

# **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FORMATION OF AHMAD DONISH'S PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS AND THE HISTORICAL CONDITIONS OF HIS CREATIVE WORK**

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## **Abstract:**

This article examines the historical conditions of Ahmad Donish's creative activity and the key factors that influenced the formation of his philosophical views. The study highlights the socio-political, cultural, and educational environment of the 19th century, which shaped Donish's intellectual outlook and reformist ideas. Special attention is given to the role of Eastern philosophical traditions, enlightenment values, and national identity in the development of his worldview. The research emphasizes that Ahmad Donish's legacy reflects a synthesis of progressive thought, moral responsibility, and social reform, which remain significant in the context of modern intellectual history.

**Keywords:** Ahmad Donish, philosophy, historical conditions, enlightenment, spirituality, ethics, social reform, Eastern philosophy, national values, intellectual heritage.

## **Introduction**

The nineteenth century Bukhara differed fundamentally from the preceding centuries. By this time, knowledge and enlightenment had declined, struggles for the throne had intensified, and scholars were often regarded as dangerous to society and subjected to persecution. In such a turbulent period, the emergence of true scholars was nearly impossible. Ahmad Donish, an Uzbek thinker, historian, philosopher, and reformer, developed his socio-philosophical views under the socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions of the Emirate of Bukhara in the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, the Emirate of Bukhara was based on a feudal system, and society was strictly stratified. State governance had become absolutist, the use of outdated traditional methods and resistance to reforms dominated, while corruption among officials, heavy taxation, and injustice prevailed in social and political life. As a result, Ahmad Donish emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge and becoming enlightened, which can be clearly seen from his following reflections:

“Since the creation of man, his boundless happiness lies in knowledge and enlightenment. If one has free will, he should not surrender to ignorance and laziness, for knowledge and enlightenment are the desire of the soul, while indulgence and idleness are the wishes of the

ego. The pursuit of knowledge is the aspiration of the mind, whereas laziness is merely the love of bodily comfort.”<sup>1</sup>.

Every person creates the environment for himself. Whether he attains comfort through the pursuit of knowledge or becomes a slave to his desires, he thereby determines his place in society. During the Manghit dynasty, Ahmad Donish held high positions and could have chosen a life of luxury and ease within the court. However, he sacrificed his personal comfort for the sake of the people and the homeland. Ahmad Donish was a devoted, humanistic, encyclopedic scholar who dedicated his entire life to leading the nation out of stagnation. He studied and analyzed all aspects of social life in depth, seeking ways to alleviate poverty and hardship among the people. He even offered open advice and recommendations to the emirs of Bukhara. Yet, these proposals were often unwelcome; many of them were ignored.

In Ahmad Donish’s worldview, the issue of justice stood above all. He wrote: “Kings are the caliphs of God on earth. Before Him, there is no rank higher than that of a just government.”<sup>2</sup>. From these considerations, it can be stated that Ahmad Donish’s worldview is characterized by his emphasis on justice, reason, intellect, knowledge, and reflection. In the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the socio-political order in Bukhara—dominated by fanaticism, injustice, economic hardship, and backwardness—hindered the spread of enlightenment ideas in the country, becoming one of the main reasons for its lag in development.

In the second chapter of his work *Navodir-ul vaqoe*, Donish reflects on how rulers should treat their amirs, noting that “a ruler must be strong and just. For if a ruler is unjust or weak and feeble, evil men will multiply in the land, and neighboring states will begin to encroach upon his territory. In such a place, peace will disappear”<sup>3</sup>.

Ahmad Donish expressed these ideas based on years of study and observation. During his student years, he was so eager for knowledge that, beyond formal lessons, he independently pursued an in-depth study of geometry, astronomy, philosophy, and literature. He thoroughly assimilated the scientific and creative heritage as well as the life and thought of great Eastern scholars such as Ibn Sina, Abu Rayhon Beruni, Umar Khayyam, Navoi, Ghazali, Fuzuli, and Bedil. While engaging with the works of these scholars, Donish’s own critical and scientific outlook also developed. After securing a study cell in the madrasa, he himself began teaching students.

Ahmad Donish had a strong interest in the natural sciences. Through his astronomical observations, at a time when technology was not yet developed, he was able to predict precisely when a lunar eclipse would occur and how long it would last. He reportedly told his contemporaries: “Whoever wishes to see this phenomenon with their own eyes should come to

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<sup>1</sup> A.Donish. “Navodir-ul vaqoe” fors-tojikchadan tarjima qiluvchilar Alixonto’ra Sog’uniy va Abdurahmon Hamroyev. Toshkent-Istanbul 2021. B-23-24.

<sup>2</sup> Qarang: O’sha manba. B-34.

<sup>3</sup> A.Donish .Donish. “Navodir-ul vaqoe” fors-tojikchadan tarjima qiluvchilar Alixonto’ra Sog’uniy va Abdurahmon Hamroyev. Toshkent-Istanbul 2021. B-63.

the roof of the madrasa at such-and-such an hour.” Sadriddin Ayni later recorded this in his memoirs.

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Donish gathered his disciples in his home and organized intellectual evenings. It is no exaggeration to call him a man devoted to science and knowledge. At the same time, this thinker was also an accomplished architect of his era. While Donish was still studying in the madrasa, his father took him as an apprentice to Bobome'mor. After Bobome'mor's death, Amir Nasrullo appointed Donish as the chief architect and awarded him the title Mahdum, entrusting him with oversight of all palace construction works.

Ahmad Donish was among the first to introduce the use of colored plaster. Over a base of plain white plaster, he applied a second layer decorated with natural pigments. In particular, he created depictions of stars in black, red, and green, producing a remarkably beautiful effect. Donish also trained his son in the arts of architecture and ornamentation. Years later, his son grew to become an outstanding architect and master decorator in his own right.

Ahmad Donish, as part of the diplomatic mission of the Emirate of Bukhara, visited St. Petersburg, Russia, from November 9, 1857, to January 12, 1858. The delegation was sent to express condolences on the death of Nicholas I, to congratulate Alexander II on his accession to the throne, and to conduct negotiations aimed at strengthening trade relations between the two states. During this diplomatic journey, Ahmad Donish served as secretary and was tasked with studying Russian life and its system of governance. Donish himself wrote: “I was given the following assignment: study the internal order of that country, pay close attention to state administration. For the affairs of neighboring states we only hear about from merchants and travelers”.

In St. Petersburg, Ahmad Donish held meetings and negotiations with high-ranking state officials. He visited the city's notable landmarks, including the Technology Institute, Alexander's manufactory, the Academy of Sciences Museum in Isaac's Cathedral, and the astronomical observatory in Pulkovo, among others. The purpose of these visits was to demonstrate the power and achievements of Russia. Upon returning to Bukhara, Ahmad Donish reported on everything he had seen and studied, analyzing their positive and exemplary aspects in detail. However, his analytical accounts and proposals were not well received by the emirs. His attempt to present Russian experience as a model for improving governance in the Emirate left little impression on them. Nevertheless, Donish did not abandon his enlightenment ideas or his advocacy for reforms similar to those of European states.

Ahmad Donish's second diplomatic mission coincided with the period of growing Russian expansion. As part of the Bukhara delegation, he was tasked with affirming the Emirate's loyalty to the Russian government and negotiating the return of the conquered regions of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Jizzakh. This journey gave Donish further opportunity to enrich his scholarly views on Russia's state system and governance. For him, reforming the state and elevating Bukhara from its decline—lagging far behind European countries—became one of his central goals.

During this mission, he visited agricultural, geological, and transport museums in St. Petersburg, as well as the Pulkovo Observatory, reflecting his strong interest in astronomy. He

also toured paper mills, glass and porcelain factories, and observed Russia's cultural life by attending performances at renowned opera and ballet theaters. He visited the military fortress in Kronstadt and took part in the unveiling ceremony of the monument to Catherine II. Though his second stay was relatively short, it allowed him to become acquainted with the lifestyle and traditions of the Russian people. In negotiations, he impressed many officials with his intellectual, political, philosophical, and scientific insights.

The Emir of Bukhara was astonished by the respect shown to Ahmad Donish by the Russian state. He was later offered high administrative positions in the Emirate. However, Donish understood that in an absolutist state—where there were no binding laws and complete lawlessness prevailed—true progress could not be achieved without fundamental reforms. With his wisdom, he politely expressed gratitude for the offers of the Emir but managed to distance himself from court life. Donish compared the Bukhara court to a great fire, in which anyone who entered would inevitably be consumed, and thus he avoided becoming entangled in it.

In his work *Navodir-ul Vaqoe*, Donish wrote: "Our contemporaries serving the ruler have considered flattery and even unsuitable deeds as their duty. I am incapable of doing either. If the ruler were to demand that, as a man of letters, I serve among the military, then it would be necessary to bring this state in line with other well-regulated states. However, establishing military discipline among the Uzbeks cannot be achieved without difficulty. Therefore, I propose to write a manual of regulations composed in both Uzbek and French. If these regulations are implemented, I pledge to serve in the ruler's presence for four to six hours daily and to fulfill the tasks within my capacity and appropriate to my position. But if such advice is unwelcome, then I must ask to be excused. Just as an elephant cannot bear the load of a mountain, so too must my inability be accepted as justified"<sup>4</sup>.

During his third journey, Ahmad Donish paid greater attention to the social life of the Russian people. While observing Russian society during the trip, he remarked: "Russian society, like elsewhere, is composed of separate groups and strata, and each group or social class holds its own privileged position. Others, however, are deprived of rights and freedoms, living under oppression and spending their lives in absolute poverty".

During his journey to Russia, Ahmad Donish managed to meet representatives of different spheres of social life. Among them were the Russian orientalist and Minister of Foreign Affairs V.V. Grigoriev, and during his second trip, the literary scholar and historian P.I. Pashino. These encounters allowed him to study the state system and social life more deeply and to compare them with those of the Bukhara Emirate. Based on these comparisons, he wrote the treatise "On Civilization and the Order of Mutual Assistance" and presented it to Amir Muzaffar. Even before reviewing the treatise, Amir Muzaffar offered Ahmad Donish high-ranking positions. However, Donish replied that he would only accept such posts if the social and political reforms outlined in the treatise were implemented. After reading it, Amir Muzaffar, angered by the suggested reforms, removed Donish from the diplomatic mission.

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<sup>4</sup> Ahmad Donish. *Navodir-ul vaqoe*. (Nodir voqealar). Fors-tojikdan tarjima qiluvchilar. Alixonto'ra Sog'uniy va A.Xamroyev. Toshkent-Istanbul 2021. B-18.

As relations with Amir Muzaffar deteriorated, Donish left court service and devoted himself to scholarly activities, organizing and completing his writings. A man as intelligent, insightful, and knowledge-thirsty as Ahmad Donish was never consumed by isolation or boredom. Amir Muzaffar, realizing that leaving such a brilliant mind unemployed would damage his own reputation and, at the same time, fearing the influence of a reformer close to the emirate's affairs, appointed him as a judge in the district of Guzar in 1882. In 1885, he became the judge of Narpay, later serving as librarian in 1887, a position he left in 1889. Fearless and devoted to justice and learning, wherever Donish went, he became a patron of scholars.

Ahmad Donish's intellectual legacy is vast. He took a keen interest in the history of the 92 Uzbek tribes, collecting extensive information on their life and history. His biography can largely be reconstructed through his work "Jome-ul hikoyat" ("Collection of Stories"), which carries strong biographical significance.

His contributions to astronomy include works such as "Manazir-ul Kawakib" ("The Splendor of the Stars"), "Risala fi a'mal al-Kurra" ("Treatise on the Use of the Globe"), "Muntahab al-Ahkam" ("Selected Laws"), and "Istig'raj-i bul va arz-i balad" ("Measuring the Longitude and Latitude of Places").

Regarding the history of the Bukhara Emirate, the conquest of Central Asia by Tsarist Russia, and the socio-political life of his time, his works include "The History of the Manghit Rulers," "A Concise History of the Manghit Amirs of Bukhara," and "Navodir-ul Vaqoe" ("Rare Events"). The latter may be compared to Nizam al-Mulk's "Siyasatnama" and is often described as an encyclopedia of its era.

Ahmad Donish tirelessly sought ways to bring his homeland out of backwardness. He studied Western political, social, and philosophical doctrines, believing that through these, his country could overcome stagnation. His ideas on public welfare, prosperity, and urban improvement carry great significance. Though his reformist and enlightenment-oriented views were unwelcome to the emirs of Bukhara, over time these ideas transformed the perceptions of statesmen, philosophers, and literary figures. After the death of Amir Muzaffar, Donish returned to Bukhara. In 1897, he fell ill and passed away in Bukhara.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Bukhara Emirate was a feudal state with absolute power concentrated in the hands of the emir. The system of governance had remained unchanged since the Middle Ages. The emir himself exercised legislative and judicial authority and, at his own discretion, appointed state officials. There was no state budget system, and officials did not receive regular salaries, instead sustaining themselves at the expense of the people. Legislative power was also carried out in accordance with the rules of Sharia. Therefore, the Muslim spiritual class had a significant influence on the educational system and administrative-judicial organs. Judges carried out judicial matters in accordance with Sharia regulations. They were also responsible for monitoring adherence to moral norms. Judges held absolute authority in interpreting Sharia laws and making legal decisions.

The economy of the Bukhara Emirate was based primarily on agriculture. Ninety percent of the land belonged to the state and its officials, which meant that peasants bore the burden of hard labor. The city of Bukhara served as the religious center of Central Asia. As the "Center

of Islam,” Bukhara had great influence among Muslims in Russia and the Near East. By the mid-19th century, science, philosophy, ethics, social thought, and the entire ideological system were subordinated to religion.

The treaty of 1868 between the Bukhara Emirate and the Russian Empire imposed restrictions on the emirate’s foreign policy and brought changes to its internal governance system. For Ahmad Donish and the country’s intellectual and enlightened elite, the loss of independence was not the result of military weakness but rather of the persistence of outdated systems, the dominance of decline in social life, and the country’s political, economic, and spiritual backwardness. The state’s administrative system was ineffective and did not meet international standards, which ultimately led to such conditions.

In his works, Ahmad Donish reflected on the decline of the country and ways to overcome the crisis, how to create an ideal state, and how to organize governance in line with the demands of modernity. Alongside practical issues of state administration, Ahmad Donish also addressed matters of morality, attaching great importance to the role of ethics in governance.

He wrote:

“Muhtasib kun barahna dar bozor,  
Ko’xrabo chun zan, ki ro’y bipush”

Translation:

“How can a ruler who cannot cover his own back  
Order the immoral women in the marketplace to veil their faces?”

For Ahmad Donish, the most essential and significant element in human society was that rulers and statesmen should embody justice and morality. Before attempting to improve the morals of the people, it was more crucial to reform the ethics of rulers and government officials. If a ruler is virtuous, his influence extends not only over a single city but across an entire province, even a whole region. Conversely, the corruption of a ruler leads to the corruption of the entire country.

The unity of morality and politics forms the foundation of Ahmad Donish’s philosophical views. The foreign scholar H. Carrère, who studied Donish’s socio-philosophical ideas, emphasized that his works have not been sufficiently researched. The dominance of religious dogmas, the widespread illiteracy of the population, and the general backwardness of society meant that Eastern thinkers expressed most of their socio-philosophical views in poetic form.

The orientalist scholar E. Bertels, who studied Ahmad Donish’s works, wrote:

“Ahmad Donish’s writings combine abstract reflections of a sociological and philosophical nature. His abstract thinking is of particular interest. His work *Navodir-ul Vaqoe* (Rare Events) is highly diverse, in which the author addresses issues of morality, social life, and the structure of the state. In Donish’s oeuvre, questions such as the structure of the earth and the universe, the relationship between the soul and the body, the importance of various crafts and professions in human life, as well as matters related to family and child upbringing are explored. He may therefore be regarded as an idealist.”

In his *Navodir-ul Vaqoe*, which he wrote over a span of fifteen years, Ahmad Donish devoted special emphasis to moral questions, including a separate chapter on “Teaching Children Crafts

and Their Advantages.” Donish sought to make it easier for children to choose a profession. He described the main professions in the emirate, such as teacher (mudarris), calligrapher, judge, merchant, poet, astronomer, and physician. According to Bertels, this chapter holds particular significance as it presents a form of sociological analysis.

In Donish’s views, justice and morality occupied the foremost place. In evaluating each profession, he advanced ethical criteria. From his perspective, the schoolteacher stands above the mudarris, since the teacher educates children who are unaware of the importance of learning, and does so without expecting personal benefit. The mudarris, by contrast, teaches people whose personal interests are already clearly defined.

In his socio-philosophical thought, Ahmad Donish consistently sought to subordinate the state, politics, and social relations to questions of morality. For the thinker, reason, morality, and justice were of equal importance when considering issues such as social relations, the origins of the state, and the responsibilities of the ruler.

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