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## **HOW ISMAIL GASPRINSKY COMBINED IDEAS OF ISLAM WITH EUROPEAN MODERNISM IN HIS WORKS**

By the late nineteenth century, the Muslim communities of the Russian Empire found themselves in a difficult position. On the one hand, Europe was rapidly advancing in science and technology; on the other, the traditional Islamic educational system had largely stagnated, leaving Turkic populations increasingly marginalized. It was in this context that Ismail Gasprinsky, a Crimean Tatar intellectual and journalist, began developing his programme of reform. What made his approach distinctive was that he refused to frame the problem as a simple choice between tradition and modernity. He did not call on Muslims to abandon their faith in favour of European values, nor did he reject Western achievements as alien. Instead, he tried to work out how the two could be brought together [1, p. 87–88; 2, p. 27].

His literary works offer the clearest expression of this idea. In *French Letters* and its continuation *Dar al-Rahat*, Gasprinsky draws on the adventure and “lost world” genre familiar from Jules Verne or Arthur Conan Doyle, but puts it to very different use. The protagonist, Molla Abbas, is a young Muslim from Turkestan who travels through Europe. He is genuinely impressed by what he sees – the infrastructure, the cleanliness of cities, the level of technological development [3, p. 68]. But he also notices things that trouble him: extreme inequality, spiritual emptiness, the growing appeal of radical political movements. Gasprinsky puts an interesting remark into this section, comparing modern Europe to ancient Rome, which was ultimately destroyed not by external enemies but by its own internal contradictions [3, p. 86].

The second part of the novel takes Abbas to a hidden community in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Andalusia – the so-called “Land of Peace.” This is Gasprinsky’s utopia, and it is worth noting what kind of utopia it is. It is not a purely Islamic paradise or a European techno-state. The society there uses modern science and urban planning but organises its social life around Islamic ethics – labour, mutual aid, modesty. Even the architecture is described as a blend of modern European geometry and Moorish ornamental style, recalling the Alhambra [2, p. 27; 3, p. 68]. The literary device is transparent, of course, but the message is clear enough: Gasprinsky wanted to show that there was no inherent contradiction between technological progress and Islamic moral order.

These ideas were not just literary experiments. Gasprinsky spent most of his life trying to implement them through education. The traditional system of Muslim schooling at the time relied heavily on rote memorisation of Arabic texts, often without comprehension, and could take years to produce basic literacy. Gasprinsky introduced a phonetic teaching method, which he called *usul-i-jadid* (the “new method”), and the results were dramatic: children could learn to read and write in their native language within about forty days [1, p. 99]. This was not just a technical improvement. The time freed up by faster literacy instruction allowed Gasprinsky to add secular subjects – mathematics, geography, penmanship – to the curriculum, alongside religious studies. Students were also encouraged to discuss the Quran rather than simply memorise it. The reform movement that grew from this, known as **Jadidism**, eventually spread far beyond Crimea, reaching Tatarstan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and even parts of Muslim India [1, p. 100].

The other major vehicle for Gasprinsky’s project was journalism. In 1883, he founded *Tercüman* (“Translator”) in Bakhchysarai – for years, the only Turkic-language newspaper in the Russian Empire [2, p. 30]. The name itself is telling: the newspaper was conceived as a kind of translation service, making European ideas accessible to a Muslim readership. **But *Tercüman* also had a linguistic dimension that is easy to overlook.** Gasprinsky deliberately wrote in a simplified, synthetic version of Turkic, based on Ottoman Turkish but incorporating

Crimean Tatar elements, so that the newspaper could be understood across different Turkic communities. In effect, he was trying to create a shared literary language for a population that was otherwise fragmented into regional dialects [2, p. 30–31]. The newspaper promoted tolerance, inter-ethnic dialogue, and – importantly – argued against the mass emigration that was draining the Crimean Tatar population at the time.

One aspect of Gasprinsky’s thought that deserves particular attention is his position on women’s rights, which was remarkably progressive for the period. He argued consistently, both in his fiction and in *Tercüman*, that no society could develop properly while excluding half its population from education and public life [2, p. 32]. In *Dar al-Rahat*, women are depicted as educated, working, and economically independent. **His well-known formulation – that the Muslim woman should be “neither a slave of the East nor a plaything of the West”** [3, p. 75] – captures his general approach neatly. He proposed that women’s emancipation was entirely compatible with Islamic tradition, pointing, for example, to marriage contracts that could protect women’s property and financial rights. This was not a peripheral issue for Gasprinsky; it was central to his understanding of what modernisation actually meant.

Looking at Gasprinsky’s legacy as a whole, what strikes most is how coherent his project was. The literary utopia, the educational reform, the newspaper, the advocacy for women – these were not separate initiatives but parts of a single argument. He was trying to demonstrate, both in theory and

in practice, that modernisation did not require a Muslim society to give up its identity. Whether he fully succeeded is another question; Jadidism faced opposition from conservative religious authorities, and the political upheavals of the early twentieth century eventually overtook many of his projects. But the intellectual framework he built – the insistence that progress and tradition can coexist if approached with enough thought – remains relevant, particularly in a world where this tension has not gone away.

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### **ISMAIL GASPRINSKY'S EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE THE CRIMEAN TATAR PEOPLE**

Since the 1880s, there are reasons to speak of the beginning of the revival of the Crimean Tatar people. This process is associated with the activities of its educated representatives. They purposefully worked to improve the situation of the Crimean Tatar ethnic group, develop education and modernize public life. By right, the figure of I. Gasprinsky laid the foundation for the cultural and educational revival of the Crimean Tatar people at the first stage of this process [1, p. 82].

I. Gasprinsky's educational path began in one of the Bakhchisarai mektebes. Then he studied for two years at the Simferopol men's gymnasium.