



# Tanzimat, Jadidism, And The Birth Of Modern Turkic Thought

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**Abstract:** The second half of the nineteenth century marked a turning point in the intellectual and literary history of the Turkic world. This period witnessed the emergence of two interrelated yet distinct reformist movements: the Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire and Jadidism in Turkistan. Both movements arose as responses to internal crises and external pressures, aiming to reconcile modernity with traditional cultural and spiritual values. The Tanzimat writers such as İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, and Ahmet Mithat Efendi sought to harmonize Western notions of liberty, civic duty, and progress with Islamic ethics and Turkic identity. Meanwhile, Jadid reformers in Central Asia – led by Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy, Abdulla Avloniy, and Abdurauf Fitrat transformed literature into a medium of enlightenment (ma'rifat) and national awakening under colonial rule. Drawing on Enlightenment philosophy, Islamic modernism, and local socio-political realities, both movements cultivated a new literary consciousness that bridged East and West. This study argues that the Tanzimat and Jadidism were not mere imitations of Western reform but rather dynamic syntheses of universal and indigenous ideas, laying the intellectual foundation for modern Turkic thought, literature, and national identity.

**Keywords:** Tanzimat, Jadidism, Turkic literature, modernization, enlightenment, Namık Kemal, Behbudiy, national identity.

**Introduction:** The second half of the 19th century in the history of Turkic peoples' literature is marked by processes of renewal, modernization, and national awakening. The political, social, and spiritual changes of this period directly influenced the content and form of literature. As the cultural dialogue between Eastern and Western civilizations intensified, new artistic thought and literary-aesthetic views began to take shape on

both wings of the Turkic literary space – in the Ottoman Empire and the territory of Central Asia. Thus, the Tanzimat (meaning: reform, regulation) literature that emerged in Türkiye and the Jadidism movement literature that developed in Turkistan constituted two important stages of the Turkic cultural awakening.

In Türkiye, this process manifested as a cultural expression of the political reforms associated with the "Gulhane Hatt-ı Hümayun" decree. By the 18th century, the decline of the Ottoman Empire became clearly visible. Consecutive defeats and the uprisings across the vast territory of the country perplexed the administration. During the reign of Sultan Selim III, the "Nizam-ı Cedid" (New Order) army, structured after the Western style, was formed for the first time. This reform in the army forced the empire to turn its direction toward the West in all aspects. With the announcement of the Tanzimat decree during the reign of Sultan Abdulmejid, a new literary direction emerged and developed.

The literary scholar A. Tanpınar explains the issue of literary influence in Turkish literature as follows: "By this (referring to the Tanzimat decree – O.Sh.), the empire declares that it has stepped out of the sphere of culture it lived in for centuries and entered the sphere of another culture it has been fighting against". The phrase "fighting against" mentioned in the scholar's observation expresses the conflict between Eastern and Western cultures. This idea, in turn, is interpreted as an important explanation for the internal contradictions the Ottoman Empire faced while accepting Western culture and the reasons for its inability to fully integrate into this culture.

The reforms initiated in the fields of state administration, law, education, and press also impacted literary life. Writers such as İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, and Ahmet Mithat Efendi strived to study Western culture and harmonize it with national values. For them, literature was a means to awaken the people, reform society, and educate an enlightened generation.

Firstly, Tanzimat writers were strongly influenced by Western literature and philosophy. During his studies in Paris, İbrahim Şinasi thoroughly studied the works of French Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Diderot. He reflected the ideas of these thinkers on human rights, social equality, and freedom of reason and thought in his journalistic work and poetry. Particularly in his collection Muntahabat-ı Ash'ar (Selections of Poems), issues such as literature serving the life of the people and the social responsibility of the poet are advanced, showing a

harmony with the socio-pedagogical views of Diderot and Rousseau.

Namık Kemal is a writer shaped under the influence of European, especially French, Romanticism and political philosophy. In his works, he assimilated the ideas of writers like Rousseau, Hugo, and Lamartine regarding human freedom, patriotism, social justice, and moral purity, adapting them to the social conditions of Turkish society. Specifically, there are typological similarities between the motives of moral upliftment and justice in Hugo's *Les Misérables* and the process of Ali Bey's spiritual awakening from a moral crisis in Namık Kemal's novel *İntibah* (Awakening). Furthermore, Namık Kemal's political-educational views are linked to English liberalism and the ideas of the French Revolution. He is recognized as the first Turkish writer to interpret the concepts of "hürriyet" (freedom) and "Vatan" (fatherland) on a civic rather than a religious basis. In this respect, he was directly influenced by the theories of "social contract" and "civic duty" from John Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau.

Ziya Pasha's literary views also express a harmony between Western realism and Eastern thought. On one hand, he assimilated the views of classical writers like Boileau and La Fontaine on formal clarity and moral taste, and on the other hand, he was inspired by the ethical-spiritual didacticism of Eastern thinkers such as Navoiy, Sa'di, Hafiz, and Nizami. A synthesis of Eastern wisdom and a critical spirit characteristic of the West can be observed in his anthology *Harabat* (The Tavern) and his work *Zafername* (Book of Victory).

Ahmet Mithat Efendi mainly promoted didactic literature and ideas of mass enlightenment. Influenced by the Western novel tradition, particularly the works of Defoe, Dickens, and Balzac, he adapted them for the Turkish reader, advancing the principle of "art for the people" in his works. In this respect, he is one of the most important transitional period writers who introduced European realism into the Turkish literary context.

At the same time, although the representatives of Tanzimat literature were influenced by the West, they created their national literature based on Islamic morality, the Eastern literary heritage, and Turkic spiritual values. For instance, Namık Kemal's work *Renan Müdafaanamesi* (Defense Against Renan) defends the scientific and moral superiority of Islamic civilization. This shows that he was an advocate for renewal based on cultural dialogue, not mere imitation of the West. That is, in the works of Tanzimat literature representatives, the Western ideas of enlightenment, freedom, nation, and citizenship were harmonized with the spiritual-moral principles of the East, creating the

foundations of a new Turkish literary thought. Thus, this literary movement, as a cultural bridge between East and West, profoundly influenced the development of not only Turkish but also all Turkic literatures.

When discussing the renewal in every aspect of the country's life, literary scholar U. Jo'raqulov sees a similarity between the changes that occurred in the Ottoman Empire with the Tanzimat decree and the Jadid movement in Turkistan: "This manifested in different forms in different places. For example, the period in Türkiye that began the Tanzimat with the famous decree written by Mustafa Reşit Pasha in 1839, announced in the Gülhane Square, and known in history as the 'Gulhane Hatt-ı Hümayun,' is also, in our opinion, a renewal it is Jadidism. True, it was primarily based on Westernization. That is why national ideas such as 'Turkism,' 'Ottomanism,' 'Islamism,' and 'Turanism' were put forward in opposition to it shortly thereafter. Europeanization was also one of the important characteristics of Jadidism here. The Tsarist government even used it for the Russification of the local population. However, a struggle also took place here for the principle—to keep the local people's religion and faith inviolable, and to use European science and knowledge to serve their defense. The emergence of Turkism, Islamism, and local Uzbekism here is not accidental" .

The process of literary reforms that began in Türkiye, namely the formation and development of Tanzimat literature, is one of the processes that had a significant impact on the spiritual and cultural life of the entire Muslim East, especially Turkistan. This is because these reforms included not only the renewal of literary form but also the change of the thought paradigm, that is, a new interpretation of the concepts of the individual, society, fatherland, and progress. The Jadidism movement that took shape in Turkistan at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century is intrinsically linked in spiritual and psychological terms with the activities of Turkish intellectuals and, moreover, with Tanzimat literature. Sirojiddin Ahmad specifically lists the factors that determined the life path of Behbudiy, one of the Jadid leaders, as his Hajj pilgrimage, his trip to Russia, his conversations with Ismail Gaspirali, and his influence from the works of Racaizade Mahmud Ekrem, Ziya Pasha, Namik Kemal, and Abdülhak Hamid Tarhan .

The main goal of both movements was to lead the people out of ignorance, call for science and enlightenment, and awaken the nation. If the ideas of "fatherland" and "freedom" held a central place in Tanzimat literature, in Jadid literature, these concepts were enriched with the ideas of "national identity" and

"spiritual independence."

It is important to emphasize that the Jadidism movement was not a direct continuation or copy of the Tanzimat reforms that began in Turkey. It formed as a product of multi-factorial historical, political, and cultural processes. Although the renewal movement in Turkish literature served as a certain source of inspiration for the Turkestan intelligentsia, the local socio-cultural environment, the policies of the Russian Empire, Islamic reform ideas, and global modernization processes also played a crucial role in the emergence of Jadidism.

First of all, when Turkestan became part of the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century, the region's population was subjected to the economic, political, and cultural pressure of colonial policy. This situation, in turn, intensified the need to preserve national identity and awaken the people through enlightenment (ma'rifat). As a result, the Jadids began to view literature not merely as an aesthetic phenomenon but as a tool for spiritual and social awakening.

Secondly, internal reform movements in the Islamic world, particularly Islamic modernism in the Ottoman Empire and the ideas of Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, also played a significant role in the formation of Jadidism. These thinkers reinterpreted Islam as a "religion of science, thought, and social justice," promoting the necessity of education, freedom of thought, and social renewal in Muslim societies. These ideas reached Turkestan through Istanbul, Cairo, and Kazan.

Thirdly, Russian Muslim intellectuals (especially the "usul-i jadid" movement of Ismail Gasprinsky) became a direct model for Turkestan's Jadidism. Gasprinsky's idea of "preserving religious belief while acquiring modern knowledge," disseminated through his newspaper "Tarjimon," strongly influenced the formation of intellectuals like Behbudiy, Avloniy, and Fitrat.

Jadid movement representatives such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy, Abdulla Avloniy, Abdurauf Fitrat, Abdulla Qodiriy, and Cho'lpon viewed artistic creation as a means of awakening and spiritually uplifting the people. Their creative outlook is primarily based on the ideas of national self-awareness, social justice, free thought, and humanism. The main goal of Jadid literature was to awaken the people who had remained in the grip of backwardness and ignorance for centuries, and to lead them onto the path of progress through knowledge, enlightenment, and culture. Therefore, for the Jadid writers, literature appeared not just as a means of aesthetic expression, but as a powerful tool for social-spiritual reform.

Behbudiy's drama, "Padarkush" (The Patricide/Father

Killer), is one of the earliest and most important experiments in this direction. In the work, the author exposes the consequences of ignorance, indifference, and spiritual decline, showing the direct connection between the moral crisis of society and family tragedies. In this regard, Behbudi is recognized as a writer who introduced a new type of social-satirical drama to the Eastern stage in his time. The work's didactic spirit, its use of the stage to call the people to social and spiritual awareness, and its aiming for a social-enlightenment purpose beyond the artistic text, make it a crucial stage in the formation of Uzbek dramaturgy.

The second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries marked a critical juncture in the history of Turkic peoples, defined by profound processes of renewal and modernization. This intellectual transformation manifested most powerfully in literature through two major, yet distinct, movements: the Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire and Jadidism in Turkistan. While Tanzimat writers such as Namık Kemal and İbrahim Şinasi initially served as inspiration, integrating Western ideas of freedom, patriotism, and civic duty with Islamic and national values, the Jadidism movement in Central Asia, led by figures like Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy and Abdulla Avloniy, took a unique path. Shaped by the pressures of colonialism, Islamic modernism, and the need for national self-awareness, Jadidism transformed literature into a powerful vehicle for social and spiritual reform (*ma'rifat*). Ultimately, both movements demonstrated that the drive for progress in the Turkic world was neither pure imitation nor rejection of the West, but a dynamic, culturally rooted dialogue that laid the essential foundation for modern Turkic thought, literature, and national identity.

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