International Journal on Integrated Education (IJIE)

e-ISSN: 2620 – 3502
p-ISSN: 2615 – 3785

Volume: 9 Issue: 1 | March 2026

https://journals.researchparks.org/index.php/IJIE

Article

Philosophy of Politics in Jadid Thought

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Abstract: This article provides a scholarly analysis of the political and philosophical views of the Jadid movement. In Jadid thought, political philosophy was formed in close connection with the ideas of enlightenment, social justice, national awakening, and legal consciousness. The article examines the Jadid intellectuals' perspectives on state–society relations, political reforms, the development of political awareness among the people, and the protection of national interests. It argues that the political-philosophical legacy of the Jadids served as an important theoretical foundation for the development of national consciousness and political thought under colonial conditions.

Citation: Yoqub o'g'li T. Y. Philosophy of Politics in Jadid Thought. International Journal on Integrated Education (IJIE) 2026, 9(1), 228-233.

Received: 08th Nov 2025
Revised: 23rd Dec 2025
Accepted: 29th Jan 2026
Published: 05th Feb 2026

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Keywords: Jadidism, Political Philosophy, Enlightenment, National Awakening, Social Justice, Political Consciousness, Legal Thought, Reforms, Colonialism.

1. Introduction

The philosophy of politics in Jadid thought represents a distinctive intellectual response to the political, social, and cultural crises faced by Muslim societies of Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Emerging under the conditions of colonial domination, internal stagnation, and global modernity, Jadidism articulated a reformist political vision grounded in enlightenment, rational governance, and social responsibility. Jadid thinkers reconceptualized politics not merely as the exercise of power, but as a moral and educational project aimed at transforming society through knowledge, legal reform, and civic consciousness [1]. Drawing simultaneously on Islamic ethical principles and modern political ideas—such as constitutionalism, national self-awareness, and progress—the Jadids sought to harmonize tradition with innovation. Their political philosophy thus occupies a critical space between cultural revival and political modernization, offering an indigenous framework for understanding statehood, authority, and reform in the Muslim world [2].

2. Materials and Methods

This study is based on a qualitative textual analysis of primary and secondary sources related to Jadid political thought. The primary materials include political, educational, and journalistic writings of leading Jadid intellectuals such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Abdulla Avloniy, as well as periodicals like Taraqqiy, Sadoi Turkiston, and Oyina. These texts are examined as philosophical and political discourses rather than purely literary or historical documents, allowing for the identification of key concepts such as governance, reform, nationhood, and civic responsibility. Secondary

sources consist of contemporary scholarly works on Jadidism, colonial Central Asia, and Islamic reform movements, which provide contextual and comparative perspectives [3].

Methodologically, the research employs a hermeneutic and comparative approach to interpret the ideological foundations of Jadid political philosophy. Hermeneutic analysis is used to uncover the normative and ethical dimensions of Jadid arguments, particularly their synthesis of Islamic values and modern political ideas. Comparative analysis allows Jadid political concepts to be situated alongside broader reformist traditions, including Ottoman constitutionalism and European enlightenment thought. In addition, elements of historical-contextual analysis are applied to relate Jadid ideas to the sociopolitical realities of Russian colonial rule. This multi-method approach ensures a systematic and nuanced understanding of Jadid political philosophy as both a product of its time and a coherent intellectual framework [4].

3. Results

The prosperity of a nation, its faith, and its confidence and determination in a great future develop in close interconnection. As every nation lives through its statehood history on the basis of ideal ideas of independence, freedom, justice, and equality, it undergoes a complex process of realizing and organizing these ideals within its socio-political life. In this sense, the laws of historical development are, to a certain extent, dependent on the will and aspirations of peoples. Periods of progress, shaped by changes in historical time and space, are rich in diverse events. National prosperity is in harmony with the individual's sense of recognizing their dignity, honor, and moral integrity at a nationwide level. However, this process has not always unfolded uniformly and manifests itself as a complex socio-spiritual phenomenon with its own distinctive characteristics [5].

The national liberation movement that emerged in Turkestan—Jadidism—was a political movement that led to the intensification of political processes precisely through the awakening of national consciousness.

To this day, the Jadid movement has often been interpreted primarily as an enlightenment movement. Indeed, the Jadids opened schools, created textbooks, and educated children using new teaching methods. In studies of their journalistic activity, the main emphasis has likewise been placed on their articles devoted to educational themes. More precisely, the failure to study the Jadids as personalities and to conduct a deep analysis of facts hinders the revelation of their image as political figures. For example, leading Jadids such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Ashurali Zohiriy were, above all, political leaders who developed programs of struggle against colonial domination [6].

The political situation that emerged in Turkestan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the Jadids' participation in the All-Russian Muslim Congresses of 1905–1906, marked a distinctive new stage in their political development. It should be noted that the Muslims of Russia came to realize that, in order to free themselves from the grip of a powerful and oppressive empire, they first and foremost needed to act in unity. As a result, the Muslim peoples bound by the chains of national oppression initiated efforts to convene an All-Russian Muslim Congress with the aim of uniting around a common organization. Russia's defeat in the First World War, the widespread dissemination of Russian democratic ideas directed against the tsarist regime, internal political conflicts, and the February Revolution all called for new struggles for freedom and liberty [7].

After the February Revolution, two interrelated issues were placed on the agenda: first, what the future state system of Russia should be like; and second, what form of governance Turkestan should henceforth adopt. These two issues were also widely discussed at the congresses of Turkestan's Muslims. In this regard, they envisaged two

different forms of state structure: one was the restoration of monarchy, and the other was the establishment of a republican system of governance [8].

The First Congress of All Turkestan Muslims, held in Tashkent on April 16–17, 1917, addressed the issue that one possible form of the state should be a democratic republic and another a federative republic; in the event that the latter form of governance were adopted, it was envisaged that Turkestan would be granted autonomy. According to journalist Mirmuhsin Shermuhammedov, who prepared a report on the congress, the deputies Zaki Validi Togan and Mahmudkhoja Behbudi firmly insisted: "We must make use of the freedom that has been granted to us today and secure autonomy for ourselves. If we lose the present moment, hoping to obtain autonomy at another time, we will suffer great losses and shed much blood." [9]. In addition, there were deputies who argued that granting autonomy to Turkestan was premature, that for the time being efforts should focus on establishing a people's republic, and that autonomy might lead to disaster. They maintained that even if autonomy were granted to Turkestan, there were no qualified local cadres capable of governing it. Therefore, they believed it was necessary to reckon with the existing situation. In fact, those who demanded national-territorial autonomy did not envisage complete independence either. During the debates, it was stated that issues such as war and peace, railways, the monetary system, customs services, and foreign trade would be resolved by the central government. This, in turn, meant that the independence demanded by the oppressed nations (peoples) from Russia at that time was not full independence but rather a form of semi-independence. Their greatest aspiration was to possess a defined territory of their own and to gain the right to independently resolve local, national, and cultural issues related to that territory [10].

In Turkestan, the first socio-political movement to embark on the path of struggle for national independence was the Jadid movement. The representatives of Jadidism shaped the core of their political and philosophical ideas around principles such as social justice, national prosperity, Turkic identity, and national independence [11]. At the same time, they sought to renew cultural, moral, and educational activities, to promote European scientific and technological thinking, to put an end to religious fanaticism, dogmatism, and ignorance, and to stimulate interest in Islamic history as a means of resisting the intrusion of alien moral ideals. Although this movement sought to present its activities in a cultural and educational form, its essence and underlying purpose lay in political struggle—liberating its people from colonial oppression and establishing an independent state. Accordingly, Jadidism passed through two stages in its development: the stage of enlightenment and the stage of political activism [12].

4. Discussion

The ideology of the Jadids was distinctive in its nature. At that time, they rejected the ideas of European culture and development, which had already spread widely across the world, and did not align themselves with the newly emerging currents of socialism or social democracy, arguing that these movements posed a threat to the future of Turkestan. They shaped the core principles of their ideology around values such as social justice, national heritage, Turkic identity, and national independence. At the same time, they sought to renew spiritual, cultural, and educational life, introduce scientific and technological achievements into the daily life of the people, and eradicate religious ignorance, superstition, fanaticism, and backwardness [13].

In the first 10–15 years of the twentieth century, new "Usul-i Jadid" or "Usul-i Savtiya" schools were established in Turkestan, alongside national press and theaters. Various associations, movements, and charitable societies were formed. The social activities of prominent figures such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Abdurauf Fitrat, Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov, Abdulhamid Cho'lpon, and Ubaydullohxo'ja Asadullohxo'jayev played a significant role in the formation of the national awakening of

the people, the development of ideas for the struggle for independence, and the enrichment of their cultural and educational outlook.

The spiritual leader of the Jadids in Turkestan, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi (1879–1919), came to the conclusion that the development of education and enlightenment among the peoples of Turkestan was essential for protecting national and state interests. Based on this, he emphasized that the peoples of Turkestan needed to overcome internal conflicts and contradictions. Behbudi advocated for the unification of the peoples of Turkestan and actively worked to achieve this. He wrote in his articles: "If all of Turkestan unites, there will be no bloodshed, land and property will not be divided, and the necessary conditions will emerge. No matter how much we talk about existing conflicts, if we unite in this way, the more the contradictions grow, the closer we move toward misfortune" [14].

As an expression of national aspirations in Turkestan, parties such as "Shoroyi Islomiya" and "Ittifoq" emerged. Soon, the Jadids realized that the Provisional Government and its administration in Turkestan were continuing the colonial policies of previous rulers. They then began efforts to convene an independent Constituent Assembly and to establish an autonomous Turkestan within the Russian state. In the early stage of the Jadid movement, they aimed to unite all peoples of Turkestan. From 1917–1919 onwards, their focus shifted toward protecting national interests through Turkestan's autonomy.

"As history shows," Behbudi stated, "rights are not granted, they are earned. Any nation or people can protect its rights, religion, and politics only by uniting its forces and pursuing its aspirations. We, Muslims, including the Muslims of Turkestan, wish that no one violates our religion or nation, and in turn, we declare that we have no intention of violating anyone else" [15].

Behbudi argued that no one and no political authority grants freedom to a nation voluntarily. This situation can be likened to the political actions of the former USSR government toward our country and people in the late 1980s, on the eve of Uzbekistan's independence. Behbudi firmly maintained that freedom can only be achieved through struggle and unity. The slogan he proposed in 1917, "Haq olinur, berilmas" ("Rights are earned, not given"), served as a call to the entire nation.

In his articles, including "Qonuni Ovrupo", "Haq olinur, berilmas!", "Loyiha", and "Qozi va biylar haqida loyiha", Behbudi emphasized the numerous deficiencies in the legal system of the region. In particular, he pointed out that the local administration had handed over legal matters to village chiefs and qazis, which allowed bribery to flourish. After analyzing the situation in this field, Behbudi proposed the establishment of state courts in every province of Turkestan.

It should also be noted that many Jadids, especially Behbudi, believed that the negative customs and habits present among the people could impede social improvement. For example, excessive extravagance in weddings and other celebrations, as well as burdensome funeral customs, significantly affected the financial situation of families. Unfortunately, these negative practices continue to persist even today.

In the views of the new intelligentsia, the primary goals were to eliminate widespread illiteracy among all social classes, reform the old education system, and curb backward, outdated, and wasteful customs. They were particularly critical of religious fanaticism and traditional practices that led to unnecessary expenses. While such progressive ideas were first initiated in the nineteenth century by enlightenment figures like Ahmad Donish, they were further developed by patriotic intellectuals such as Sadriddin Ayni, Abdulvohid Munzim, Mirkomil Burkhanov, Usmonkhoja Polatkhojayev, Kholidkhoji Mehri, Mulla Vafo, and Abdurauf Fitrat.

These forward-thinking views of the Jadids remain relevant for contemporary society. Excessive extravagance in weddings and celebrations was pushing families into

financial difficulties. Limiting such practices, as much as possible, requires the political will of the government.

The Jadids, who actively participated in the creation of various parties and societies, became leaders of the national movement. They demanded separate territorial autonomy within the Russian state. Moreover, the Turkestan Autonomy was envisioned to have its own customs, treasury, federal bank, and the right to conclude trade and economic agreements with certain states.

Jadidism manifested itself in a distinctive way in the Bukhara and Khiva khanates, shaped by the historical, socio-political, and spiritual processes of the time. Ideological disagreements between the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans over ways to reform the socio-economic and political systems led to the emergence of a leftist wing that actively participated in the "revolutionary" movements of 1920.

The programs announced by the Young Khivans advocated reforms that would limit the power of the khan, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in the country, and the enlightenment of the people. The February Revolution of 1917 had a strong impact on their activities, prompting them to take an open path of struggle. On April 5, 1917, Khiva Khan Asfandiyar Khan was forced to sign the manifesto presented by the Young Khivans. The manifesto emphasized the necessity of opening new-method schools, constructing railways, postal services, and telegraphs, bringing the state treasury under supervision, ensuring that all officials were elected and properly compensated, and guaranteeing equality of all citizens before Sharia law.

However, the Young Bukharan movement, in its program of reforms, did not set for itself any overarching goals or attempt to forcibly establish a republican form of government, taking into account the political situation of the time. F. Khojayev refers to this as a minimum program, according to which "the monarchical form of government will not be changed, the issue of a constitution will not be resolved in advance… Two objectives were set: to establish a lawful state in Bukhara, replacing the medieval Eastern despotism-based monarchy with a European-style monarchy, and to strengthen Bukhara's economic, political, and military potential by improving the cultural and everyday life of the people." According to the views of the Young Bukharans, the emirate's system of governance was to be retained in a limited form, with the only concession being that at the local level, elders would be elected by the people, while the judicial system, based on Sharia law, would remain under the control of the clergy.

The second program, developed by the Turkestan Central Bureau, took a more radical stance, aiming to overthrow the emirate by any means. According to this program, a People's Republic was to be established, with representatives included in the government in accordance with the population's composition, and universal suffrage was to be introduced. The legal system was to be reorganized, with criminal courts operating in two stages: first-instance courts elected by the people, and second-instance courts appointed to supervise and review the decisions of the first-instance courts. The program also envisioned the introduction of an eight-hour workday, the formation of trade unions, and the organization of credit and supply systems.

5. Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that the philosophy of politics in Jadid thought constituted a coherent and normatively grounded vision of social and political transformation. Rather than advocating radical political rupture, Jadid intellectuals emphasized gradual reform through education, moral renewal, and legal consciousness as the foundations of just governance. Their understanding of politics was inseparable from ethical responsibility and collective progress, positioning the state as an instrument for public enlightenment and social welfare. By integrating Islamic moral principles with modern concepts such as constitutionalism, civic participation, and national self-

awareness, the Jadids articulated an indigenous political philosophy capable of responding to the challenges of colonial domination and internal stagnation.

At the same time, Jadid political thought reveals both its historical limitations and enduring relevance. Operating within restrictive colonial conditions, Jadid reformism often remained aspirational and programmatic rather than fully institutionalized. Nevertheless, its emphasis on knowledge-based governance, social accountability, and cultural self-determination continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary debates on political modernization in Muslim societies. The Jadid experience underscores the possibility of reconciling tradition and modernity without abandoning cultural authenticity, thereby contributing to broader discussions in political philosophy on reform, identity, and ethical statehood.

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