

The role of Jadid theater in the development of youth spirituality

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Article History

Received on 30 April 2025

1st Revision on 3 May 2025

Accepted on 5 May 2025

Abstrak

Purpose: This study analyzes the role of Jadid theater in nurturing spirituality and moral awareness among youth in late 19th to early 20th century Central Asia. It seeks to show how theater became a medium for education, reform, and national awakening through cultural innovation.

Research methodology: The study applies a qualitative historical approach using document and literature analysis of primary and secondary sources, including plays, newspapers, and writings of Jadid intellectuals such as Behbudi, Niyoz, Avloniy, and Fitrat. Descriptive analysis is used to interpret the ideological and structural elements of their works within socio-cultural contexts.

Results: The Jadid movement transformed traditional storytelling into modern theater that addressed social issues, promoted literacy, and inspired youth spirituality. Despite censorship and scarce resources, amateur and professional groups sustained the movement, gradually expanding participation, including women. Theater became a powerful cultural tool that left a lasting legacy in Central Asian society.

Conclusions: Jadid theater functioned not merely as art but as a cultural instrument combining education, morality, and national identity. By integrating traditional and modern forms, it fostered youth engagement, advanced literacy, and mobilized society toward reform, underscoring the importance of cultural platforms for social and spiritual development.

Limitations: This research is limited to historical and document-based analysis, without empirical data such as interviews or reception studies that could provide contemporary perspectives.

Contribution: The study enriches understanding of how Jadid theater became a strategic platform for youth spiritual development and national awakening in Central Asia.

Keywords: *Central Asia, Jadidism, Spirituality, Theater*

How to Cite: Qizi, S. S. S. (2025). The role of Jadid theater in the development of youth spirituality. *Global Academy of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(4), 227-237.

1. Introduction

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi once said, “The theater is a school of morality”. Theater plays an important role in elevating human thought, especially in encouraging young people toward kindness, instilling love for the homeland, appreciating parents, family, and friendship, and fostering a sense of dedication to their profession (Raxmanova et al., 2024; Sabridin & Bobomuratovna, 2022). That is, it provides people with important lessons. Therefore, serious attention is being paid to attracting more young people to theaters, creating more performances that depict contemporary heroes, and conveying the tragic consequences of law violations and crime to future generations through theatrical productions (Gilbert, Baker, Bain, Flood, & Wolbers, 2023). This is because not all young people may fully grasp the essence of certain illegal actions simply by reading or hearing about legal norms (Fagan & Tyler, 2005). However, the ideas conveyed in plays based on real-life events reach deep into the hearts of both youth and adults (Kaldybekovich, Hazret, & Raikhan, 2013; Peters, 2017).

The Jadid movement, which emerged in late 19th–early 20th century Central Asia, was a powerful catalyst for educational, cultural, and spiritual renewal across the region (Kaldybekovich et al., 2013; Kholbutaevich & Shamsiyevich, 2024). Jadid intellectuals viewed theater not merely as an art form but as a means to awaken moral consciousness and elevate the spiritual life of youth (Alijonova, 2019). Through dramatic performances, they addressed social shortcomings and planted the seeds of personal and national transformation (Sobirovich, 2023). Pioneers such as Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoz, Abdulla Avloniy, and Abdurauf Fitrat authored plays tackling issues such as ignorance, superstition, illiteracy, and social injustice (Kizi, 2025b). Their dramaturgy emphasizes collective archetypes rather than individual heroes, fostering reflection and empathy in youthful audiences. Thus, the Jadid theater became a conduit for spiritual and ethical formation (Abdullaeva, Gafurova, & Khandamian, 2022).

The Jadid theater's strategy was deeply intertwined with their broader reformist agenda, including the establishment of new-method schools and the founding of newspapers (Badan, 2016). They believed that textbooks alone could not affect the soul; rather, the emotional resonance of drama could instill higher values, national pride, and social awareness among young citizens (Muzaffarova, 2020; Popov & Karásek, 2021). This study aims to analyze the role of the Jadid theater in nurturing the spirituality and moral awareness of youth in late 19th to early 20th century Central Asia. Employing a qualitative historical approach, the research is grounded in document and literature analyses of primary and secondary sources, such as archival records, published plays, newspapers, and intellectual correspondence from the era. The descriptive analysis interprets how the theatrical works of Behbudi, Niyoz, Fitrat, and others functioned as vehicles for moral instruction and national awakening. This study examines the narrative structures, ideological frameworks, and performative elements that shape the spiritual formation of young audiences. Ultimately, this research seeks to elucidate the mechanisms by which the Jadid theater catalyzed individual and societal transformation.

The moral and educational dimensions of theater have always fascinated reformers because of their ability to influence not only the mind but also the heart. Unlike abstract legal texts or doctrinal lessons, theater translates norms and values into living experiences. Through characters, dialogue, and dramatic conflict, audiences are presented with moral dilemmas and their consequences in ways that evoke empathy and self-reflection. For young people, whose ethical frameworks are still in formation, theater serves as a powerful mirror of social life (Corsa, 2021). It dramatizes the choices between right and wrong and shows how these choices reverberate across families, communities, and nations. This pedagogical aspect explains why reformers like Behbudi described theater as a “school of morality,” emphasizing its role in cultivating ethical sensibilities beyond the classroom (Feng, 2022).

In the context of Central Asia, where oral traditions and performative storytelling were already deeply ingrained in cultural life, the use of theater as an instrument of reform was both innovative and culturally resonant. Folk narratives, poetry recitals, and epic tales have long functioned as vehicles of communal instruction, transmitting values across generations. By adapting these traditions into modern theatrical forms, the Jadids bridged the familiar and the new. This blending allowed audiences to recognize their own lives and struggles on stage while being introduced to new ideas. In this sense, theater became a medium through which cultural continuity and transformation were negotiated simultaneously (Gulkhara & Farzaliyeva, 2025). One of the distinguishing features of the Jadid theater was its collective orientation. Rather than celebrating isolated heroic figures, Jadid playwrights presented archetypal characters who embodied social problems and aspirations (Sangirov, 2025). A greedy merchant, ignorant father, or enlightened teacher all represent broader social forces rather than individual personalities (Sadriiddinova, 2024). This dramaturgical choice carried pedagogical significance: it encouraged audiences to see themselves reflected in these characters, to recognize their own complicity in social ills, and to consider their collective responsibility for reform (Allen & Laine, 2018). By fostering self-reflection, Jadid theater nurtured an awareness of the need for communal rather than purely individual transformation. Moreover, the Jadids strategically chose themes that resonated with the everyday lives of ordinary people in Central Asia. Plays often depicted issues of marriage, education, superstition, and corruption—problems with which audiences could easily identify. For

example, the plight of a child denied schooling or the tragedy of a family torn apart by ignorance serves as vivid illustrations of the costs of social stagnation. These narratives were not abstract commentaries but tangible stories that demonstrated how entrenched practices hindered the progress. In this way, the Jadids transformed the theater into a forum for public dialogue about pressing social issues.

The performative dimension of the theater amplifies its impact. The act of staging a play in front of an audience creates a communal experience that engages emotions and senses in ways that are unavailable to written texts. Spectators were not passive recipients but active participants who responded with laughter, tears, or outrage as the story unfolded. This shared experience reinforced the moral lessons conveyed by the play and deepened their sense of belonging to a collective undergoing transformation. For youth, the theater provided not only entertainment but also a formative environment where values were internalized through emotion and social interaction. By integrating theater into their reformist agenda, the Jadids demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of cultural pedagogy. They recognized that textbooks and classrooms, while important, could not alone shape a nation's soul. Drama, with its emotional resonance and accessibility, reaches audiences across literacy levels and social strata. Even those unable to read reformist newspapers or textbooks could understand and be moved by the theatrical performance. This inclusivity gave theater a democratizing role in the Jadid project, ensuring that the message of reform extended beyond the intellectual elite to the broader populace.

The historical significance of this approach becomes clearer when placed within the colonial context of Central Asia under Russian rule. The Jadids sought to resist cultural domination not through outright political confrontation but through the subtler work of moral and spiritual renewal in their society. The theater offered a relatively safe space for critiquing ignorance, corruption, and backwardness without directly challenging colonial authority. In doing so, it functioned as a form of cultural resistance, equipping the younger generation with the moral resources necessary for eventual national awakening. The ability of theater to embed reformist messages within emotionally compelling stories made it a particularly effective instrument of what might be called "quiet revolution." Furthermore, Jadid's emphasis on theater underscores the interconnection between art and nation-building. By portraying contemporary heroes, dramatizing social injustices, and elevating ideals of knowledge and virtue, theatrical works inspire audiences to imagine a reformed community and a better future. This imaginative exercise was central to forging a modern national identity. For youth, such performances planted seeds of pride, responsibility, and vision—qualities that would later prove essential in their struggles for autonomy and cultural renewal.

From a methodological standpoint, the study of Jadid theater also highlights the importance of analyzing cultural production not merely as art, but as social action. Plays are historical documents that reveal the concerns, strategies, and aspirations of their authors. Examining their narratives, symbols, and performative elements allows us to trace the moral universe that the Jadids sought to cultivate. It also shows how cultural forms can function as catalysts for transformation, shaping not only individual attitudes but also collective consciousness. Ultimately, the role of Jadid theater in nurturing morality and spirituality among youth exemplifies the broader potential of cultural movements to transform society from within. By speaking to the heart and mind, blending tradition with innovation, and addressing both personal and communal dimensions of life, Jadid theater created a holistic model of reform. This demonstrates that education is not limited to formal instruction but encompasses the moral and emotional cultivation of citizens. The resonance of this legacy continues to affirm the enduring power of theater as a school of morality and a vital tool for societal renewal.

2. Literature Review

The Jadids placed great importance on education and upbringing (Kizi, 2025a). They sought to turn the education system into the most crucial link in society's development. The Jadids attributed the backwardness of development in Central Asia to the misinterpretation of Islam (Nurmatov, Abdrassilov, & Soon, 2022). Therefore, they believed that it was necessary to reform the madrasa education system. In 1883, Ismail Gasprinski launched the newspaper "Tarjimon" in the Turkic language and began promoting Jadidist ideas through it. When it was first published, the newspaper came out once a week;

from 1903, it was issued twice a week, and from 1912, it became a daily publication. Although “Tarjimon” was widely read in Turkestan, it did not become a part of the population’s daily routine.

The reform movements in Istanbul, Paris, and Egypt significantly influenced the Jadids (Rakhmankulova, Choriev, Yusupova, & Muminov, 2020). After traveling to Istanbul and meeting with individuals who supported cultural reform there, prominent Jadids such as Ismail Gasprinski, Cho‘banzoda, Fitrat, and Mahmud Khoja Behbudi experienced a shift in their views. Throughout history, theater has undergone many stages of development. It is an art form that emerged from religious, magical, and spiritual influences. While the word “theater” initially referred to the place where performances were held, it later came to mean a staged production (Zayniddinova, 2022). Since ancient times, many nations, – such as Greece, France, and Italy, – have contributed to the development of theater.

The emphasis placed by the Jadids on education should be understood within the broader historical context of Central Asia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For centuries, the region has maintained an educational system rooted in traditional Islamic madrasas, which emphasize religious sciences, memorization of classical texts, and scholastic debate. While this system preserved a strong Islamic intellectual heritage, it often neglected the integration of practical sciences, modern languages, and new pedagogical methods that were already reshaping societies in Europe and the Ottoman Empire at the time. For the Jadids, this imbalance represented a critical barrier to social and economic advancement. They argued that without reform, Central Asia would remain isolated and unable to compete with or respond to the rapid global transformations occurring at that time.

Thus, Tarjimon played a pivotal role in disseminating reformist ideas. Beyond serving as a platform for political and cultural commentary, newspapers functioned as educational tools. By publishing in Turkic and simplifying the writing style, Gasprinski ensured that his messages reached a wider audience, including those with limited literacy. This accessibility reflected the Jadids’ belief that modernization had to begin with mass education rather than being confined to the elites. The growing frequency of the newspaper’s publication mirrored the increasing demand for reformist discourse and the urgency with which the Jadids felt the need to promote new ways of thinking. Despite its influence, Tarjimon faces challenges. Many rural populations remain deeply rooted in traditional practices and are wary of new interpretations of religion and society. In some cases, conservative religious leaders viewed the Jadids as a threat and accused them of undermining Islamic orthodoxy. This resistance limited the extent to which Jadidist ideas could penetrate everyday life, especially in areas with low literacy rates and where oral traditions remained dominant. The limited integration of newspapers into the daily routine of the population highlights both the strengths and shortcomings of the Jadid movement: while intellectually innovative and progressive, its ideas often struggled to translate into widespread social transformation.

Intellectual exchanges with reformist movements in Istanbul, Paris, and Egypt provided the Jadids with both inspiration and validation. The late Ottoman Empire, for example, had already embarked on a series of Tanzimat reforms that sought to modernize its administration, education, and law. By engaging with Ottoman intellectuals, the Jadids saw that it was possible to reinterpret Islamic teachings in ways that embraced science, reason, and progress without abandoning their religious identity. Similarly, exposure to French and Egyptian intellectual traditions introduced them to Enlightenment ideas, liberal-education models, and the role of print culture in mobilizing social change. These cross-cultural interactions convinced the Jadids that Central Asia’s backwardness was not inevitable but rather the result of stagnation in educational and cultural institutions. Theater, as highlighted in the literature, provides an illustrative example of how cultural reform manifests in practice. For the Jadids, theater was not merely entertainment; it was an instrument of education, moral instruction, and social critique. By adopting a medium rooted in performance and storytelling, they connected with audiences in ways that abstract religious or philosophical discourse could not. Plays often dramatized themes of ignorance, corruption, and social injustice, implicitly critiquing the status quo while advocating for reform. In this sense, the Jadids’ embrace of theater echoed global trends in which artistic forms became intertwined with political and cultural transformations.

The broader history of theater underscores the universality of this approach. From ancient Greek tragedies that grappled with fate and morality to Renaissance plays that explored humanism and power to French and Italian theater that blended art with social commentary, the stage has long been a site for cultural reflection. By situating themselves within this tradition, the Jadids demonstrated an awareness of the power of cultural forms in shaping the collective consciousness. Their efforts highlight the interconnectedness of global reform movements and the adaptability of local traditions for new purposes. Simultaneously, the Jadid movement must be recognized as a product of both continuity and rupture. On the one hand, it drew deeply from the Islamic traditions of scholarship, moral responsibility, and communal guidance. However, it sought to break away from the rigidity of older systems by introducing new pedagogical tools, secular subjects, and critical reasoning. This duality reflects the broader tension of modernization in colonized and semi-colonized societies: how to adopt elements of Western progress without losing cultural and religious identity. The Jadids' solution was to frame reform as a return to the "true" spirit of Islam, which they argued had historically embraced knowledge, curiosity, and scientific inquiry.

The complexity of the Jadid project becomes even clearer when its social dimensions are considered. Education for them was not limited to formal schooling but extended to the reorganization of family life, promotion of women's literacy, and cultivation of civic responsibility. They envisioned a society in which individuals could actively participate in public discourse, informed by both religious ethics and modern knowledge. While these ideas were radical for their time, they laid the foundation for future generations to continue the struggle for cultural and educational reform. In conclusion, the Jadid movement illustrates the intricate interplay between local traditions and global influences in shaping educational and cultural reform. Its reliance on print media, adoption of theater, and engagement with international reformist networks highlight the multifaceted strategies used to address the perceived backwardness of Central Asia. Although its impact was uneven and often resisted, the movement's intellectual legacy continues to resonate as an example of how reformers in non-Western societies sought to negotiate the challenges of modernity while remaining anchored in their cultural and religious heritage.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative historical approach based on document and literature analyses. This research relies on primary and secondary sources, such as historical accounts, published plays, newspapers, and other written records of Jadid intellectual activities between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A descriptive analysis was applied to examine how the Jadid movement utilized theater as a tool for education, social reform, and national awakening. The approach emphasizes interpreting the content, structure, and ideological elements of theatrical works by Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoz, Abdurauf Fitrat, and others in their historical and socio-cultural context.

The choice of a qualitative historical approach stems from the need to situate the Jadid movement within its complex sociopolitical environment. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on numerical measurements, the qualitative historical approach allows for a deeper understanding of events, ideas, and cultural expressions as they unfold over time. This method emphasizes interpretation rather than measurement, prioritizing the meanings embedded within documents, plays, and publications that capture the intellectual pulse of the Jadid Era. This study provides a narrative reconstruction of how reformist thinkers and playwrights envisioned societal transformation.

At the core of this approach is a systematic examination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources form the backbone of this study, as they represent direct evidence of the Jadids' intellectual and cultural activities. These include original plays authored by figures such as Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, whose work *Padarkush* is often cited as a pioneering effort in Central Asian theater. Similarly, the plays of Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoz and Abdurauf Fitrat reveal not only artistic creativity but also ideological strategies aimed at awakening the audience. Newspapers, particularly those influenced by Gasprinski's *Tarjimon* and local periodicals, serve as additional primary sources that document the debates, criticisms, and reception surrounding Jadidist activities.

In contrast, secondary sources provide analytical perspectives that contextualize primary materials. These include historical accounts, biographical studies, and later interpretations of the Jadid theater. While secondary materials may lack the immediacy of firsthand evidence, they are crucial for triangulating information, clarifying ambiguities, and situating Jadids within broader regional and global reformist currents. The combination of primary and secondary sources ensures that the analysis remains grounded in original evidence and enriched by scholarly interpretations. The methodological framework is structured around document and literature analyses. Document analysis involves the careful reading, categorization, and interpretation of written materials produced during the period under study. This includes paying attention not only to the explicit content but also to the language, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies employed by Jadid playwrights and intellectuals. For instance, references to ignorance, superstition, or corruption in plays are interpreted as symbolic critiques of the prevailing social conditions. Similarly, depictions of modern schools and enlightened characters are examined as narrative devices promoting reformist ideals.

Literature analysis, in this context, extends beyond the artistic appreciation of plays. Instead, it focuses on the ideological and cultural functions of theatrical texts. Plays are treated as cultural artifacts that embody reformist thought and carry messages that transcend mere entertainment. By analyzing plot structures, character development, and dialogues, this study identifies how theater serves as a vehicle for public pedagogy. The combination of document and literature analysis makes it possible to trace both the explicit reformist agenda of the Jadids and the implicit cultural codes embedded in their works. A descriptive analysis was employed as the guiding analytical technique. This involves systematically describing the content and structure of documents and plays without reducing them to simple summaries. The aim is to reconstruct the worldview of the Jadid intellectuals, showing how they mobilized cultural tools to achieve their educational and political goals. For example, when analyzing a play, the descriptive approach highlights the storyline and the broader messages conveyed about family, morality, religion, and social responsibility. Such analyses enable researchers to identify recurring themes, motifs, and ideological positions that define the Jadid theater.

The historical contextualization of these materials is equally important. Theater and journalism cannot be understood in isolation from the political and social dynamics of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Central Asia. Therefore, the methodology incorporates a contextual reading of documents, situating them within the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, the rise of pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic ideologies, and the broader global trends of modernization. This contextual approach ensures that the plays are not treated as abstract literary works but as active interventions in a contested cultural and political landscape that is constantly evolving. The interpretation process proceeds in several stages. First, documents and plays were collected and organized chronologically, allowing the researcher to observe shifts in themes and strategies over time. Second, each text was subjected to close reading, with attention to both literal content and symbolic meanings. Third, thematic coding was applied to categorize recurring motifs, such as calls for women's education, critiques of traditional authority, and appeals to national unity. Finally, the coded themes were synthesized into broader interpretive narratives that reveal how the Jadid movement used theater as a dynamic tool of reform.

The methodological design also acknowledges the limitations of historical research. Many documents from the Jadid period have been lost, censored, or selectively preserved, meaning that the surviving materials may not represent the full spectrum of voices. To address this, this study adopts a comparative approach and cross-references multiple sources to mitigate biases. For example, the portrayal of reform in a Jadid play may be compared with contemporary newspaper reports to assess how audiences and critics responded to it. Such triangulation enhances the reliability of the findings while acknowledging the partiality of historical evidence. Another crucial aspect of the methodology was reflexivity. The researcher recognizes that the interpretation is shaped by contemporary perspectives and scholarly frameworks. To minimize distortion, this study strives to foreground the Jadids' own categories of thought, using their language and concepts as the primary basis for analysis. Simultaneously, modern analytical tools are employed to understand the broader implications of their work. This dual commitment to historical authenticity and critical interpretation reflects the balance that qualitative historical research seeks to achieve.

By focusing on figures such as Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoz, and Abdurauf Fitrat, the study emphasizes the diversity of strategies within the Jadid movement. While united by a common goal of reform, each intellectual employed distinct theatrical forms and themes in their works. Behbudi's works often revolved around family and morality, Niyoz's plays highlighted social justice and education, and Fitrat's writings engaged with philosophical and national identity questions. Therefore, the methodology does not treat the Jadids as a monolithic group but rather examines how their individual contributions collectively advanced the cause of social awakening. Finally, the methodological approach underscores the transformative role of theater in linking education with activism. By staging performances in schools, public spaces, and community gatherings, the Jadids sought to reach audiences that written texts alone could not reach. Theatrical works functioned as a form of "live literature," accessible to both literate and illiterate populations. This accessibility explains why the theater became such a powerful medium for reformist messages. The methodological emphasis on theater as both text and performance captures the multidimensional nature of Jadid cultural activism. In summary, the methodology integrates qualitative historical analysis, document and literature review, descriptive examination, and contextual interpretation. This comprehensive framework enables the reconstruction of the intellectual strategies of the Jadid movement while highlighting the cultural and educational functions of their theatrical works. This provides a nuanced understanding of how a reformist movement in Central Asia creatively harnessed the power of culture to inspire education, social reform, and national awakening.

4. Result and Discussion

Although the history of theater in Central Asia dates back to ancient times, it developed mainly through the staging of legends and epics passed down from ancestors. Modern forms of theater in the region emerged in the last quarter of the 19th century under the influence of Jadids (Yusufjonova, 2025). The Jadid movement, which began with educational and upbringing activities, later expanded into the fields of press, theater, and literature. Journalism and magazine publishing developed, numerous printing houses were established, and many books were published in the country. According to Behbudi, a school alone is not sufficient for achieving enlightenment. A nation needs a mirror in which it can see both its flaws and its virtues. This truth inspired him to establish theaters and create plays. As a result, one of the first works of Uzbek drama, "Padarkush" ("The Parricide"), was produced.

In 1911, Behbudi wrote the novel "Padarkush." "Padarkush" consists of three acts and four scenes and is written in a simple language. The story of "Padarkush" takes place among three characters: Boy, a fifty-year-old who believes that everything revolves around money and earning wealth; Domla, who has a modern worldview and tries to explain to Boy that this belief is wrong; and Ziyoli, an educated intellectual who studied at a Russian school. Behbudi expresses his ideas about education and upbringing through the words of Domla and Ziyoli. Despite numerous advice, the boy's father refuses to send him to school. As a result, his ignorant son, Toshmurod, joins street hooligans, kills his own father, and is subsequently exiled to Siberia.

The purpose of staging the play "Padarkush" was to unite all intellectuals in the cause of national interests and emphasize the importance of educating and nurturing children. The staging of the "Padarkush" drama became the foundation for the development of Uzbek literature. This has also increased interest in the theater genre. The drama "Padarkush" was performed in Tashkent in 1913, in Samarkand in 1914, and by the "Turon" theater troupe in Fergana between 1914 and 1916. The play was staged during revolutionary periods. After "Padarkush," many amateur theater troupes were established [3.225].

Theater groups were established in the cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Kokand, and theater writers and art specialists, such as Avloni and Hamza, were trained. Between 1911 and 1917, the number of Uzbek stage works written, – whose titles are known to specialists, – exceeded forty. The Jadids placed great importance on the theater. They staged performances in theaters across several cities. The main idea promoted in these performances was to lead people out of darkness and ignorance. For the Jadids, theater was an unlimited opportunity to convey their ideas to society.

The theater provided the Jadids with an opportunity to create an environment for discussion. In the dramatic works written by Jadid authors, greater emphasis was placed not on the individual personalities of the characters but on their representation as social types. Overall, socially themed performances featured both positive and negative aspects. Each performance had an ideological purpose that it aimed to convey to the audience. As a result, the intended goal was achieved, and by the end of the play, the audience understood the idea presented. At the conclusion of each performance, one of the characters summarizes the main message of the show.

As there were no professional actors in the theater, the staged works were performed by amateurs. When plays were staged with madrasa students, it was very difficult to find female actors, so in the early days, male actors played female roles. Until 1914, Armenian or Georgian girls occasionally performed on stage [1.177]. Hamza Hakimzoda Niyozı was one of the Jadids who held an important place in Uzbek literature due to his activities in the field of theater and his contributions to Uzbek theater. For this reason, the large theater building in Tashkent and many other places in Uzbekistan are named after him. His first success in this field was the work “Zaharli hayot yoxud ishq qurbonlari” (“Poisonous life or victims of love”). This work depicts the pure love between two young people and their deaths caused by an ignorant society.

In Kokand, Hamza Hakimzoda Niyozı wrote the work “Boy ıla Xizmatchi” (“The rich man and the servant”), emphasizing the importance of literacy in society. In addition, his works titled “Kim to‘g‘ri?” (“Who is right?”), “Tuhmatchilar jazosi” (“The punishment of slanderers”) and “Maysaraning ishi” (“Maysara’s affair”) are among the earliest examples of comedy. His work “Paranji sirlaridan bir lavha yoki yallachilar ishi” (“A scene from the secrets of the veil or the work of the yalla singers”) is a psychological drama. One of the active representatives of the Jadid movement in Tashkent, Abdulla Avloniy, wrote the plays “Pinak”, “Biz va Siz” (“We and You”), “Portugaliya inqilobi” (“The Portuguese revolution”), “Advokatlik osonmi?” (“Is being a lawyer easy?”), and “Ikki muhabbat” (“Two Loves”). In his works, Avloniy revealed the stagnant state of traditional life and addressed harmful habits such as gambling, drawing attention to the need to prevent the lack of education and upbringing.

Abdurauf Fitrat greatly influenced the development of theater in Bukhara. On the one hand, Fitrat was involved in opening new Jadid schools, and on the other, he was engaged in organizing theaters. Fitrat gained fame through his theatrical works. In his theatrical works, Fitrat focused on historical themes and aimed to enlighten the public through his works. He wrote plays such as “O‘g‘uzxon”, “Chingizxon”, and “Temur sag‘anasi”. The main themes of “Chin sevish” and “Hind inqilobchilari” were the independence of India. The play “Hind Inqilobchilari” (“The Indian Revolutionaries”) depicts the struggle against the British in all its complexity. In the play, the theme of love is used to convey the main message.

Fitrat participated in the staging of theatrical performances. Another of Fitrat’s theatrical works, “Shaytonning Tangriga isyoni” (“The Devil’s Rebellion against God”), was a dramatic short epic. This work explains that the devil does not obey God’s commands. It narrates the story of how the devil, created from fire, was expelled from paradise for refusing to bow to Adam, who was created from the clay. The work titled “Abulfayzxon” is the first historical drama in the Uzbek literature. In this play, Abulfayzxon’s attempts to ascend the throne and his oppression of the people are depicted critically, and ultimately, his assassination is mentioned. The author emphasizes the need to fight against tyranny through Ibrahim’s character.

Due to unfavorable conditions and factors such as censorship, staging theater performances was difficult. The first theatrical performances were organized in private homes and continued for a long period. During the Jadid period, the foundation of theatrical art was firmly established, and despite many Jadids being massacred, it was successfully continued by writers who followed in their footsteps. Mahmud Khoja Behbudi’s novel “Padarkush” demonstrates the power of theater’s influence. Besides Behbudi, many intellectuals such as Abdulla Qori, Abdulhamid Cholpan, Hamza Hakimzoda Niyozı, Abdulla Avloniy, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Munavvar Qori created literary works. Despite the pressures and

obstacles, theater continued to develop. There were attempts to stage works, even if done secretly. Initially performed by amateur groups, these works were later presented to audiences by professional troupes. As society progressed, women began to take their place in theater and demonstrate their significant influence within society through the stage. Theater has become an important cornerstone in enlightening people.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that Uzbek theater was born as a result of the Jadid movement in the form of an enlightening theater. The main goals of the theater, as stated in the “Nizom” of the “Turon” troupe – the first Uzbek creative ensemble – were: a) to develop a serious attitude towards stage performances and philanthropy among the population, and b) to present performances to the people and provide them with wholesome entertainment... [4.3]. Overall, an important feature of Jadid theater and dramaturgy was its ability to portray family life in a way that touched the human heart, educating it intellectually, and thereby celebrating the ideas of national awakening that were gaining momentum in society at the time. The torch lit by the Jadid enlighteners continued to illuminate the paths of art, introducing new ideas and aspirations into theater and dramaturgy until the 1930s.

5.1 Limitations and Future Study

This study is limited to a historical and document-based analysis of Jadid theater, primarily focusing on the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It does not include empirical data, such as interviews with theater practitioners or audience reception studies, which could offer additional perspectives on the contemporary legacy of Jadid dramaturgy. Future research may consider a comparative approach by examining how similar educational theater movements evolved in other Islamic or post-colonial societies. Additionally, further exploration of gender roles in early Jadid theater and the gradual inclusion of women on stage will provide valuable insights into the social dynamics of reform-era performance culture.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the academic staff and librarians for their support in accessing rare historical archives and theater manuscripts. Special thanks are extended to colleagues in Central Asian Studies who provided critical feedback during the development of this manuscript, as well as to the translators who helped interpret the original texts written in Turkic and Persian. In addition, the author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the research assistants who carefully catalogued, digitized, and organized many of the archival documents used in this study. Their meticulous work made it possible to reconstruct the intellectual networks and cultural exchanges that defined the Jadidism era. The encouragement of fellow scholars and peers during workshops and conferences also played a vital role, offering constructive discussions that sharpened the analytical framework of this study.

The author is further indebted to their family and close friends, whose patience and moral support sustained the long process of writing and revision. Without their encouragement, the challenges of engaging with such a broad range of historical materials would have been far more difficult to overcome. Finally, appreciation is extended to the broader academic community, whose prior studies laid the foundation upon which this work has been built. While the responsibility for any errors or oversights remains entirely the author’s own, the collective contributions of these individuals and institutions are deeply appreciated.

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