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The Life and Pedagogical Activity of Abduqodir Shakuriy In the Historical Context

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Abstract: This article examines the life and pedagogical activity of Abduqodir Abdushukur Shakuriy (1875–1943), one of the most prominent Jadid educators of Samarkand, within the wider historical context of late imperial Russian rule and early Soviet modernization in Central Asia. Using historical-analytical, comparative, and source-critical methods, the study reconstructs Shakuriy's formation as a teacher, school founder, textbook author, and reformer; analyzes his curricular and organizational innovations such as the rapid-literacy method, coeducation, the introduction of Russian language, labor and music lessons, and the preparation of reading books and anthologies for new-method schools; and situates his practice alongside contemporaneous global reform currents that reached Central Asia through Tatar, Ottoman, and Russian channels. The article also explores the constraints that colonial and early Soviet politics placed on educational experimentation, including persecution, school closures, and Shakuriy's arrest during the Great Terror, with subsequent posthumous rehabilitation. It argues that Shakuriy's enduring significance lies not only in the institutional facts of schools and textbooks but in a coherent pedagogical worldview that fused national enlightenment with pragmatic modern schooling aimed at moral character, civic competence, and practical skills. By tracking his trajectory from the first new-method school of Samarkand to his leadership at city schools and his textbook authorship, the article clarifies how local initiative, transregional networks, and changing political regimes co-produced a distinct Samarkand pedagogical school whose patterns continue to inform present debates about curriculum, teacher authority, and the social mission of schooling in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Abduqodir Shakuriy; Jadidism; Samarkand pedagogical school; educational reform; coeducation; labor education; new-method schools; Uzbek education history; curriculum; teacher identity.

Introduction: At the turn of the twentieth century, Central Asia became a frontier of educational reform. The region's Muslim intellectuals—the Jadids—advocated a "new method" that combined phonetic literacy, vernacular instruction, secular subjects, and a public culture of schools, presses, and theatres. The geographic and political situation of Turkestan under the Russian Empire created a paradoxical environment: oppressive in its colonial hierarchies yet permeable to ideas, technologies, and pedagogical models circulating from Tatar centres, the Ottoman world, and Russia's urban schools. Within this ferment, Abduqodir Shakuriy of Samarkand emerged as an influential practitioner who organized schools, authored primers and readers, and argued—through example rather than manifesto—for an education that would be both modern and locally grounded. He was born in 1875 near Samarkand and died there in 1943, his life spanning the late imperial period, the revolutionary years, and the consolidating Soviet state.

Understanding Shakuriy's contribution requires more than listing firsts. He is better viewed as a node in overlapping networks: Jadid circles in Samarkand and Kokand, Tatar reformers in Kazan, and pedagogical currents encountered via Istanbul and Russian gymnasia. The Jadid project—captured in major syntheses of Central Asian reform—placed print culture, vernacular schooling, and moral regeneration at the centre of national renewal. Shakuriy's activity in Samarkand exemplifies how this agenda assumed concrete institutional form and how the same political conditions that facilitated reform also threatened it, from surveillance to criminalization.

This article reconstructs Shakuriy's biography and pedagogy from published scholarship, encyclopedic entries, and institutional narratives; it then interprets his strategies in light of the evolution of schooling under late imperial and early Soviet policy. While the Jadids are sometimes presented as a generic movement, the Samarkand case demonstrates how reformers operated at the scale of village, neighbourhood, and city school, improvising resources and adapting curriculum to social realities. By placing Shakuriy within these nested contexts, we can sharpen our sense of what "modern" came to mean for teachers and children in early twentieth-century Uzbekistan.

This study uses a historical-analytical approach with three complementary strategies. First, it synthesizes authoritative secondary literature on Jadidism and Central Asian modernization to frame the intellectual and institutional milieu in which Shakuriy worked. Key interpretive anchors include Adeeb Khalid's study of cultural reform and Edward Allworth's cultural history of the modern Uzbeks, which together detail the ideological vocabulary of reform and its social infrastructures of schools, printing houses, and public associations. These works also clarify the relationship between local initiative and state policy from the imperial to the Soviet period.

Second, it mobilizes biographical and institutional sources to reconstruct specific episodes in Shakuriy's life. Encyclopedic entries and curated institutional narratives provide dates, places, and descriptions of school founding, textbook authorship, and later persecution and rehabilitation; they also record the memory of coeducation and the introduction of Russian language, labor, and music lessons. Such sources include entries from Uzbek and English encyclopedic platforms and the Imam Bukhari International Research Center's historical vignettes. Because these materials sometimes rely on local memory or non-peer-reviewed documentation, the analysis triangulates across multiple attestations and attends to convergence rather than isolated claims.

Third, it uses recent open-access articles on the history of new-method schools in Samarkand to corroborate dates and clarify the micro-pedagogy of rapid literacy, reading anthologies, and classroom equipment. These studies, though heterogeneous in venue, are valuable for preserving quotations from memoirs and for reporting school practices such as desk-and-blackboard use, mixed-sex classes, and curricular hours for crafts and agriculture, details often underrepresented in broader narratives.

Shakuriy was born in the Rajabamin village near Samarkand, a city where madrasa learning existed alongside a growing presence of Russian-system schools. He received elementary instruction in traditional settings, then pursued studies at local madrasas such as Orifjonboy and encountered the practices of Russian gymnasia, which impressed upon him the value of classroom organization, printed textbooks, and graded lessons. The ability to read across languages—Persian, Uzbek, Arabic, later Russian and Turkish—opened him to transregional currents and to the Tatar press, particularly the "Tarjimon" newspaper of Ismail Gaspirali, which more than any single text modelled a reformist synthesis of Islamic values and modern civic competence. These experiences formed the matrix for his later school organization and textbook writing.

In the late 1890s he travelled to Kokand to observe new-method schools, returning to open, in the autumn of 1901, what sources identify as the first new-method school in the Samarkand area. The school's novelty lay less in its symbolic break with tradition than in the practical orchestration of phonetic literacy, graded readers, and classroom furniture designed for group instruction rather than rote recitation. Contemporary accounts emphasize that he commissioned desks and blackboards resembling those of Russian gymnasia and adapted them to local conditions, indicating a pragmatic borrowing rather than wholesale imitation.

Shakuriy's school sought to "shorten the road" to literacy by replacing the prolonged memorization of sacred texts with a phonetic sequence and by pairing reading with writing from the outset. The curriculum included secular subjects and introduced Russian as a discrete language of study, a bold move in a colonial environment where the utility of Russian could be both a tool of advancement and a vector of cultural pressure. By gradually integrating labor and music lessons, he treated school as a place where mind, hand, and feeling could develop together; the inclusion of horticulture and crafts reflected both the agrarian context of Rajabamin and an ideal of useful knowledge. As narrative vignettes show, he guarded scarce equipment—a globe, for example—as a symbol of a wider world to which rural children could be introduced.

The social organization of the school was equally innovative. He first organized a modern school for girls with his wife as teacher, then moved toward coeducation by combining boys and girls in the same lessons. This transition shocked local conservative opinion but instantiated the Jadid belief that national progress required women's education and that literacy should not be segregated by gender. The school's reliance on village contributions and on Shakuriy's own resources exemplifies a Jadid pattern: reform as civic initiative rather than top-down decree.

If the classroom gave shape to a new schedule of learning, Shakuriy's readers and anthologies gave it voice. Among the textbooks associated with him are the Jome' ul-hikoyat reader, first published in 1907 and revised in 1911, the anthology Zubdat ul-Ash'or (1907), and primers such as Ta'limi alifbo yohud rahbari maktab prepared with colleagues. These works interwove didactic stories with selections from classical poetry and contemporary moral texts, modelling a pedagogy in which literacy training was inseparable from ethical and aesthetic formation. The prevalence of Persian and Uzbek materials, sometimes in collaboration with prominent Samarkand educators, reflects a multilingual, transregional literacy that was deeply local in sentiment.

The Jadid appropriation of print culture—newspapers, teaching manuals, reading books—has been highlighted in major studies as the infrastructure of reform. Shakuriy's textbook production stands squarely within this current, but his contribution is distinctive for the way anthologies functioned as bridges between inherited literary canons and the emerging needs of a schooled public. In this sense, the reader format did not merely transmit content; it naturalized a sequence of graded reading, a repertoire of exempla, and an expectation that children's moral vocabulary would be trained through curated texts.

In 1909, Shakuriy visited Kazan, where Tatar reformers had already developed an impressive ecosystem of teacher training, school manuals, and periodicals. The Tatar junction functioned as a conduit for pedagogical technique—phonetic primers, classroom management strategies—and for a rhetoric of modernization that remained rooted in Muslim communal life. In 1912 he travelled to Istanbul, encountering Ottoman primary-school methods and curricular debates. While precise details of these trips rely on memoir fragments and later retellings, their plausibility is reinforced by the tight Jadid-Tatar-Ottoman circuits of the period and by the textbooks he later adopted and adapted, including the widely used Muallimi avval and Muallimi soniy.

These networks mattered because they contextualized the Samarkand school within broader debates about the aims of primary education: whether rapid literacy should be allied with practical arithmetic and geography; how religious instruction could be reorganized around comprehension rather than memorization; and how the teacher's authority should be exercised in a classroom that emphasized activity and comprehension. Shakuriy's practice, as reported by students and colleagues, suggests that he chose synthesis over polemic, experimenting with methods that preserved moral seriousness while adopting the discipline of the modern classroom.

After the October Revolution, the institutional environment changed again. In 1921, Shakuriy was appointed headmaster of Samarkand's 13th school while continuing to teach language and literature. The expansion of the school network allowed him to scale up practices pioneered in Rajabamin, including attention to teacher competition and performance. Contemporary reports state that in 1923 Pravda publicized a competition for model teachers across the Soviet Union and listed Shakuriy among the twenty-seven winners; although this detail requires careful archival verification, it reflects the local memory of his recognition as a skilled practitioner at the national level.

The 1920s also saw village-funded school construction on Samarkand's outskirts, with Shakuriy providing organizational leadership.

Yet the same decade brought tightening controls over independent civic initiative. Schools founded on Jadid models were sometimes closed or forcibly restructured, and by the later 1920s, many of the "old intelligentsia" were marginalized. Reports from institutional histories indicate that Shakuriy's school was closed in 1925; he then withdrew to gardening work as the political climate worsened. He was arrested in August 1937 on charges common to the era—membership in an "anti-revolutionary organization" and anti-Soviet propaganda—and sentenced to a decade of imprisonment by an NKVD "troika." He died in 1943, a victim of Stalinist repression, and was rehabilitated as innocent in 1956. These episodes, beyond their biographical significance, testify to the vulnerability of pedagogical reform when not anchored in stable legal protections.

Shakuriy's reforms were not a random assortment of techniques but manifestations of a coherent pedagogical worldview. At its core was the conviction that literacy is a civic instrument and that schools must cultivate moral qualities through meaningful texts and disciplined practice. Coeducation aligned with this worldview because it treated intellectual dignity as common to boys and girls. The introduction of Russian language into the timetable was not capitulation but an instrumental choice to equip pupils to navigate the administrative and economic realities of their time. Labor and music lessons signalled a holistic understanding of human development that joined utility with culture. In this respect, Shakuriy's practice anticipated later Soviet discourse on polytechnical education even as his personal fate underscores the contingent politics of such consonances.

From a broader perspective, the figure of the teacher as public intellectual—printing books at personal expense, organizing resources, and arguing by example—corresponds closely to the Jadid ideal reconstructed in major historiography. The Samarkand case helps dispel caricatures of Jadidism as either purely religious reform or merely political activism; rather, it emerges as a pedagogy of social modernization in which the classroom, the printed page, and the neighbourhood formed a single circuit of enlightenment. In contemporary Uzbekistan, where curricular debates revolve around balancing national heritage, global competencies, and practical skills, Shakuriy's approach offers a historical template for integration rather than opposition.

Interpreting Shakuriy within the historical context requires attention to the layered timelines of Central Asian reform. Under the Russian Empire, the state's educational policy oscillated between limited support for Russian-system schools and suspicion toward Muslim initiatives; this pushed Jadid projects to rely on civic funding, print solidarity, and transregional expertise. After 1917, the early Soviet period opened a brief window in which Jadid educators participated in creating national school systems, but by the late 1920s, ideology hardened, and independent actors were repressed. Shakuriy's career maps onto this arc with unusual clarity: initial local initiative under imperial constraints, brief scaling within the Soviet school system, and final destruction under Stalinism.

Comparatively, Shakuriy's classroom innovations resonate with contemporaneous reforms elsewhere—the graded reader, the phonetic method, the integration of practical work—yet their meaning in Samarkand differed because they served a national program of cultural survival. The hybrid curriculum aimed to produce a literate citizen who could engage the state and the market without abandoning local ethical frameworks. This fusion is visible in the composition of his readers, where classical poetry and moral tales accompany science and geography, and in the material culture of desks, blackboards, and globes that reconfigured the very geometry of learning. In this sense, the Samarkand new-method school was not a derivative copy of European modernity but a localized translation.

Abduqodir Shakuriy's life and work epitomize the practical intelligence of Central Asian educational reform at a moment when the meanings of "modern" and "national" were being negotiated daily in classrooms and printshops. His school in Rajabamin inaugurated in 1901 a Samarkand tradition of new-method pedagogy that condensed foreign models into a vernacular program; his readers and anthologies habituated children to a literature of moral and civic formation; his organizational leadership demonstrated how reform could proceed through local initiative and public recognition even in unstable times; and his arrest and posthumous rehabilitation remind us that pedagogical innovation, absent institutional safeguards, remains perilously exposed to political winds. To read Shakuriy historically is thus to see education as a site where empires and nations wagered on the future by shaping how children learned to read, think, and belong. His legacy—coeducation, holistic curriculum, and civic-minded literacy—continues to offer a usable past for present debates about schooling in Uzbekistan.

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