii, then the enlightening-educational component will prevail in its content. But if we start tracing *Jadidism* from the activities of Mullah Murat, then the essence of this phenomenon will acquire a clear political-ideological character. If we assume that it was Kursavi who stood at the beginning of *Jadidism*, then its content will be practically merged with religious reformism.¹¹

Religious stage

The religious stage of *Jadidism* began with the emergence of its earliest representatives: G. Utiz Imyani (1754-1815), Abu Nasr al- Kursavi (1776-1813), I. Khalfin (1778-1829) and Ahmad Makhдум Danish (1827-1897). All these pioneers represented the forces of change particularly in the field of religion. Nevertheless Kursavi was the first to break the pattern of subservience and dependence the Volga Tatars had shown toward the Islamic scholastic centers of Central Asia. He took the initiative of religious reform among the Tatars and addressed the Muslims as: "you are not the true and faithful Muslims. You have receded from Allah's Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions". This voice became a shining light in the darkness of ignorance. Due to this light, many renewed their religion and faith.¹² Kursavi's direct contact with the conservative *ulama'* of Bukhara and Samarqand and his access to the rich libraries of Central Asia led him to react strongly against established dogma. He advocated a religious reform that would revitalize Islam through a return to its pristine purity. A serious scholar of Qur'an and Hadith Kursavi revealed himself as a strong

adversary of *Kalamists*.¹³ He suggested opening of the gates of *ijtihad* to live thought and contribute to the liberation of society from the dominance of scholastics.¹⁴ Ideas, first propounded by Kursavi, became foundation stones of Tatar Muslim culture and religious reform that produced a host of representative thinkers in the coming decades. The revivalist reformism was thus initiated by a small group of Tatar theologians. But, at the turn of the 19th century, there was a strong body of Islamic reformers in the region and the movement of purification within Islam gained momentum. Therefore, it is not accidental that Islam in religious and cultural terms had manifested itself in the Tatar society in the beginning of the 19th century in two forms: Revivalism and religious Reform.¹⁵

Revivalist tendencies in public thought were compounded by Tatar masses' aspiration of returning to that "true faith" from which it had diverged. Tatar religious reformers thought that the backwardness of Muslim societies was the result of a misunderstanding of "true" Islam. Utyz-Imyani was sure that Islam was the only true source of revival of Tatar society under conditions of its clear perception and cleansing of centuries-old innovations, which were reprehensible (*bid'a*), recognizing the necessity of *ijtihad*.¹⁶ The main task of religious reformist thinkers was a re-comprehension of religious outlook, ethics and value system and its approach to the 'secular' demands of the present. Hence they tried to solve the problem of intellectual backwardness of Islam by means of a return to intellectual liberalism.

The progressive ideas of Kursavi and other thinkers continued to remain within the ambit of a small group of theologians and intellectuals until the very late 19th century. These ideas could not enter the mass consciousness, since the appropriate ideological institutions were absent and till 1880s there were no means of mass media to popularize these ideas. Nor could *madrasahs* carry out this function, for the teachers in these institutions were mostly the graduates of Central Asian schools which still lacked any scientific outlook or methodology.¹⁷

Only with the advent of *madrasahs* of new method and the

first periodicals, such as *Tarjeman* of Ismail Gasprinskii in 1883 did certain prerequisites for the transmission of religious and reform ideas to the mass consciousness came into being. Having realized that there was an educational crisis within the Muslim community; Gasprinskii evolved a new (*Jadid*) method of teaching. By this method, he meant both the technique employed for teaching the Arabic alphabet, and the complete system of education in use in the old (*qadim*) schools. Gasprinskii aimed at providing instruction in religion effectively and concisely and thereafter, giving pupil the skills, languages and information required in a changing world.¹⁸ Prominent among his new method schools was Husenyah of Orenburg, the Muhammedogah of Kazan, Aliyeh of Ufa where apart from religious instruction, modern knowledge, science, history and other subjects were taught.¹⁹ He was supported by Shihabeddin Merjani (1818-1889), a leading Muslim scholar and progressive figure among the Kazan Tatars. Merjani had spent eleven years (1838-1849) in Central Asia studying at *madrassahs* of Bukhara and investigating the manuscripts and rare material of the Samarqand Library. During the years of his study at Samarqand (1843-45), Merjani's religious thinking shifted and his critical approach to all established truth first revealed itself. In 1886 and 1887, Merjani travelled to the Middle East. In Ottoman capital he was received with great honor by Sheikh al-Islam and some of the most prominent ministers. He also visited Ottoman institutions of learning and welfare. He also visited Mecca and Cairo. Merjani wrote some twenty four works in Arabic language that contain the core of his reformist ideas. As a follower of Kursavi, Merjani stressed upon the need of re-introducing *ijtihad* to address the issues facing the *Ummah*.²⁰ Thus with Merjani's support to the movement, in a short time, the power of *Jadidis* increased tremendously. In this period the *Jadidis* were obliged to prove high degree of Islamic flexibility, its adaptability to new conditions, creating prerequisites for reconsideration of an outdated world view, to the detriment of faith and scholastic domination, changing from traditional to new norms of relation between people of both

universal and absolute regulars.²¹ *Jadidis* drew upon an effectively functioning ideological system with the fundamental premises that Islam was a component of national culture, it served as both a moral and ethical basis for society, the creative force of the nation and its spiritual energy.²² The Tatar *Jadidis* defined intellectualization of religious life, utilization of historical mobility with its ability to adapt to any new circumstances and assimilate new social realities as the main trends in the evolution of Islam. Tatar thinkers denouncing *taqlid*, distinguished *ijtihad*, proving that Islam is a religion that urges to follow the balanced and common sense, contributing to liberty and raising of the mind. As a result, *Jadidism*, as early as the beginning of 20th century, had absorbed original features of Tatar Muslim culture, and was therefore considered the only acceptable form of religio-spiritual revival and a strong deterrent against the imperialist efforts to destabilize Tatars as a Muslim nation.

Thus the discourse of Reform became the cry of the nation and almost the whole of Tatar intelligentsia advocated and represented it. Prominent among these advocates was Gataullah Bayazitov, who in the last decade of 19th century had published several books on different aspects of practicing the faith of Islam, in Tatar society as well as in non-Tatar (orthodox) surroundings. These books included *Islam and Progress, Relation Towards the Non-Orthodox, Islam and Science* and so on. He thinks that there are no "obstacles in cultural development, no barriers for the Muslims to stand in line with the cultural Europeans. We can boldly state that the Qur'an, the *Shari'ah* can exist along with any sensible reforms".²³ He continues, there can be no doubt that enemies of Islam were unable to affect its fundamentals from outside, but, forces which managed to affect it turned out to be from within Islam.²⁴ He further adds that due to external and outside influence, the Muslims have suddenly turned from the right path and declined from the true spirit of Islam. Another Tatar reformist thinker Z.Kamali who was a *mudarris* at Hilalya *madrassah* put forth the view that difficulties in studying and interpreting Islam appear

because most teachers of Islamic disciplines are not acquainted with the latest achievements of science. Another scholar M. Bigiev emphasized that his major goal is the “cleansing of the Muslim confession from ignorant scholasticism and the raising of the holy *Shari 'ah* above all teachings.”

Therefore, it was not blind imitation of religious authorities that was necessary, but serious comprehension of their heritage within the context of modern scientific achievements. Jadidis proclaimed that the Muslim tradition required reforms; they made it clear that religious reform is not adding something that has not been proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), nor is it eliminating or making some kind of change to Muslim foundations, but removal of what people added to religion; religion's return to original substance, in which it was in the first age of Muslim confession.

Cultural stage

The 19th century witnessed the Tatar upsurge towards modern developments. A dramatic change of mentality and diversion was taking place among the Tatar educated class. The number of Tatars and Bashkir students who were educated in European type of schools increased and formed the base of the secular Tatar intelligentsia. However public consciousness was developing in close connection with traditional Islamic conception and ideas. On the other hand, the economic situation of the Volga Tatars was deteriorating; trade between Volga Tatars and Central Asia was decreasing and, as a result, Tatar merchants' revenue gradually decreased. European goods were entering into the markets of Bukhara and Caucasia, driving out the local products. Unless they took necessary precautions immediately, Tatar Muslims would lose the remaining trade and industry they had. This gave rise to structural changes in Tatar society. These changes connected with the penetration of bourgeois relations into Russia resulted in general direction of socio-economic development in accordance with capitalist trends, causing considerable changes in mass

consciousness.²⁵ Theoretical searches of Tatar intellectuals of the late 18th and early 19th century reflected this duality of public consciousness: understanding of the necessity of serious ideological changes and preservation of a powerful conservative layer represented in the power of tradition of Islam.

Tatar reformists like Ismail Gasprinskii (1851-1914) and Yusuf Akcura (1876-1936) were feeling the threat facing the Muslims of Russia in the period. Gasprinskii's project for unifying Turkic languages came out of these threats. He thought if Turkic peoples could not establish a common literary language and culture, they would face a dark future. Both Gasprinskii and Akcura believed that the reason for the economic decline was closely connected with intellectual backwardness.²⁶ Therefore, one precaution Gasprinskii proposed was to reform educational system immediately. As already pointed out in this paper, the very term "Jadidism" is genetically connected with the *usul-i-jadid* conception which came into being in the course of the formation of the 'new method' education system among the Tatars. The result was that by 1900 C.E printing shops owned and operated by Tatars had opened in Kazan as well as in the major cities of Volga and Ural region. Printing developed so rapidly that Kazan alone boasted some twenty Tatar Presses, which between 1900 and 1917 published 5,154 titles in 38,714,032 copies. Book printing developed so rapidly during the first decade of 20th century that the catalogues of Arabic books printed in the Volga area were circulated at the St. Petersburg book exhibition of 1910. The *Millet* shop which opened in Kazan in October 1908, produced in the first seven months of its existence some 202,600 copies of different titles.²⁷

However, the reforms they advocated were not limited to education only, but also included such aspects of social life as an increase in the status of women and reforming Islamic law and economy. It designated the whole spectrum of religious attitudes including puritanism, mysticism and even a renewed and more tolerant view of inter-religious relations particularly with respect

to Shi 'as. The Tatars supported the *fatwa* of the Qazi of Ashkabad, Haji Mir Ibrahim who recommended a union of Shiite and Sunni Muslims. They even collected money to be sent to the Amir of Bukhara for distribution among those who had suffered during the violent clashes that took place between the two sects in Bukhara during the winter of 1910.²⁸

Another characteristic of the Tatar reformers was their positive approach toward the western civilization. They saw Europe as a model for progress and wanted to learn from the west in order to rise to level of their society. This awakened an admiration for western institutions and values as well as a wish to see these developments in their own society. However, while they desired western knowledge and techniques, they did not want to westernize Tatar society but to help it to regain what they believed to be the high cultural level of early Islamic centuries.

Thus progressive part of the intelligentsia considered *Jadidism* as an intellectual and ideological power, capable of leading Tatar society out of a centuries-long collapse.²⁹ *Jadidis* maintained that Muslims in the Russian empire had entered a period of decay that could only be rectified by the acquisition of new kind of knowledge and modernist, European-modeled cultural reform. Its representatives realized that Tatar society lacked a modern outlook and aimed to bring traditional world perspectives into conformity with the demands of the era. *Jadidis* tended to such future of the Muslim community, which would not only be the best for its present state but better than any immediate past.³⁰

Meanwhile, towards the end of the nineteenth century, two important developments were taking place among the Muslims of Russia: First, Tatar students shifted their attention from the *madrasahs* of Bukhara. Second, the interruption of economic relationship between the Volga Tatars and Central Asians as the Russian empire occupied the Central Asian lands and the Russians themselves entered these markets. The need for the Tatar intermediaries declined and they were gradually excluded from Central Asia. Following this economic isolation from Central Asia,

the cultural and educational links of the Volga Tatars decreased gradually. In other words, while the Tatar merchants directed themselves toward the Russian markets, the literary elite shifted their attention toward Russian cities as well. Their programs, organizations, and enthusiasms were primarily responses to the social and economic changes and the cultural initiatives introduced by Russia. Superficially, they became acquainted with western ideas, and even admired some of them, but rather than adopting these ideas, they preferred to look for the equivalent thoughts within Islamic tradition.

Under these conditions Tatar society needed a new system of attitudes and a new guideline of values. The new outlooks, conceptions and norms could be comprehended only in the light of Islam in forms and conceptions customary to the people. A leading Tatar religious reformer, Rizaeddin b. Fahreddin (1859-1936) argued that the progress or retrogression of societies depends on the strength of belief (*aqidah*) on which they are based. According to him, the main reason for the backwardness of Tatar Muslim society was the degeneration of faith during the preceding centuries. He thought that if Muslims wanted to restore the power, wealth and dignity of their society, they had to understand Islam in the way early Muslims perceived it.

Political Stage

Until mid-19th century, there was no other force than religion among Tatars capable of inspiring and directing the national-liberation movement. Islam, being the national religion of the Tatars, became a powerful force for fighting against the dominating imperial political system to preserve the nation. Teachers, instructing in *madrasahs* became the leaders of 'national awakening' and finally, all the Turko-Tatars of Russia were united in Islam. But, despite this fact, the process of forming and spreading of national ideology, secular at its core, was progressing quite fast, since it arose from the inner needs of society.

Penetration of Tatar *Jadidis* into politics dates back to early

19th century, but their participation in the political life of Russia started to be noticeable from 1905. *Jadidism* served as an original transition from previous stereotypes of mass consciousness to up-to-date forms of political thinking. At the beginning of 20th century there appeared new opportunities in Tatar society to realize the ideas initially presented in *Jadidism*. There was a tendency to create political basis to revive Tatar society. Active participation of practically all intellectual forces in political processes and organizations attest to the fact that Tatar society was ready for a more coordinated solution to its socio-political problems. Under these conditions, the secular-national component turned out to be so demanding that *Jadidism* became the leading trend in Tatar society.³¹

On one hand, polarization of political forces was growing in the society, particularly after Russian revolution of 1905-1907; on the other hand, appealing to the mass consciousness, these political forces had to take the Islamic factor into consideration. Even the Tatar Bolsheviks, despite the fact that their political goals included the creation of an atheist society, desisted from criticism of Islam, having known in advance that it would result in the total loss of their social credibility.³²

The growing inclination of the Russian-Muslim modernists to western liberal norms and institutions introduced a new tendency of the dynamics of All-Empire ideology. In such a way, a combination of the Muslim-nationalist and religious ideas came into being, capable not only of defending, but also advancement in the sphere of ideology and the political culture of the Russian Empire.

By the beginning of the 1930s there appeared other peculiarly class-based definition of *Jadidism*. In 1931, *Jadidism* was defined as a “banner of joint political struggle of the progressive Tatar bourgeoisie and its followers against conservatism.” In 1952 resolution, *Jadidism* was defined as “bourgeoisie-national movement”, preaching an “ideology of nationalism, pan-Turkism, and class peace within the Tatar nation for the sake of national unity” and tried to “tear the Tatar nation apart from Russia, turning

it into an appendage of the Putrid empire of the Turkish Sultans.”³³

However, *Jadidism* did not survive the upheavals ushered in by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The Russian government banned some of their newspapers while some others were closed due to lack of readers. Only 12 out of 40 Tatar newspapers were left. All these developments forced the *Jadidis* to rethink their situation and decide to return back to educational and cultural activities. Though the *Jadidis* seized on the chaos of the revolutionary period to try to advance their ideas, they enjoyed only limited success. And while many *Jadidis* rose to prominence in the 1920s, a cruel fate awaited them as their followers perished in Stalin’s purges. This marked the end of *Jadidist* political activity.

Notes and References

- 1 The Tatars, as the dominant Muslim people in the Russian empire had been pursuing a course of reform as early as the later part of 19th century. The Russo-Japanese war of 1904 and the Russian revolution of 1905 put forth great challenges to the established order by providing stimuli to Tatar Muslims to focus on political and social issues. By the end of the 19th century, revolutionism was a major political reality, already threatening to overthrow the tsarist regime. After the revolution of 1905 its alignments were crystallized. Young Volga Tatars could not escape the challenge of this ferment about them. They found themselves politically and psychologically aligned against Europe. Beginning in the later part of 19th century, efforts toward Modernization became increasingly popular-and, by the end of the century, predominant in Tatar urban centers. They centered on methods of educational instruction. A popular hallmark of those who resisted the old-line way of teaching the Quran was called the ‘new,’ *Jadid*, method and hence its advocates were called *Jadidis*. They were ‘new’ in their whole approach to literature, science, social life and economic activity. [Hodgson. M.G.S, *The Venture of Islam*, vol.III, Chicago, 1974, pp.317-19].; For more details see: Sarafraz Khan, *Muslim Reformist Political Thought*, Routledge ,London & New York, 2003, pp.87ff); See also: Shams-ud Din, “Russian Policy Toward Islam and Muslims: An Overview.” in *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol,V,July,1984,London,pp.321 ff. Kanlidre Ahmad., *Reform within Islam, The Tajdid and Jadid Movement among the Kazan Tatars (1809-1917)*, Istanbul, 1997,

pp.74,78; For further study on Jadidism see: Khalid Adeeb, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. Berkeley, 1998. For more details see Kanlindre's article "The Trends of Thought among the Tatars and Bashkirs: Religious Reformism and Secular Jadidism vs. Qadimism (1883-1910)" in the *Journal of The Institute of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue. 9, 2010.

- 3 Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars*, Stanford, California, 1986, p. 104.
- 4 Adeeb, op.cit, p, 93.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Abdullin Ya. G, *Jaddism Among Tatars*. Kazan, 1998, pp. 3, 23, 29, 33-34.
- 7 Ravil Bukharaev, *The Model of Tatarstan under President Mintimer Shaimiev*, Curzon, 1999, p, 58.
- 8 Ishaqov Damir, *Jadidism: Formation of Main Concepts, Tatar History and Civilisation*, Istanbul, 2010, p. 24.
- 9 Ishaqov, op.cit, p. 242.
- 10 Mukhametshin Rafik, *Jadidism: Problems of Research, Tatar History and Civilisation*, Istanbul, 2010, p.245.
- 11 Mukhametshin, op.cit, p. 246.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Mukhametshin, *Jadidism: Theological Components, Tatar History and Civilisation*, Istanbul, 2010, p.252.
- 14 Mukhametshin, *Jadidism: Problems of Research*. op.cit, p.246.
- 15 Mukhametshin, *Jadidism: Prerequisites of Formation, Tatar History and Civilisation*, Istanbul, 2010, p.247.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Walidov J., *Essays on Education and Literature of the Tatars*, London, 1981, p.26.
- 18 Khan, op.cit, p.95.
- 19 Shamsudin, op.cit, p.323.
- 20 Rorlich.opcit, pp.50-51.
- 21 Mukhametshin, *Jadidism: Prerequisites of Formation*, op.cit, p.249.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Mukhametshin, *Jadidism: Theological Components*, op.cit, p. 253.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Earlier, Bukhara and Samarqand had a tremendous impact over the Volga region; the Tatar and Bashkir students formed their educational and intellectual life on the traditional models of Bukhara and Samarqand. Tatar merchants traveled between the Volga-Ural region and Central Asia. Tatar youth traveled with the caravans because they were eager to learn from the famous *mad-asahs* of Bukhara and

Samarqand.

²⁶ The Muslims of Russia were still under the influence of the medieval type of Bukharan *madrassahs*. Bukhara was far from Europe and their people were unaware of the changes and intellectual transformation happening in Europe. Therefore, thoughts coming from Bukhara to the Muslims of Crimea and Volga basin were no longer satisfying the needs of modern minds.

²⁷ Rorlich, *op.cit*, p.71.

²⁸ Rorlich, *op.cit*.p.61.

²⁹ Mukhametshin, *op.cit*, p. 245.

³⁰ Ishaqov, *op.cit*, p.246.

³¹ Mukhametshin, *Jadidism: Problems of Research*, *op.cit*, p.247.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ Ishaqov, *Jadidism: Formation of Main Concepts*, *op.cit*, p. 239.