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ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS IN 18TH–19TH CENTURY AMERICAN AND UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article examines the ideas of Enlightenment that developed in the 18th–19th centuries in America and Central Asia, particularly in Uzbek literature. During this period, the concepts of science, education, moral reasoning, and social reform shaped the main intellectual currents. The article analyzes the emergence of Transcendentalism through the ideas of the European Enlightenment, as well as its interactions with the Jadid movement and their broader intellectual context.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Enlightenment Thought, Transcendentalism, Jadidism, American Literature, Uzbek Literature.

Introduction

In the history of human thought, Enlightenment represents one of the most significant stages. This concept emerged as a socio-philosophical movement aimed at advancing society through science, reason, and consciousness. The term “Enlightenment” is derived from the Arabic word *maʿrifat* — meaning knowledge or understanding — and the Persian-Tajik word *parvar* — meaning nurturing or supportive — together signifying a set of ideas that promote knowledge and elevate consciousness. Transcendentalism emerged in the early 19th century in North America, particularly in the state of Massachusetts, in the

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cities of Boston and Concord, as a philosophical and literary movement. The term is derived from “transcend” (Latin *transcendere* — “to rise above,” “to surpass limits”) and signifies surpassing existing limitations, both social and religious, through human experience and reasoning. The word “Jadid” comes from the Arabic *jadid* (جدید), meaning “new” or “modern.” In Uzbek, the term “Jadidism” (Jadidchilik) was used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to denote a movement promoting “new-method” education and socio-cultural reforms. Jadidism in Central Asia was a cultural movement aimed at reforming Muslim society. At the core of this movement lies the idea of introducing a new-method education system and promoting modern knowledge. This concept is widely known in Western intellectual thought as the Enlightenment, which developed in Europe during the 17th–18th centuries and later spread to other regions, including America and Eastern countries. The main goal of Enlightenment was to free the human mind from ignorance, encourage independent thinking, and ensure societal progress based on science. By the 19th century, these ideas began to manifest in distinct forms across different regions. In particular, in American literature, Enlightenment ideals entered a new stage in the 19th century, reaching their most refined philosophical and literary expression through the Transcendentalist movement. Building upon the rationalism of the Enlightenment, this movement deepened it further, placing human inner life, spiritual freedom, and harmony with nature at the center of its philosophy. The key figures of Transcendentalism were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller, whose works reflect a new, individualistic interpretation of Enlightenment ideas. Ralph Waldo Emerson is recognized as the founder of Transcendentalism. In his work *Nature* (1836), nature is portrayed as the principal means through which humans achieve spiritual development. According to Emerson, through nature, a person perceives divine truth and discovers their own “self.” In his *Self-Reliance* (1841), he emphasizes inner independence and self-trust. Emerson writes:

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“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.”¹

This idea enriches the rational thought of the Enlightenment with personal intuition and inner freedom. Henry David Thoreau is a writer who linked the ideas of Transcendentalism with practical life through his philosophy of nature. His work *Walden* (1854) demonstrates ways for humans to live in harmony with nature, embrace a simple lifestyle, and attain inner freedom. Thoreau criticizes the artificiality of society and calls upon humans to return to the bosom of nature. He writes:

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately...”²

Here, the author emphasizes that the primary goal is for humans to live consciously and achieve self-realization.

Margaret Fuller and the Ideas of Social Equality

Margaret Fuller was a prominent writer who enriched Transcendentalism with issues of social and gender equality. In her work *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), she addresses women’s rights and personal freedom. Fuller expands the ideas of the Enlightenment, connecting them to equality and justice in society. Transcendentalism emerged in American literature as a new stage of Enlightenment thought. While the Enlightenment emphasized the rational aspect of human reasoning, Transcendentalism complemented it with spiritual, moral, and individual freedom. In the works of Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, the human inner world, harmony with nature, and freedom of thought are placed at the center. In this respect, Transcendentalism represents the highest stage of Enlightenment development in American literature. In Uzbek literature, Enlightenment ideas developed within the Jadid movement at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries. Representatives of this movement considered modernizing education, advancing science, and awakening national consciousness as the primary means of social reform. Through their works, Jadid writers sought to

¹ Emerson, R.W. *Self-Reliance*. Boston, 1841, p. 58.

² Thoreau, H.D. *Walden*. Boston, 1854, p. 12.

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liberate the people from ignorance, direct them toward modern knowledge, and promote social awareness. Mahmudxo‘ja Behbudiy was one of the leading figures of the Jadid movement, and his works emphasize the importance of education and social reform. In his work *Maktab* (1904), he argues for the necessity of introducing a modern educational system. Behbudiy criticizes the traditional school system and advocates the “new method” of teaching, or *usul-i jadid*. According to him, education should include not only religious knowledge but also mathematics, geography, and natural sciences.

Abdulla Avloniy, in his work *Turkiy Guliston yoxud Axloq* (1913), links Enlightenment thought to moral education. He regards knowledge as the primary means through which humans can achieve perfection. Avloniy emphasizes: “Ilm — inson uchun najot yo‘lidir.”³

Through this perspective, he interprets enlightenment not merely as knowledge but as a means of moral and ethical perfection.

Abdurauf Fitrat was an influential writer in Jadid literature who developed ideas of social and national awakening. His works emphasize the need to renew society, cultivate national consciousness, and acquire modern knowledge. In his journalistic writings, Fitrat advocated for liberating the people from ignorance and achieving progress through science. He regarded enlightenment as a central factor for preserving and developing the nation. Is‘hoqxon To‘ra Ibrat devoted particular attention to education and the advancement of science in his works. His views on the “new method of education” (*usul-i jadid*) contributed to the foundation of modern school systems. Ibrat considered knowledge the key driver of social progress and regarded teaching young people modern sciences as a vital task. Through their writings, Jadid authors broadly disseminated Enlightenment ideas, significantly contributing to social and cultural awakening in Uzbek society. For them, education, science, and moral training were the main instruments for renewing society. In this respect, the Jadid movement represents

³ Avloniy, Abdulla. *Turkiy Guliston yoxud axloq*. Toshkent, 1913, 15-bet.

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the most important stage of Enlightenment development in Uzbek literature. Its proponents identified modernizing education, advancing science, and fostering national consciousness as the primary means of social reform. Within this context, Is'hoqxon To'ra Ibrat holds a special place: he interpreted knowledge and enlightenment as the main drivers of societal development and played a major role in introducing usul-i jadid schools and promoting modern education. Despite differences in historical and social circumstances, Enlightenment ideas in both American and Uzbek literature served a common goal: to shape humans as conscious, independent-thinking, and morally mature individuals. From this perspective, a comparative study of these ideas based on the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Is'hoqxon To'ra Ibrat is of significant scholarly value. The purpose of this article is to identify the distinctive characteristics of Enlightenment ideas in American and Uzbek literature and to comparatively analyze their similarities and differences through the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Is'hoqxon To'ra Ibrat. Both thinkers aimed to renew society through enlightenment and to cultivate humans as conscious and independent-minded individuals. Although the Transcendentalist and Jadid movements emerged in different historical and cultural contexts in 19th-century America and Central Asia, they are both rooted in the shared ideals of enlightenment. Both currents place human intellect, education, and societal reform at the center of their vision.

1. Ideological Foundations and Origins

Transcendentalism, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, developed under the influence of European Enlightenment and Romanticism. It emphasizes the human inner world, spiritual experience, and harmony with nature.

Jadidism, on the other hand, was shaped through the work of writers such as Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Abdulla Avloniy, and aimed at modernizing Muslim society and reforming education.

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Key distinction:

Transcendentalism — philosophical and individual-oriented

Jadidism — social and practical reform movement

2. Human and Intellectual Development

Transcendentalism views the individual as an independent thinker who listens to their inner voice. In Emerson's Self-Reliance, he emphasizes the need for humans to trust themselves and transcend societal stereotypes.

In Jadidism, intellectual development is achieved through education and science. For example, Abdulla Avloniy evaluates knowledge as the "path to salvation" in his writings.

Transcendentalism — inner intuition

Jadidism — knowledge and education

3. Relationship to Nature and Society

In Henry David Thoreau's Walden, nature is portrayed as a source of spiritual purification for the individual.

In contrast, Jadid literature primarily focuses on societal reform rather than nature. Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy emphasizes the importance of education and culture for the development of society.

Transcendentalism — nature-centered

Jadidism — society-centered

4. Education and Enlightenment

Education plays a central role in both movements, though approaches differ

Transcendentalism: Education as a means for personal growth and inner development

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Jadidism: Education as a tool for societal transformation

While the Jadids reformed the school system through the *usul-i jadid*, Emerson connects education with personal reflection and intellectual development.

5. Commonalities

Despite differences, these movements share several key aspects:

Cultivation of human intellect

Renewal of society through enlightenment

Pursuit of moral and ethical perfection

Critique of old stereotypes and traditions

Although Transcendentalism and Jadidism emerged in different cultural contexts, both have roots in Enlightenment ideals. Transcendentalism emphasizes individual freedom and spiritual development, while Jadidism seeks societal progress through education and reform. Thus, these two movements can be seen as two distinct interpretations of Enlightenment ideas — one individualistic and philosophical, the other social and practical. If you want, I can also integrate this with your earlier full article translation into a single, smooth, academically formatted English version ready for submission. This would combine the historical context, philosophical analysis, and comparative outline in one cohesive document.

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