



THE ROLE OF MAHMUDKHODJA BEHBUDI IN THE UZBEK NATIONAL ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article explores the life, socio-political, and scientific activities of Mahmudkhodja Behbudi, a key figure and ideological leader of the Turkestan Jadid movement. The study examines Behbudi's pivotal role in the early 20th-century national awakening, focusing on his contributions to educational reform, modern journalism, theatrical arts, and the conceptualization of national independence. Utilizing historical-analytical and biographical methods, the research analyzes how Behbudi utilized press platforms and the new-method (usul-i jadid) schools to foster socio-cultural modernization and political consciousness among the Central Asian population. The findings highlight Behbudi's legacy as a foundational strategist for national sovereignty, whose pedagogical and reformist ideas continue to influence Uzbek socio-cultural history. The study underscores the historical significance of his martyrdom and evaluates his long-term impact on the socio-political trajectory of the region.

MAHMUDXO'JA BEHBUDIYNING O'ZBEK MILLIY MA'RIFATPARVARLIK HARAKATIDAGI O'RNI

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit soʻzlar: Mahmudxoʻja Behbudiy, jadidchilik, Turkiston maʼrifatparvarligi, taʼlim islohoti, ijtimoiy-siyosiy tafakkur, milliy mustaqillik, Oʻzbek madaniyati tarixi, Ismoil Gʻaspirali.

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada Turkiston jadidchilik harakatining yirik namoyandasi va gʻoyaviy yetakchisi Mahmudxoʻja Behbudiyning hayoti, ijtimoiy-siyosiy hamda ilmiy-maʼrifiy faoliyati yoritilgan. Tadqiqotda Behbudiyning XX asr boshlaridagi milliy uygʻonish jarayonidagi oʻrni, xususan, taʼlim islohoti, zamonaviy jurnalistika, teatr sanʼati va milliy mustaqillik gʻoyalarini shakllantirishdagi hissasi tahlil qilinadi. Tarixiy-tahliliy va biografik metodlar asosida Behbudiyning matbuot hamda usul-i jadid maktablari orqali Markaziy Osiyo aholisi orasida ijtimoiy-madaniy modernizatsiya va siyosiy ongni rivojlantirishdagi faoliyati oʻrganilgan. Tadqiqot natijalari Behbudiyning milliy suverenitet gʻoyalarining asosiy strateglaridan biri sifatidagi tarixiy merosini ochib beradi hamda uning pedagogik va islohotchilik qarashlari bugungi kunda ham Oʻzbekistonning ijtimoiy-madaniy tarixida muhim ahamiyat kasb etishini koʻrsatadi. Shuningdek, maqolada uning shahidlik bilan yakunlangan hayot yoʻlining tarixiy ahamiyati va mintaqaning ijtimoiy-siyosiy taraqqiyotiga koʻrsatgan uzoq muddatli taʼsiri baholanadi.

РОЛЬ МАХМУДХОДЖИ БЕХБУДИ В УЗБЕКСКОМ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОМ ПРОСВЕТИТЕЛЬСКОМ ДВИЖЕНИИ

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: Махмудходжа Бехбуди, джадидизм, туркестанское просветительство, реформа образования, общественно-политическая мысль, национальная независимость, история узбекской культуры, Исмаил Гаспринский.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются жизнь, общественно-политическая и научно-просветительская деятельность Махмудходжи Бехбуди — выдающегося представителя и идейного лидера джадидского движения Туркестана. Исследование анализирует ключевую роль Бехбуди в национальном пробуждении начала XX века, уделяя особое внимание его вкладу в реформирование системы образования, развитие современной журналистики, театрального искусства и формирование идей национальной независимости. На основе историко-аналитического и биографического методов

исследуется, каким образом Бехбуди использовал печать и новометодные (усул-и джадид) школы для содействия социально-культурной модернизации и развитию политического сознания населения Центральной Азии. Результаты исследования показывают, что Бехбуди был одним из основоположников стратегии национального суверенитета, а его педагогические и реформаторские идеи продолжают оказывать значительное влияние на социально-культурную историю Узбекистана. В статье также подчёркивается историческое значение его мученической гибели и оценивается его долгосрочное влияние на общественно-политическое развитие региона.

Introduction. Throughout the history of Uzbekistan, the pursuit of science, enlightenment, and spiritual development has remained continuous across all historical epochs. Even during the Soviet colonial period, prominent intellectual figures emerged across various spheres of cultural life. The early 20th century marked a critical juncture in the Turkestan region, characterized by national self-awareness, intellectual revival, and a profound cultural awakening. During this period, key reformers emerged to combat social stagnancy, foster enlightenment, and establish a modern educational infrastructure. Among these distinguished intellectuals, Mahmudkhodja Behbudi occupied a prominent position. He dedicated his life to eradicating ignorance, promoting societal enlightenment, fostering national identity, and advancing independent critical thinking.

Behbudi actively contributed to the establishment of modern-method (usul-i jadid) schools, the institutionalization of the national press, and the development of professional theater in Turkestan. Furthermore, he advocated for national independence through comprehensive societal enlightenment and structural reforms. As noted by the political figure Fayzulla Khodjayev, Behbudi was an unrivaled figure among the Turkestan Jadids of his era in terms of his political-social engagement and the breadth of his intellectual expertise. Despite the political risks and personal dangers associated with his reformist trajectory, Behbudi maintained a resolute commitment to national liberation, framing anti-colonial reform and socio-cultural advancement as fundamental moral and intellectual imperatives.

Literature review. The socio-political heritage, enlightenment activities, and dramatic legacy of Mahmudkhodja Behbudi have been the subject of extensive historical and literary inquiry. A review of existing literature reveals that scholars have addressed Behbudi's

contributions across three distinct historiographical phases: early Soviet contemporary accounts, post-Soviet national identity reconstructions, and modern academic evaluations.

The earliest systematic documentations of Behbudi's public service and educational vision stem from his contemporaries and immediate Jadid successors. Following his tragic assassination in Karshi in 1919, his close associate Hoji Muin published pioneering biographical and reflective accounts in the regional press, notably in the Zarafshon newspaper (1923). Early Soviet scholarship initially recognized Behbudi's foundational role in Central Asian journalism, typography, and pedagogical reform (*usul-i jadid*). Furthermore, influential political figures of the period, such as Fayzulla Khodjayev, acknowledged Behbudi as the undisputed intellectual leader of the Turkestan Jadid movement, highlighting his unmatched breadth of knowledge, political strategy, and diplomatic authority among early 20th-century reformers.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbek historiography underwent a significant paradigm shift, allowing for an uncensored re-evaluation of Jadidist literature and national independence concepts. The publication of Behbudi's primary text collection (*Tanlangan asarlar*, 1999; 3rd ed., 2006) provided researchers with direct access to his journalistic articles, textbooks, and iconic theatrical drama, *Padarkush* (The Patricide).

Biographical and literary research advanced significantly through the comprehensive work of Naim Karimov (*Mahmudkhodja Behbudi*, 2010), who systematically examined Behbudi's intellectual network, international travels, and editorial management of publications like *Samarqand* and *Oyina*. Similarly, Saidov (2000) analyzed the conceptual relationship between cultural enlightenment and anti-colonial resistance in his study *Ma'rifat libosidagi ozodlik*, demonstrating how Behbudi utilized educational reform as a vehicle for political sovereignty and societal emancipation.

In recent years, contemporary researchers have shifted focus toward analyzing specific socio-cultural dynamics, power relationships, and ideological conflicts during the Jadid era. Critical inquiries published in academic and cultural periodicals—such as I. Gafur's analysis of Behbudi's complex interactions with traditional monarchical structures (*O'zbekiston adabiyoti va san'ati*, 1994) and D. Jamolova's evaluations of his self-sacrificial devotion to statehood (*Yangi O'zbekiston*, 2022)—reflect an ongoing academic dialogue regarding his reformist tactics.

Despite this extensive body of literature, previous studies have largely examined Behbudi's contributions in isolation—separating his journalistic endeavors from his political nationalism or theater-based pedagogy. There remains a critical need for a synthesized holistic evaluation that demonstrates how his multifaceted activities in press, education, and political philosophy systematically formed a unified conceptual model for national independence. This article aims to

bridge this analytical gap by offering an integrated socio-historical assessment of Behbudi's comprehensive legacy.

Materials and methods. The methodological approach relies on an interdisciplinary synthesis of historical, hermeneutic, and discourse analysis techniques to ensure objectivity and scientific rigor:

Historical-Comparative Method: Applied to trace the evolution of Behbudi's reformist ideas in response to the changing socio-political climate of Turkestan under Russian Tsarist and early Soviet rule. Biographical Method: Used to reconstruct Behbudi's public, educational, and journalistic activities through personal accounts, contemporary memoirs, and historical records. Content and Textual Analysis: Employed to analyze Behbudi's primary writings, editorial contributions, and theatrical work (Padarkush), evaluating the underlying ideological concepts of national independence, pedagogical modernization (*usul-i jadid*), and civic identity. Source Criticism (Hermeneutics): Implemented to contextualize both historical news articles (e.g., Zarafshon) and post-independence Uzbek historiography, cross-referencing archival claims to avoid subjective bias and present a balanced historical narrative.

Results and discussion. Mahmudkhodja Behbudi was born on January 19, 1875, in the village of Bakhshitepa near Samarkand. His father, Behbudkhodja Solikhodja ogli, was a descendant of the prominent Sufi scholar Ahmad Yassavi and served as an imam-khatib. On his maternal side, his grandfather Niyazkhodja hailed from Urgench and relocated to Samarkand during the reign of the Emir of Bukhara, Shahmurad.[1.6-p] Following the early loss of his parents—his mother passing in 1893 and his father in 1894 during his madrasa studies in Bukhara—financial constraints prevented Behbudi from formally completing his higher theological education. Consequently, he returned to Samarkand to work as a scribe (*mirza*) in the court of his maternal uncle, Qazi Muhammad Siddiq, under whose guardianship he was raised. Demonstrating high competence in Islamic jurisprudence, Behbudi rapidly advanced from court clerk to the rank of mufti. During this formative period, Behbudi's evolving worldview was profoundly influenced by the Crimean Tatar reformer Ismail Gasprinsky. Gasprinsky's visits to the Turkestan region to establish new-method (*usul-i jadid*) schools served as a institutional catalyst for local intellectuals. Although many of these initial schools were subsequently closed by imperial authorities, the mentor-disciple relationship between Gasprinsky and Behbudi developed into a lifelong strategic alignment. In his personal memoirs, Behbudi frequently acknowledged Gasprinsky's foundational role in shaping his reformist philosophy.

In 1899–1900, Behbudi undertook an eight-month Hajj pilgrimage alongside his associate Hoji Baqo.[2. 9-bet] This extensive travel through the Middle East served as an empirical

foundation for examining anti-colonial movements and global modernization dynamics. Behbudi systematically collected socio-political data on Western-colonized Eastern nations, analyzing their strategies for achieving national sovereignty and civic emancipation.

Upon returning to Turkestan, Behbudi critically evaluated the historical factors contributing to the decline of Central Asian statehood. Through rigorous debates with intellectual peers such as Hoji Baqo, Hoqandboy Abdukholiq ogli, and Badriddin, he formulated a conceptual diagnosis of Turkestan's geopolitical vulnerability and colonial subjugation. He identified the primary obstacles to liberation not merely as external military rule, but as internal societal fragmentation, widespread illiteracy, and low civic-legal consciousness among the populace. Consequently, Behbudi and his contemporaries determined that the essential prerequisite for national independence was the intellectual "re-armament" of society through comprehensive educational and socio-cultural enlightenment.

Translating his reformist theory into practice, Behbudi spearheaded the institutional expansion of modern education in the Samarkand region. Through his initiative and organizational efforts, new-method schools were established in 1903 in surrounding rural areas, including Halvoyi (directed by S. Siddiqiy) and Rajabamin (directed by A. Shakuriy).

Recognizing the severe shortage of contemporary educational materials, Behbudi actively engaged in curriculum design and textbook authorship. Between 1904 and 1909, he published a foundational series of secular and religious textbooks tailored for *usul-i jadid* schools, including:

"Risolai asbobi savod" [Manual on Literacy Methods] (1904)

"Risolai jug'rofiyai umroniy" [Manual of Human Geography] (1905)

"Risolai jug'rofiyoyi Rusiy" [Geography of the Russian Empire] (1905)

"Kitobat ul-atfol" [Children's Writing and Epistolary Manual] (1908)

"Amaliyoti islom" [Practices of Islam] (1908)

"Tarixi islom" [History of Islam] (1909)[3. 9-bet]

These works collectively established a standardized, modern pedagogical framework aimed at raising a new generation of civically conscious and intellectually adaptable Central Asian youth.

In 1908, Behbudi expanded his educational activities by establishing the public library "Qira'atkhana-i Behbudiya" (Behbudi Reading Room) in Samarkand. In his editorial writings, he documented that the library housed over 600 books, along with numerous brochures, newspapers, and journals. The growing public interest in this repository subsequently enabled him to launch a commercial book trade business. Recognizing the high demand among Samarkand's progressive intellectuals for foreign literature and modern periodicals, Behbudi

systematically acquired books from abroad. During his travels across the Caucasus, Crimea, Turkey, and other regions, he procured diverse educational and ideological texts to enrich the library's holdings.[4. 28-p]

Beyond school establishment, textbook publishing, and library management, Behbudi recognized the periodical press as an essential instrument for promoting civic awareness, social reform, and geopolitical literacy. Consequently, in 1913, he initiated independent publishing operations. In April 1913, he launched the newspaper "Samarqand", followed by the weekly magazine "Oyina" (The Mirror) in August of the same year.

The Newspaper "Samarqand": Published bi-weekly in both Uzbek and Tajik languages, the newspaper initially expanded from a two-page to a four-page layout. However, due to strict colonial censorship and severe financial constraints, the publication was forced to cease operation on September 17, 1913, following its 45th issue.

The Weekly Magazine "Oyina": Despite the closure of Samarqand, the journal "Oyina" achieved broader regional influence. Its subscriber base extended beyond Turkestan into the Caucasus, Tatarstan, Iran, Afghanistan, India, and the Ottoman Empire. Published until 1915, the journal featured critical polemics and scholarly articles focusing on civil rights, legal protections, history, and linguistic-literary modernization in Turkestan.

Linguistic reform occupied a central position in Behbudi's ideological framework. He consistently advocated for multilingualism as an indispensable prerequisite for societal advancement and international integration, emphasizing that national development depended on mastering both mother tongues and modern regional languages.[5. 7-p]

The Russian February Revolution of 1917 drastically accelerated the socio-political dynamics across the Turkestan region. According to memoirs by Hoji Muin, although Behbudi had been suffering from severe nervous exhaustion brought on by the grueling final years of World War I, the February Revolution infused him with renewed ideological vigor and physical energy, prompting his immediate return to active political organizing [6. 135-p]. The revolutionary political shift revived hopes for national self-determination among Central Asian intellectuals. Formulating the famous political maxim "Rights are not given, they are taken" ("Haq olinur, berilmaydur"), Behbudi spearheaded efforts to transition from cultural enlightenment to active political state-building.

Following the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 and the subsequent intensification of colonial administrative controls, national reformists demanded territorial autonomy. On November 26, 1917, the Extraordinary IV Regional Muslim Congress was

convened in Kokand, resulting in the official proclamation of the Turkestan Autonomy (Turkiston Muxtoriyati).

As a primary architect of this autonomous government, Behbudi expressed his long-standing aspirations for national liberation in his landmark article "Turkiston muxtoriyati" [Turkestan Autonomy], published in the newspaper Hurriyat on December 22, 1917: "On November 27, in Kokand, the autonomy of Turkestan was officially declared at the General Muslim Congress." [7. 19-p]

The strategic attempt at self-governance was short-lived in February 1918, Bolshevik armed forces launched a military assault that forcibly dissolved the Turkestan Autonomy. Despite this catastrophic setback and the perilous political environment, Behbudi refused to capitulate, continuing his advocacy for national interests and legal protections.

His steadfast anti-colonial stance made him a primary target for Soviet security services. In 1919, while traveling through the Shahrisabz Beklik, Behbudi was apprehended through espionage coordinated by the Extraordinary Commission (Cheka). After two months of detention, he was transferred to Karshi and imprisoned. Shortly thereafter, by the decree of Togaybek (the Governor of Karshi), Behbudi was executed by Nuriddinkhodja Ogaliq Ahmadkhodja ogli. The tragic martyrdom of Mahmudkhodja Behbudi marked a devastating loss for the early 20th-century Central Asian enlightenment and national sovereignty movement.

Conclusion. In conclusion, Mahmudkhodja Behbudi represents a foundational archetype of national self-determination, socio-cultural reform, and intellectual resistance in early 20th-century Central Asia. His multifaceted contributions—spanning the establishment of modern-method (usul-i jadid) schools, the compilation of secular and religious curricula, the founding of public library infrastructure, and the development of national journalism through publications like Samarqand and Oyina collectively constituted a comprehensive strategic framework aimed at anti-colonial modernization and societal liberation.

Behbudi's ideological trajectory demonstrates that he viewed systemic enlightenment not merely as an educational endeavor, but as a mandatory prerequisite for political statehood and civic sovereignty. His active leadership in the declaration of Turkestan Autonomy in 1917 marked a critical transition from cultural reformism to organized political action, making his tragic martyrdom in 1919 a poignant testament to his unwavering commitment to national independence.

In contemporary Uzbekistan, the academic re-evaluation of Behbudi's life and structural reforms holds significant practical and educational relevance. Re-integrating his ideological heritage into modern academic discourse provides an essential conceptual model for fostering

critical thinking, civic responsibility, and national identity among the younger generation. Future research should focus on a deeper comparative analysis of Behbudi's socio-political philosophy alongside broader early 20th-century Islamic and Eurasian reform movements.

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