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# Mahmud Kashgari's Enlightenment Ideas

Kholova Umida Umedovna\*<sup>1</sup>

1. PhD., Researcher at Bukhara State University

\*Correspondance: [umidaxonxolova@gmail.com](mailto:umidaxonxolova@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This article examines the enlightenment-oriented views of Mahmud al-Kashgari and his philosophical and ethical ideas concerning the concept of the virtuous and intellectually accomplished individual. Drawing primarily on Diwan Lughat al-Turk and other works attributed to the thinker, the study analyzes his perspectives on knowledge, language, morality, education, human virtues, and social development. The research demonstrates that Mahmud al-Kashgari regarded knowledge and enlightenment as the fundamental prerequisites for human perfection and social progress. He portrayed the ideal individual as one who embodies wisdom, moral integrity, patriotism, honesty, compassion, and a strong sense of social responsibility. The article further highlights the enduring relevance of his intellectual legacy and substantiates the significance of his ideas for contemporary spiritual, moral, and educational development.

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## 1. Introduction

The Karakhanid rulers' strong commitment to scholarship and learning brought about significant transformations in the intellectual sphere and contributed to a substantial increase in the number of scholars. The importance they attached to educational activities was primarily driven by two key factors. First, it was intended to strengthen the newly adopted Islamic faith among the Turkic tribes and to eliminate remnants of earlier beliefs that were incompatible with their new religious convictions. Second, these educational institutions served as important instruments for reinforcing Sunni doctrine and consolidating Sunni religious identity in opposition to Shiite influences [1].

The development of the educational system during the Karakhanid period and the gradual transformation of madrasas into major centers of learning created favorable conditions for the emergence of a vibrant intellectual and scholarly environment. As a result of this flourishing educational atmosphere, a number of distinguished scholars emerged in various fields of knowledge. During this period, Kashgar – the capital of the Karakhanid state—evolved into a prominent center of learning and occupied a leading position in the advancement of science and scholarship in Central Asia. Kashgar was renowned for its mosques, madrasas, magnificent architectural complexes, caravanserais, and its community of eminent scholars and intellectuals.[2]

Among these outstanding figures, Mahmud al-Kashgari stands as one of the most remarkable representatives of the scientific and cultural flourishing of the Karakhanid era.

His intellectual activities clearly reflected the ideals of enlightenment and education. Mahmud al-Kashgari advocated the preservation and advancement of knowledge, language, and culture, emphasizing the importance of transmitting this rich heritage to future generations. Throughout his life and scholarly endeavors, he actively promoted these educational and humanistic ideals.[3]

## 2. Materials and Methods

The object of this study is the enlightenment-oriented views of Mahmud al-Kashgari and his philosophical and ethical ideas concerning the concept of the perfect human being. The research employs historical-comparative, hermeneutic, and logical-analytical methods. The primary sources analyzed are the texts of *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* and *Adab al-Salihin*, which were subjected to comprehensive scholarly examination. Relevant academic literature was critically reviewed and synthesized to provide a broader contextual framework. Mahmud al-Kashgari's perspectives on knowledge, language, morality, education, and human virtues were investigated through a systematic approach.[4] The findings are presented using a descriptive-analytical method, and the significance of the thinker's ideas for contemporary spiritual, educational, and cultural development is substantiated on a scholarly basis.[5]

### Literature Review

Mahmud al-Kashgari was one of the most eminent scholars of the eleventh-century Turkic world—a distinguished linguist, geographer, historian, and, at the same time, an accomplished folklorist and ethnographer who made an invaluable contribution through his comprehensive study of the oral traditions, customs, and cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples. His role in world scholarship, particularly in illuminating the historical and cultural development of Turkic civilizations, is of exceptional significance. His most renowned work, *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* (Compendium of the Turkic Dialects), is not merely a linguistic source but also a comprehensive encyclopedia of the culture, folklore, and ethnography of its time, providing unique insights into the social, intellectual, and cultural life of the medieval Turkic world [6].

In addition to his linguistic works, Mahmud al-Kashgari is also associated with an ethical, educational, and didactic work entitled *Adab al-Salihin* (The Conduct of the Righteous). Written in the spirit of didactic moral instruction, the work discusses in detail the ethical principles necessary for human life, their social significance, and their role in the upbringing and moral education of the younger generation.[7]

## 3. Results and Discussion

Mahmud al-Kashgari can be regarded not only as an encyclopedic scholar but also as a prominent advocate of enlightenment and education. Throughout his scholarly activities, he consistently promoted ideas aimed at intellectual development, moral refinement, and cultural preservation. His scientific and literary heritage reflects a profound commitment to the dissemination of knowledge, the cultivation of ethical values, and the advancement of society through education. The following enlightenment-oriented principles can be identified within his intellectual legacy:

### 1. The idea of understanding national identity through the formation of a national language

Mahmud al-Kashgari regarded the Turkic language not merely as a means of communication but also as a fundamental instrument of national identity and cultural self-awareness. Through his scholarly efforts, he demonstrated the lexical richness and grammatical sophistication of the Turkic language, thereby establishing its scientific and literary significance. His monumental work, *Diwan Lughat al-Turk*, compiled in the eleventh century, is far more than a comprehensive dictionary containing over 9,000 lexical

entries. It serves as an invaluable source of information on the social, cultural, and geographical landscape of the medieval Turkic world.[8]

The work includes one of the earliest linguistic maps, detailed explanations of dialectal variations, and extensive descriptions of everyday life, beliefs, customs, traditions, and values among Turkic peoples. In this regard, *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* represents not only a linguistic achievement but also a significant cultural and ethnographic encyclopedia. By preserving and systematizing the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Turkic nations, Mahmud al-Kashgari made a profound contribution to the development of Turkic studies and the strengthening of Turkic cultural consciousness. His efforts to safeguard language and transmit cultural knowledge to future generations clearly reflect his enlightenment-oriented worldview and his commitment to education, intellectual advancement, and cultural preservation [9].

## **2. The reflection of the idea of a perfect person in the views of Mahmud Kashgari**

In addition to his linguistic works, Mahmud al-Kashgari is also associated with an ethical, educational, and didactic work entitled *Adab al-Salihin* (The Conduct of the Righteous). Written in the spirit of moral instruction and didactic advice, the work provides a detailed discussion of the ethical principles necessary for human life, their social significance, and their role in the upbringing and moral education of the younger generation.[10]

*Adab al-Salihin*, as indicated by the author himself, consists of an introduction and seven chapters, each of which includes four sections. The introduction explains the main purpose of the work. In discussing the aim of its composition, the author thoroughly reveals the essence of the social necessity that requires human beings to possess positive moral qualities and virtuous conduct [11].

*Adab al-Salihin* constitutes an important source for attaining spiritual and moral perfection, cultivating virtuous character, and securing a *достойное* place in society. In this work, the author guides readers toward spiritual purity, the ideal of becoming a morally accomplished individual, and the ability to make life decisions based on justice, wisdom, and reason. Through its ethical teachings, the work emphasizes the importance of self-discipline, moral responsibility, and adherence to noble values in both personal and social life.[12]

Therefore, *Adab al-Salihin* is not only a valuable monument of the Eastern ethical tradition but also a timeless guide for moral education. Its ideas continue to retain their relevance today, serving as an important source for nurturing the younger generation in the spirit of spiritual maturity, ethical integrity, and humanistic values.

The work has preserved its didactic and educational significance throughout the centuries and continues to serve as a valuable source for the cultivation of spiritual and moral virtues. Its ethical teachings provide important guidance for fostering moral integrity, personal responsibility, and the development of noble character, making it a relevant resource for both individual self-improvement and the moral education of future generations [13].

Each chapter of the work is devoted to specific ethical principles, reflecting the author's belief that every individual must learn and adhere to positive moral values. Mahmud al-Kashgari maintained that the absence of virtuous behavior harms not only the individual but also society as a whole. According to his perspective, moral deficiencies lead to social discord, whereas the cultivation of positive character traits contributes to both personal well-being and collective prosperity.

In *Adab al-Salihin*, the acquisition of noble moral qualities is presented as one of the fundamental factors ensuring the development and stability of social life. The work emphasizes that a harmonious society can be achieved only when individuals embody ethical virtues in their daily conduct. To this end, Mahmud al-Kashgari outlines a

comprehensive system of external (zāhirī) and internal (bātinī) moral principles, which serve as essential guidelines for personal and social behavior. These principles are summarized as follows:

1. Etiquette of Greeting and Seeking Permission.
2. Etiquette of Communication.
3. Etiquette of Sleeping and Traveling.
4. Etiquette of Conversation.
5. Marital Etiquette.
6. Rules of Cleanliness and Hygiene.
7. Etiquette of Hospitality.
8. Etiquette of Banquets and Dining.
9. Rules of Travel.

Mahmud al-Kashgari employs the concept of the “virtuous person” rather than the notion of the “perfect human being.” This concept refers to the harmony and beauty of both the individual’s inner (spiritual and moral) and outer (behavioral and social) dimensions, reflecting the integration of noble character, ethical conduct, and personal refinement.

Adab al-Salihin is an important source for preparing young people for family life and, above all, for developing their understanding of family values and responsibilities. Based on the findings derived from the study and analysis of the work, it would be appropriate to incorporate its teachings into the curricula of educational institutions. In particular, integrating the ethical and educational values embodied in this work into subjects such as moral education, literature, and reading would contribute significantly to preparing young people for family life, promoting moral development, and strengthening value-based education [14].

In Adab al-Salihin, the attainment of human perfection is associated with justice, moral integrity, the pursuit of knowledge, respect for elders and younger members of society, and the ability to establish a worthy place within the community through the cultivation of these virtues.

The work serves as an important instrument for educating the younger generation in the spirit of spiritual maturity, humanism, and justice. At the same time, it harmoniously presents Eastern ethical traditions and Islamic values, promoting the ideal model of a virtuous individual and fostering a sense of social responsibility [15]. The work serves as an important means of educating the younger generation in the spirit of humanism and nurturing them into just, morally accomplished, and virtuous individuals.

#### 4. Conclusion

An enlightened society is founded upon enlightened individuals. Such individuals serve as a moral and spiritual compass within social life, guiding society through their knowledge, ethical conduct, and sense of responsibility. From this perspective, the greater the number of educated, virtuous, and enlightened individuals in a society, the greater its capacity for development, prosperity, and social progress. In this regard, Adab al-Salihin constitutes one of the most important sources for the moral and intellectual formation of enlightened and ethically accomplished individuals, providing valuable guidance for the cultivation of virtue, wisdom, and social responsibility.

Using a didactic and advisory style, the author emphasizes such noble human values as honesty, patience, humility, compassion, respect for parents, and good neighborly conduct. The work also provides a comprehensive discussion of the importance of inner purity, spiritual development, and adherence to moral and ethical principles. Through practical examples drawn from everyday life, the author conveys ethical values in a clear,

accessible, and engaging manner. Adab al-Salihin is significant not only as a source of personal moral education but also as an ethical guide that contributes to the preservation of peace, benevolence, and mutual respect within society.

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