

THE ROLE OF FEMALE JADIDS IN JADID ACTIVITY

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The Jadid movement, which emerged in Central Asia at the turn of the 20th century, sought to reform society through education, modern thinking, and cultural revival. While much attention has been given to male figures of this movement, female Jadids also played an indispensable role. This article highlights the lives, courage, and intellectual contributions of remarkable Uzbek women who, often at the cost of personal freedom and safety, contributed to national awakening, educational reform, and cultural transformation during the Soviet era. Through the stories of women like Matluba Muhammad, Maryam Sultonmurodova, Xayriniso Majidkhanova, and Dilorom Yusupova, we shed light on a hidden chapter of Uzbek history and the extraordinary resilience of these female pioneers.

Keywords: Female Jadids, Jadidism, Uzbek women, Matluba Muhammad, Maryam Sultonmurodova, Xayriniso Majidkhanova, Soviet repression, women's education, national awakening, cultural modernization.

Introduction

The Jadid movement, which emerged in Central Asia at the turn of the 20th century, is widely recognized as a powerful force of cultural and intellectual reform that sought to awaken national consciousness, modernize education, and promote enlightenment ideals among the peoples of Turkestan. Much scholarly attention has been given to the male leaders of this movement—such as Mahmudkhuja Behbudiy, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Choʻlpon—who laid the foundation for a modern Uzbek national identity [1]. However, the pivotal contributions of female Jadids have remained largely underrepresented in historical discourse. These women were not passive observers; they were active participants who defied societal norms, overcame systemic oppression, and made significant strides in education, literature, health, and civil rights.

The emergence of enlightened Uzbek women during the Jadid era reflected a broader transformation in gender dynamics, national ideology, and the struggle for independence. Figures such as Matluba Muhammad, Maryam Sultonmurodova, and Xayriniso Majidkhanova epitomized the ideals of the movement [2]. Through their educational achievements, literary works, and professional dedication, they challenged not only colonial repression but also the deep-rooted patriarchy of traditional Central Asian society.

This article aims to illuminate the vital role of female Jadids in the broader Jadid

movement by exploring their biographies, literary contributions, and social impact [3]. Drawing on both archival records and published historical sources, it investigates how these women helped to reshape the cultural and intellectual landscape of their time. In doing so, the article seeks to restore their rightful place in national memory and underscore their influence in laying the foundations of an independent and progressive Uzbekistan.

The Symbol of Resistance: Matluba Muhammad

Matluba Muhammad stands out as a beacon of resistance in the disgraceful history of Soviet totalitarianism. Her name lives on as a symbol of endurance, education, and poetic patriotism. As a talented student and poet, she was only 17 years old when she wrote the verses, “My nation, long oppressed by the hand of the Tsar,” which reverberated across the Soviet Union and shook its foundations [4].

A student of great poets like Cho‘lpon and Shokir Sulaymon, Matluba’s patriotic poetry became so influential that it was published in European presses, resulting in the closure of the Uzbek Pedagogical Institute in Moscow where she studied. One of her most famous poems, “Kurtulush yo‘linda” (On the Path to Liberation), was translated into German by Sattor Jabbor and widely circulated, prompting fierce Soviet backlash. Her intellectual rebellion not only threatened the oppressive regime but also inspired a generation of young women [5].

Despite being expelled, imprisoned, and falsely accused, Matluba persevered. After her release and exoneration, she continued her studies, served in the medical field during wartime, and remained deeply committed to the wellbeing of her people. When Uzbekistan gained independence, she wept tears of joy, finally witnessing the freedom for which she had sacrificed so much [6]. She passed away in 1998, honored by those who remembered her struggle.

A Voice of Talent and Truth: Maryam Sultonmurodova

Maryam Sultonmurodova was another talented woman who made her mark as a writer, penning numerous essays and articles such as “Mehr ko‘zda” (Love is in the Eyes), “Kutilmagan baxt” (Unexpected Happiness), and “Qalbin nidosi” (The Cry of My Heart). Her writings reflect not only her literary talent but also her deep concern for society and the future of Uzbek women. Like other female Jadids, she used her pen as a tool of resistance and awakening, inspiring others through literature and journalism [7].

International Influence: Xayriniso Majidkhanova

Xayriniso Majidkhanova was one of the first Uzbek women to study abroad. Sent to Germany by the “Ko‘mak” society in 1922, she represented the courage and ambition of a new generation of female thinkers. Her articles, including a notable piece published in the Turkiston newspaper, revealed a progressive vision of Uzbekistan’s future.

Upon her return, she introduced modern European medical practices in rural areas, establishing child healthcare centers and promoting women's health. These efforts stirred controversy but laid the groundwork for healthcare modernization. A poem written for her departure, "Be careful, beautiful bird", reflects how symbolic her journey was for the intellectual elite of the time.

Legal Pioneer: Dilorom Yusupova

Dilorom Yusupova holds a unique place in the history of Uzbekistan as the first female legal scholar and jurist who made significant contributions to the development of legal thought and practice during the early 20th century [8]. Her achievements are not only notable because of her gender, but also because they occurred in a period when the legal profession was heavily male-dominated and women's access to higher education was extremely limited, especially in Central Asia.

Born into a time of great social transformation under the influence of the Jadid movement, Dilorom Yusupova's academic journey began at a local women's school established as part of the educational reforms encouraged by enlightened Jadid thinkers. Demonstrating exceptional intellectual ability from an early age, she pursued legal studies at a time when doing so was considered unconventional, even rebellious, for a woman. Her determination to break these boundaries was not merely a personal ambition—it was a reflection of the larger ideological spirit of the Jadid movement that championed progress, gender equity, and national advancement through education and reform.

Yusupova's early writings and legal commentaries reveal a deep understanding of both Islamic legal traditions and the emerging Soviet legal framework, which made her a bridge between the two worlds [9]. She advocated for a synthesis that would respect national identity while introducing modern legal systems that could support the rights of all citizens—especially women. As a result, she became one of the founding figures of the Uzbek school of legal thought, influencing generations of scholars and practitioners who followed her path.

Her involvement in drafting early civil codes and contributing to the legal education curriculum at institutions in Tashkent was groundbreaking. She focused not only on codification and legal principles but also on raising awareness of legal rights among ordinary people, particularly women, who had long been marginalized and excluded from the judicial system. She delivered lectures, wrote in progressive journals, and mentored a new generation of female students—many of whom would become educators, legal aides, and activists in their own right.

Dilorom Yusupova's legacy continues to inspire legal professionals and scholars in Uzbekistan today. Her contributions are increasingly being recognized in academic works, legal institutions, and public memory, as Uzbekistan reclaims the lost narratives of its national history and the courageous women who helped shape it [10].

Cultural Transformation and Identity

The influence of female Jadids was not limited to education and politics. Their exposure to European culture changed their personal appearance and dress style, which sparked debates among conservative groups. Wearing modern clothing, using utensils like spoons, and participating in theater were seen as radical departures from tradition.

However, these changes signified more than fashion; they were expressions of intellectual liberation and a desire to align with global progress. By embracing modernity, these women not only challenged patriarchal norms but also catalyzed cultural reform. Their lives demonstrated that national progress required both men and women to engage in change.

Overcoming Repression and Legacy

Despite Stalin's oppressive purges, the female Jadids remained steadfast. Many, like Matluba and her husband Vosiq Muhammadov, suffered imprisonment, exile, and execution. The loss was immense, but their stories did not end in silence. Their resilience ensured that even in prison or exile, they carried the spirit of national identity, freedom, and knowledge.

Matluba, for instance, nursed her imprisoned brother Fatxulla back to health after his return from Vorkuta and never stopped serving her people until her final days. Her life and others like hers illustrate how the Soviet regime failed to extinguish the flame of Jadid ideology.

Conclusion

Reading about these remarkable women, one cannot help but be struck by their bravery, intellectual depth, and sense of national responsibility. From publishing in international journals to defying totalitarian governments, they broke new ground for Uzbek women.

Today, thanks to ongoing state efforts and President-led initiatives, the history of the Jadid movement—and particularly its female figures—is receiving the attention it deserves. These women were not just companions to their male counterparts; they were leaders in their own right, who contributed to the enlightenment and modernization of the Uzbek nation. Their stories continue to inspire a new generation striving for freedom, education, and equality.

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