

The Development of Political Doctrines in Central Asia (17th–19th Centuries)

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ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 19th century, Central Asia faced significant socio-economic underdevelopment, with a low standard of living and strong religious influence shaping cultural and spiritual life. During this period, interest in Sufi philosophy and medieval Muslim thinkers' works grew, reflecting a revival of intellectual and cultural heritage. This shift led to an increasing belief in human intelligence and knowledge as key forces for societal change, inspiring the emergence of the Enlightenment movement. The movement aimed to promote scientific progress, social development, and universal human values while challenging oppression and stagnation. Its rise coincided with the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia, which played a crucial role in shaping its direction and ideological foundations. Progressive intellectuals of the time sought to reform society by advocating for education and enlightenment as means to achieve liberation and modernization.

Keywords: Reform; Society; People; Secure; Duty; Justice; Ambassadors; Civilization; State; Stability; Governance; Gender Equality.

1. Introduction

In the second half of the 19th century, the Enlightenment in Central Asia focused on promoting the cultural and spiritual heritage of past generations and upholding the principles of Muslim morality. It encouraged people to pursue knowledge and scientific advancement while simultaneously criticizing the backwardness of the existing socio-economic system and the low cultural and spiritual awareness of society. The movement sought ways to overcome these challenges, striving for socio-economic progress, cultural enrichment, and the humanization of society. Beginning in the second half of the 19th century, the central theme of political thought in the region was Enlightenment. The ideas of prominent figures such as Sattorkhon Abdulgafforov, Mukimiy, Furqat, Ahmad Donish, and Berdaq exemplify this intellectual movement [1].

According to these intellectuals, the primary cause of injustice in society was the backwardness of its members. Therefore, they viewed the liberation of the people and the elimination of colonial oppression as their foremost objectives.

1.1. Study Objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

[1] to analyze the evolution of political doctrines in Central Asia from the 17th to the 19th century, with a particular focus on the emergence of Enlightenment thought. [2] to examine the socio-economic and cultural conditions that spurred the revival of Sufi philosophy and medieval Muslim intellectual traditions. [3] to assess the contributions of key intellectual figures - such as Ahmad Donish, Berdaq, and Mukimi - in advocating for societal reform and modernization. [4] to evaluate the impact of external forces, particularly the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia, on the transformation of regional political and legal thought. [5] to explore the dynamic interplay between traditional religious values and emerging modern principles in shaping governance and societal progress.

2. Discussion

Bukhara's prominent Enlightenment thinker, Ahmad Donish, was born in 1827 in Bukhara. Over time, he emerged as one of the most influential intellectuals of his era. He served in the court of Amir Nasrullah, where he developed his philosophical and political ideas. Ahmad Donish believed that for society to be truly aligned with human interests, a fundamental transformation in people's behavior was necessary. In his view, this change could only begin when individuals first understood their own nature and purpose [2].

Ahmad Donish deeply lamented the lifestyle of the citizens living under the Bukhara Emirate, particularly their low cultural and spiritual level. He believed that the only way to improve society was through its humanization. To achieve this, he argued that the existing social order needed to be transformed. In pursuit of reform, he presented a proposal to Amir Muzaffariddin, advocating for changes aimed at humanizing the socio-economic system in Bukhara. However, his proposal was rejected.

Ahmad Donish understood that the most crucial step toward creating a just society was the reform of the state itself. He maintained that the state should serve the interests of the people as a whole, rather than a select group of individuals. Furthermore, he believed that the ruler should be enlightened, just, and wise, consulting his officials on critical state matters before making decisions. Under such leadership, the principles of social justice would be established in society.

A state founded on injustice and indifferent to the well-being of its citizens, according to Ahmad Donish, could not endure for long. He asserted that one of the key conditions for humanizing society was adherence to social justice, particularly ensuring equality among people. He emphasized the fair distribution of both material and spiritual wealth, believing that such measures would prevent conflicts and disagreements within society.

Ahmad Donish tirelessly sought ways to lift his homeland out of its state of backwardness. He famously stated, "A person will always survive only if he defends his homeland, only if he stands with his people". In his quest for progress, Donish also studied the socio-political teachings of the West, seeking insights that could benefit his nation.

Additionally, he placed great importance on the selection of competent, educated, and responsible individuals for state institutions. He stressed that the administration and production systems required knowledgeable and experienced personnel. He was critical of certain state officials, accusing them of incompetence and neglecting the people's interests while remaining loyal to their positions.

In contrast, he observed that many incompetent individuals were drawn to the ruling elite not out of a sense of duty but because they lacked the skills to succeed in any other profession or trade. He remarked, "The reason such people surround the throne is that they are well aware of their own laziness and inability to succeed in any real trade or profession. Even if they lack intelligence, they secure a place in the kingdom through flattery, allowing them to live comfortably under the sultan's patronage" [3]. In other words, such individuals serve only their own interests and personal gain. Ahmad Donish attributes this to the lack of clear discipline in the state administration of the emirate. To address this issue, he argues that the emir (or king) must establish strict discipline within the

government. Furthermore, he insists that the roles and responsibilities of each professional and business owner should be clearly defined and that individuals should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfill these duties effectively.

Ahmad Donish also proposed a solution to this problem, stating: “The king must establish a grand council. He should select its members from among the most intelligent and learned individuals representing different social classes within the country and provide them with salaries. The councilors who convene there should act in the best interests of both the people and the state. Any decisions they collectively agree upon should be implemented without hesitation” [4]. In the history of Central Asian socio-political thought, Ahmad Donish was among the first thinkers to propose the idea that the origin of the state is closely linked to the concept of property [5]. According to Ahmad Donish, the primary duty of the state is to care for its people. He compares state power to a ruler sitting on a throne, emphasizing that five essential elements are needed to sustain it: justice, a strong army, the support of the people, access to water resources, and a well-managed treasury [6].

According to Ahmad Donish, the primary duty of the state is to safeguard the interests of the people. He believed that for a state to prosper, five essential conditions must be met:

The King Must Be Just and Strong: The ruler must not be arrogant, lazy, tyrannical, or weak. Instead, he should embody honesty, kindness, and humility, always assisting those in need and living modestly like an ordinary citizen. Donish asserts that a king who lacks patience and contentment cannot be just. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the ruler must govern in accordance with Sharia law, remain aware of the people’s conditions, maintain close ties with scholars and intellectuals, create favorable conditions for their work, and select two loyal and intelligent ministers. All his political decisions should be guided by the prosperity and well-being of his people and country.

Public Officials Must Be Honest and Fair: Ahmad Donish stresses that government officials must act with honesty and integrity. He warns that if officials are corrupt and unjust, even a righteous king will be unable to maintain stability, leading to public dissatisfaction and the collapse of the state. In such cases, the king must take decisive action against corrupt officials; otherwise, he risks becoming complicit in their wrongdoing.

The State Must Ensure Access to Medical Care: Donish believed that every city should have an adequate number of doctors and physicians, reflecting his concern for both the physical and spiritual well-being of the people. He argued that only a physically healthy society can produce a strong and enlightened generation, as true maturity and personal development are only possible when individuals are in good health. He supports this idea with the following statement: “If a city lacks doctors, many people will suffer from illnesses and die due to both internal and external causes. When this happens, society will collapse” [7].

Hospitality and Kindness Toward Visitors and Those in Need: The residents of a city should be compassionate and welcoming to visitors, particularly those in need. Ahmad Donish emphasizes that the state must create comfortable conditions for foreigners, ambassadors, tourists, and others who travel to the country. This includes building caravanserais and hotels to accommodate them. Moreover, he stresses that kindness and generosity should be extended to all visitors, regardless of their religious background.

Failure to uphold such hospitality, he warns, would lead to the state being perceived as unwelcoming and closed to outsiders. This would negatively impact trade and diplomatic relations, hinder the country's development, and push it into isolation, ultimately causing its reputation to diminish.

In his major work, *A Brief History of the Emirs of Bukhara*, Ahmad Donish highlights how Russian and other foreign merchants and tourists were mistreated upon visiting Bukhara. Instead of being welcomed, they were arrested, and their property was confiscated. As a consequence, Bukhara merchants were similarly detained in Orenburg, leading to a series of diplomatic and economic setbacks. He attributes these events to the decisions of an ignorant and arrogant minister, underscoring the destructive consequences of such policies [8].

Sufficient Water Supply for Agriculture: Ahmad Donish emphasizes the critical role of water in sustaining agriculture and, consequently, the prosperity of a nation. He states: "The water flowing from the large and small streams that originate from the river must be abundant enough to support the country's agriculture. This is one of the most essential necessities of life. No matter the city, if it lacks sufficient water, it will inevitably fall into ruin before long".

Donish underscores that a stable and well-managed water supply is fundamental to both economic stability and the overall survival of a civilization. Without adequate water resources, agricultural production would decline, leading to food shortages, economic instability, and ultimately, the collapse of the city or state. Ahmad Donish understood the critical need for water among the people, which is why he proposed constructing a canal from the Amu Darya to irrigate the land and support agricultural development.

He succinctly encapsulated his philosophy on leadership with the statement: "A leader is like a spring, and those around him draw water from it". This metaphor highlights his belief that a just and capable ruler serves as a vital source of sustenance and guidance for his people, ensuring their well-being and the prosperity of the state [9],[10]. It is evident from this that justice, social stability, enlightenment, and the overall development of a country are closely tied to its leader. In his work, Ahmad Donish offers valuable insights, particularly on matters of defense, state governance, and societal organization.

He emphasizes that a strong defense system is essential for a nation's prosperity, highlighting the importance of maintaining a well-supported army. He states: "Without these, no state can endure. There can be no king without soldiers, and no soldier can survive without a treasury. A prosperous country is a prerequisite for a thriving civil society. It is the king's duty to ensure that sufficient soldiers are trained and equipped to protect the nation from its enemies, utilizing the wealth of the treasury".

This passage underscores Donish's belief that national security, economic stability, and governance are interconnected, and that a ruler must strategically invest in defense to safeguard the state's future [11].

A standing army must always be maintained in the country, as threats can emerge unexpectedly. Without a well-organized and ready military force, gathering scattered troops to confront an enemy would be difficult.

Ahmad Donish also provides his thoughts on the qualities a soldier should possess when being recruited. According to him, a soldier must: 1) Be courageous and brave. 2) Be intelligent and vigilant. 3) Be an experienced and

well-trained soldier. 4) Skillfully wield a sword and rifle, and effectively handle fire and water in battle. 5) Be wise and resourceful, capable of adapting to any situation. 6) Have battlefield experience, having encountered and fought against other brave warriors. 7) Only those who embody these qualities, Donish argues, can truly be considered soldiers.

Ahmad Donish's socio-political views hold particular significance in shaping the development of a nation. He clarified the relationship between the state and reason, as well as the state and property. He defined the fundamental duties of the state, advocated for reforms in governance, and proposed measures to ensure national prosperity. He also articulated the concept of a just and enlightened ruler, outlining the ruler's responsibilities. Furthermore, he expressed a balanced and positive perspective on both religious and secular matters, all while striving for a just, prosperous, and fulfilling life for his people.

Berdimuhamed Kargaboy oglu, known by his pseudonym Berdaq, was born in 1827 in the village of Aqqal'a in the Muynak district, south of the Aral Sea. He became a renowned enlightener and public figure, making significant contributions to the development of Muslim culture through his many poems and epics.

According to Berdaq, for society to become more humane, the state must serve the people, and in return, citizens should serve their homeland and community while taking pride in their work. He believed that for a person to be valued and respected in society, honesty and truthfulness must be upheld as fundamental virtues. In his view, an individual who lacks these qualities in their moral and spiritual character cannot truly be considered human.

Berdag also argued that the presence of negative traits in people's moral and spiritual character is shaped by the socio-economic conditions of their time. He believed that to eliminate moral and spiritual corruption, it is first necessary to address social injustice and provide proper education.

To increase the number of enlightened individuals in society, Berdaq emphasized the need for a conscientious and just leader—one who prioritizes the well-being of the people over personal interests. He also recognized that women make up a significant portion of society, asserting that the humanization of society is directly linked to the cultural and spiritual development of women.

Berdag advocated for gender equality, stressing that men and women should have equal rights in society. However, he also believed that a woman should be a devoted companion to her husband, treating him with deep love and respect. He strongly condemned the practice of selling women for large sums of money, denouncing it as a sign of ignorance and moral decay. He viewed societal traditions as major influences on women's self-esteem and human rights, often restricting their freedoms. As a Karakalpak enlightener, Berdaq called for the protection of women's rights and the advancement of their social status.

Muhammad Aminkhodja Mukimi was born in 1850 in Kokand. From 1870, he worked as a ferryman at the Aqjar ferry on the banks of the Syrdarya River. In the early 1880s, he returned to Kokand, where he lived in a cell at the Hazrat Madrasah until the end of his life. Devoted to calligraphy and writing, he emerged as a powerful critic and satirical enlightener of his time. Mukimi exposed the devastating effects of colonial policies, revealing how once-thriving cities and villages in the beautiful Fergana Valley were falling into ruin. He highlighted the

worsening poverty and helplessness of the people, the trampling of human rights, and, in particular, the hypocrisy of the so-called “democratic electoral system” promoted by the colonial rulers. He mocked the arbitrariness, cruelty, deceit, and moral decay of Tsarist Russian authorities and their local collaborators.

He was deeply disturbed by the stark inequality in society - where local elites and wealthy individuals lived in luxury while the laboring class, which formed the foundation of society, suffered from poverty and hunger. Mukimi was outraged by oppression and injustice, calling on people to recognize the flaws of the existing social system and to strive for a more humane society based on knowledge, science, honesty, religion, and true democracy.

Mukimi’s four-part work, *Travelogue*, is not merely a personal account of his journeys but a profound literary critique of the colonial system and the pressing social issues of his time.

As a prominent enlightener, he sharply condemned colonial rule, famously declaring, “The world is a drug!” At the same time, his deep patriotism, unwavering loyalty to his homeland, and profound national pride are clearly reflected in his works [12].

The enlightener Ubaydullah Usta Salih oğlu, known as *Zavqiy*, firmly established himself as a prominent intellectual and became widely recognized as a popular enlightener during the 1870s and 1880s. *Zavqiy* began his literary career by composing romantic ghazals and muhammas, but he soon shifted his focus to socio-political themes and the urgent problems of his time. Through his works, he artistically depicted scenes from the lives of the working class and the oppressed communities in both cities and villages.

A critical perspective on colonial realities and negative social phenomena became a defining feature of *Zavqiy*’s literary contributions. His satirical approach targeted vices such as meanness, corruption, dishonesty, and moral decay, exposing them in the actions and character of individuals. This sharp critique of societal flaws and colonial rule became the dominant ideological foundation of his Enlightenment-era works.

Zavqiy’s contributions to satire were immense. As a writer of numerous satirical pieces, he played a significant role in expanding and strengthening the satirical literary movement, which had been pioneered by Mukimi in Uzbek national literature [13].

Many of the enlightener’s works, written in a socio-political and humorous tone, convey serious reflections and firm conclusions about the most pressing issues in a country that had been turned into a Tsarist colony. These works critically examine the deep socio-economic divisions within society, particularly in terms of human rights and the unequal distribution of wealth, as well as their far-reaching consequences. Such writings were a significant innovation in national literature.

The influence of the *Jadid* movement, which emerged in the early 20th century advocating for national liberation, scientific progress, and educational reform, played an incomparable role in shaping the Enlightenment worldview. Those who embraced Enlightenment ideals actively promoted science and education, supported new methods of schooling, and called for the mastery of modern knowledge and technology to keep pace with global advancements. In this regard, the poem that begins with the line “Seize the opportunity, friends, let us open our eyes to the nation” is particularly noteworthy.

Turdi Faroghi was an enlightener who lived and worked in the Bukhara Khanate in the 17th century. Early in his career, he served at the khan's palace, where he composed works praising the rulers of the time and dedicated hymns to them. However, as he gained a deeper understanding of the suffering and hardships faced by the working people, he underwent a sharp ideological transformation, and his literary focus shifted toward social justice.

Faroghi identified inequality as the root cause of robbery, invasion, lawlessness, and tyranny within society. He directly condemned the khan and his inner circle, holding them responsible for fostering an environment where corruption and oppression thrived for their own personal gain. In his view, these rulers not only tolerated but actively encouraged injustice to accumulate wealth and consolidate power.

According to Turdi Faroghi, the only way to escape such oppression was for the working people to rise and fight for their independence. Once they had secured their freedom, they could entrust their fate to a just and enlightened king. He believed that only under the rule of such a leader could peace and stability be achieved. A truly enlightened ruler, he argued, would surround himself with wise, just, and people-oriented advisors, leading the state with fairness and compassion.

Faroghi further asserted that if a king genuinely cared about the well-being of his people, he would put an end to internal conflicts. He warned that wars fought over power and the throne would only drain the nation's resources and plunge the state into crisis. For him, true leadership was not about personal ambition but about ensuring the peace, prosperity, and stability of the nation.

3. Results

Similar political and legal ideas were also put forward by Sayyida Nasafi, who lived and worked at the end of the 16th century. Born into a poor family near the city of Karshi, he received his early education in Bukhara, where he later remained and continued his intellectual work. Sayyida Nasafi, while advocating for the rights of ordinary people, recognized that the unjust policies of the rulers were the primary cause of the hardships endured by hardworking citizens.

Emphasizing that the foundation of any state is its people, Nasafi argued that a ruler's power ultimately depends on the support of the people, as no king can govern without them. From this perspective, he asserted that the primary duty of the state and its leader is to care for the people, ensure national peace, and protect the country's stability. He strongly condemned rulers who failed in this responsibility, maintaining that such neglectful kings had no right to govern. Furthermore, he believed that the people had the right to resist and express their dissatisfaction with unjust rulers.

The historian Khoja Samandar Termizi also made significant contributions to the political and legal thought of this period. His political and legal views are reflected in his work "Dastur al-Muluk" (Advice to Rulers), which provides guidance on governance and statecraft [14].

In his work, Khoja Samandar Termizi presented his views on the origin of the state based on religious teachings. He emphasized the idea that the state was created by God and that its governance was entrusted to God's vicegerent on earth—the king. In his opinion, God did not entrust state leadership to just anyone but to a person capable of ruling

effectively, ensuring peace, fighting for power when necessary, and overcoming difficulties with resilience. Thus, governing the state is an extremely responsible and complex task that only a just ruler can successfully fulfill.

Since injustice inevitably leads a state into crisis, Termizi argued that the ruler must establish strict order and enforce laws to maintain stability and strengthen his authority. He believed that caring for the people is a constant duty of the ruler, requiring continuous communication with his subjects. To prevent oppression and ensure justice, the king must appoint trusted assistants who would safeguard the property and well-being of every member of society.

When selecting these assistants, the ruler should prioritize intelligence, morality, and wisdom, as these officials serve as intermediaries between the king and the people. Their integrity ensures stability within the state and contributes to its strength. However, if corrupt and dishonest individuals gain power, public dissatisfaction will inevitably grow. Therefore, the king must be fair in dealing with civil servants, ensuring that no official is accused without just cause. Termizi stressed the importance of having sufficient evidence before passing judgment on any individual.

Termizi's views on diplomacy reveal that he was a proponent of peace and good neighborly relations between states. He believed that the selection of ambassadors required great wisdom, as the ambassador represents the king and establishes diplomatic relations with other nations. The ambassador serves as the king's eyes and voice, and his demeanor and conduct could determine whether peace or hostility arises between two states.

Termizi strongly condemned wars of aggression, considering them unjust. However, he believed that a war fought in defense of one's state was justified. Given the inevitability of interstate conflicts, he emphasized that the king must maintain a strong and well-equipped army while staying informed about its condition. An army with sufficient supplies and strategic preparation ensures national security.

Furthermore, he insisted that military personnel should not be chosen randomly but should be brave, intelligent, physically strong, and disciplined individuals. According to Termizi, a well-structured army plays a crucial role in consolidating the ruler's power. Since a nation's survival is closely tied to its military strength, he asserted that a state must maintain an army even in times of peace to ensure long-term stability and security. The ideas put forward by Termizi remain relevant today and can be seen reflected in the ongoing reforms in Uzbekistan, particularly in governance, law enforcement, military organization, and diplomatic strategies.

In the second half of the 19th century, Central Asian enlighteners believed that in order to humanize society, it was necessary to lift the country out of socio-economic and cultural backwardness. They advocated the idea that education and knowledge were essential for achieving this goal. These ideas were also reflected in the views of the famous Uzbek enlightener from Kokand, Zakirjon Kholmuhammad oglu Furqat.

Zakirjon Kholmuhammad oglu Furqat was born in 1859 in Kokand. He received his early education at a local school and, in 1883, enrolled in the Kokand madrasah. However, due to the worsening socio-political situation in Kokand, he was unable to continue his studies. In 1889, he moved to Tashkent, where he became acquainted with not only Muslim literature but also world literature.

His travels took him to Samarkand in 1891, followed by journeys to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Egypt. In 1892, he visited Arabia and later traveled to Bombay and Kashmir in 1893. That same year, he arrived in Kashgar and, traveling through Kashmir and Tibet, reached the Uyghur lands. He lived in Yorkent for many years and passed away in 1909.

Furqat strongly emphasized that friendship and brotherhood among different peoples were key to creating a more humane society. He believed that in order to benefit from the achievements of world civilization, it was essential to learn the languages, customs, and traditions of other nations.

4. Conclusion

According to Furqat, the rise of ignorance and lack of education in society was not just a setback but a tragedy and disaster. He viewed science as a guiding star, capable of illuminating the path for the uninformed and leading them toward righteousness. Furqat concluded that the faster scientific progress is achieved, the sooner the dreams and aspirations of society will be realized. He argued that as the number of educated individuals increases, the number of spiritually impoverished people will decrease, ultimately making society more enlightened and humane [15].

As early as the second half of the 19th century, Central Asian thinkers advocated for the education of Muslim women as a means to humanize society and lift it out of socio-economic and, especially, cultural-spiritual crises.

In particular, Zakirjon Kholmuhammad oglu Furqat proposed the idea that women should receive an education equal to that of men. He also emphasized that women should have the right to participate in public life alongside men, arguing that their presence in society was essential for progress and enlightenment.

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Consent for publication

The author declares that he consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

Author's independent contribution.

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