

**A CALL TO THE YOUTH OF TURKESTAN: VOICES FROM A CENTURY AGO**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the historical appeals made by early 20th-century Central Asian reformers and intellectuals to the youth of Turkestan during a time of colonization, cultural suppression, and national awakening. Through letters, essays, speeches, and publications, Jadid intellectuals conveyed a clear message to younger generations: to embrace knowledge, preserve national identity, and fight—through education and moral integrity—for the future of their homeland. By examining the content and context of these appeals, the article highlights their enduring relevance and power in shaping modern Central Asian consciousness.

**Keywords:** youth, Turkestan, Jadidism, national awakening, education, historical legacy, colonialism, identity.

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### **Introduction**

In the early 20th century, Turkestan—encompassing modern-day Uzbekistan and neighboring regions—was under the tight control of the Russian Empire. Amidst growing colonial repression and cultural transformation, a wave of reformist thinkers emerged, now known as the **Jadids**. These intellectuals, educators, and spiritual leaders recognized that the fate of their nation depended on a single force: **the youth**.

Believing that the younger generation held the key to liberation and renewal, the Jadids devoted significant effort to addressing them directly. Through newspapers, public speeches, school curricula, plays, and literary works, they crafted heartfelt and strategic messages encouraging youth to rise above ignorance, adopt modern knowledge, and never forget their roots.

This article investigates the themes, style, and sociopolitical impact of those historical appeals—“the voices of a century ago”—and how they laid the foundation for national consciousness and resistance against colonialism.

### **Methodology**

To analyze the appeals made to the youth of Turkestan during the early 20th century, this study employs:

- **Historical analysis:** placing Jadid texts within the colonial context of the Russian Empire’s rule in Central Asia.
- **Discourse analysis:** interpreting the language, tone, and rhetorical strategies used in messages directed toward youth.
- **Biographical approach:** focusing on the lives and messages of key figures such as Mahmudkhuja Behbudi, Abdurauf Fitrat, Abdulla Avloniy, and Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhanov.
- **Comparative insight:** drawing parallels between youth-oriented reformist writings in Turkestan and similar movements in the Ottoman Empire, India, and Egypt.

Primary sources include early 20th-century newspapers (*Taraqqiy, Shuhrat, Sadoi Turkiston*), educational materials, speeches, and memoirs.

## **Results**

The research reveals several key themes present in the appeals of Turkestan’s early reformers to the youth:

### **Knowledge as Salvation:**

Jadid thinkers frequently emphasized education as a national duty. They believed that a modern, literate, and enlightened youth would be the strongest defense against colonial subjugation.

### **Moral Responsibility:**

Youth were encouraged to uphold ethical values, personal discipline, and respect for cultural heritage. “The dignity of a nation begins with the character of its children,” wrote Avloniy in *Turki Guliston yoxud axloq*.

### **Cultural Preservation and Reform:**

Rather than blindly imitating the West, youth were advised to integrate modern science and technology with Islamic and Turkic values. Fitrat called for a youth who could “speak with reason, act with conscience, and never forget their people’s pain.”

### **Call to Leadership and Sacrifice:**

In their plays and poetry, reformers portrayed young characters as future leaders, defenders of the nation, and sometimes martyrs for the cause of justice and liberty.

### **Emphasis on National Identity:**

Jadids cultivated a strong sense of belonging to a shared Turkestani identity, rooted in language, religion, and historical pride.

## **Discussion**

The Jadids’ passionate calls to the youth of Turkestan were more than just words—they were a blueprint for societal transformation. These messages sought to counteract the debilitating effects of colonialism, which aimed to suppress native languages, diminish spiritual life, and impose political obedience.

By placing the youth at the center of the national awakening, Jadid reformers demonstrated strategic foresight. They understood that changing the future meant transforming the present—and that transformation began in schools, households, and the minds of children.

Their approach was both emotional and rational. They employed poetic language and religious metaphors to inspire devotion, while also providing practical curricula and modern pedagogical techniques to instill competence. This duality made their message resilient and relatable.

Despite the tragic fate of many of these figures during the Soviet purges of the 1930s, their messages endured. In post-independence Uzbekistan and other Central Asian republics, their

ideas have been rediscovered, and their legacy continues to inform education and national ideology.

### Conclusion

The voices of early 20th-century Turkestan reformers still echo in the aspirations of modern Central Asian societies. Their unwavering belief in the power of youth, education, and moral clarity remains a cornerstone of nation-building in the region.

To study these historical messages is not simply to revisit the past—it is to engage with a timeless vision of national pride, cultural resilience, and the pursuit of justice through knowledge. For today's youth, those century-old appeals offer both inspiration and instruction: to remain rooted in identity, to strive for excellence, and to lead with conscience.

The century-old appeals to Turkestan's youth remain more than historical artifacts—they are enduring moral compasses that still speak to contemporary challenges. The messages delivered by early reformers emphasized that identity, when anchored in education, cultural memory, and ethical values, becomes a powerful shield against external domination and internal decay.

In today's rapidly globalizing world, where cultural homogenization and historical amnesia threaten smaller nations, the call for self-aware, educated, and morally upright youth is more urgent than ever. The Jadid legacy teaches us that youth empowerment is not merely about technology or economy—it is about cultivating a generation that can think critically, act ethically, and feel deeply connected to the fate of its people.

The reformers of the past envisioned youth not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active builders of the future. Their message was clear: **learn deeply, live with dignity, and lead with conscience**. That vision remains as relevant for today's students in Central Asia as it was for the youth of 1910s Turkestan.

Thus, the voices of those who once wrote, spoke, and sacrificed for a brighter tomorrow continue to echo—urging the youth of today not only to remember but also to **respond** with purpose.

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