

Mahmudkhoja Behbudiyy – A Leader of National Identity and Enlightenment

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Abstract. *This article is dedicated to illuminating the multifaceted activities of Mahmudkhoja Behbudiyy, a thinker of the national revival period of the XX century, leader of the Turkestan Jadids, a public and religious figure, pedagogue, writer, publisher, and skilled publicist. The new ideas and goals promoted by this encyclopedic scholar in the educational system, press, literary processes, social and political life, and his worthy service for the prosperity of the nation and the homeland are presented.*

Key words: *Mahmudkho 'ja Behbudiyy, Jadid, Jadids, polyglot, publicism, dramaturgy, press.*

INTRODUCTION

The social and political changes that took place in the society of Turkestan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the need for the development of science and education, created the basis for the formation of the national awakening movement. During this period, an educational movement known as Jadidism emerged and one of its main ideological leaders was Mahmudkhoja Behbudiyy. Through his multifaceted activities, he contributed immensely to renewing the thinking of Turkestan Muslims, spreading enlightenment, awakening the nation, and educating a generation capable of independent thought. Behbudiyy was not only a pedagogue or publicist, but an encyclopedic thinker who worked in many fields such as education, press, art, history, religion, language, literature, and politics.

His activities combined modern scientific thinking, a people-oriented approach, and practical reforms, and played a leading role in introducing Jadid ideas into life. The rich scientific and educational heritage left by Behbudiyy remains relevant today and serves as an important source for understanding Uzbek national consciousness and cultural identity.

This article analyzes Mahmudkhoja Behbudiyy's activities in various fields, particularly his reforms in the educational system, his services in awakening public consciousness through the press, innovations in dramaturgy, and views based on multilingualism, and reveals his place as an encyclopedic scholar.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In preparing this article, historical-analytical, biographical, textual and sociolinguistic approaches were used to comprehensively cover the activities of Mahmudkhoja Behbudiyy. The article examines Behbudiyy's articles and dramas based on their content and linguistic features, as well as the relationship between language and society, multilingualism, and issues of language policy in education and press from a sociolinguistic perspective. The research sources consisted of works written by Behbudiyy, the "Oyina" and "Samarkand" publications, modern scholars' research, and reliable electronic resources.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the intellectuals of the nation — the Jadids — appeared on the historical scene to elevate national education and upbringing, and widely disseminate the ideas of national awakening in Turkestan. Their spiritual leader and flag bearer of the renewal ideas was Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy. He was not only a leader of the Jadid movement, but also a thinker who wrote actively in various fields, reformed the national education system, and strove to awaken society through each of his articles in the press. Throughout his activities, he wrote articles in fields such as education, religion, politics, ethics, economics, history, geography and art, demonstrating his worthiness of the title “encyclopedic scholar.”

An encyclopedic scholar is an intellectual who expresses scientific ideas at the intersection of various sciences, possesses spiritual and cultural values recognized not only by one nation but worldwide, and contributes to the development of society through advanced ideas and practical activities. Behbudiy's creative heritage and Jadid movement fully correspond to this concept. His articles contain scientific analysis, critical approaches, and practical ideas, and it is clear that each of his works served in awakening national spirit and developing society.

Behbudiy – reformer of education

Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy understood very well that great transformations begin with the reform of the education system. Therefore, he stated, “Where there is no enlightenment, the nation remains in darkness. The revival of the nation is through science and enlightenment,” and began implementing innovations in the educational system. He led the creation and dissemination of the Jadid education system. His activity in the field of education was theoretically and practically deeply grounded, and this activity can be analyzed in four main areas:

1. Introduction of new method schools (usul-i jadid, usul-i savtiya)

Behbudiy criticized the traditional schools where education was based one-sidedly on religious content and supported the introduction of new Jadid schools. According to him, the blind memorization method in old schools did not meet the requirements of the time, and education aimed at deep thinking, critical reasoning, and understanding the essence should be the main method of new schools. “The new school develops the mind, teaches asking questions and thinking,” he wrote, expecting great outcomes from educational reforms. He introduced teaching in various fields of science in new schools.

2. Creating textbooks and curricula

On Behbudiy's initiative, Jadid schools were opened in Samarkand, Kattakurgan and other cities; curricula were revised and secular sciences — mathematics, geography, history, ethics, natural sciences and the Turkic language were taught there. Behbudiy himself was the first author of new textbooks for Jadid schools.

His textbooks written between 1903–1910 in Uzbek and Tajik — “Rahnamo-i safar,” “Tarikh-i Islamiya,” “Risala-i asbobi savod,” “Risala-i jughrofiyai umroniy,” “Risala-i jughrofiyai Rusi,” “Kitabat-ul-atfol,” “Amaliyoti Islam” served as teaching manuals for Jadid schools. Behbudiy also regularly wrote articles in the “Oyina” newspaper on important topics such as ethics, literacy, language culture, offering them as educational material. Through his articles titled “Lessons of Ethics,” he tried to develop moral education in children. “A well-mannered child is a devoted figure of the nation. School must lead him to perfection,” he believed. To systematize the publication and continuity of school textbooks and other educational materials, Behbudiy opened a private publishing house — “Nashriyoti Behbudiya” in 1913. He also founded the “Kutubxonai Behbudiya” library and reading rooms for students.

3. Views on the personality and qualification of the teacher

Behbudiy linked the success of education with the personality and professional skills of the teacher. According to him, a good teacher must be not only knowledgeable but also morally mature. In special articles he repeatedly emphasized the need to improve teachers' spiritual preparation: “The teacher is

the educator of the nation, so he must be physically and spiritually pure. His every word and action influences the child.”

4. Innovative views on women’s education

Behbudiy firmly defended the right of women to education. He believed that in order for women to be active participants in society, they must be educated. He wrote special articles on this subject and tried to establish a Jadid school for girls in Samarkand. “Even if our women do not walk in the street, they raise children. And for a well-raised child, an educated mother is necessary,” he wrote. Behbudiy’s activity in the field of education had revolutionary significance for his time. His school system, curricula, views on teachers, and attitude toward women’s education were decisive factors in the implementation of Jadid ideas. He considered education as the main tool for reforming society and worked theoretically and practically in this regard.

Behbudiy and the press

One of Behbudiy’s most productive activities as an encyclopedic thinker was his journalistic work. He was a very skilled and modern publicist. On his initiative, the “Oyina” journal began publication in Samarkand in 1912, becoming a unique publication of its time. The newspaper published articles on science, education, politics, geography, history, medicine, ethics, and other fields. One of his goals was to convey knowledge and innovations to the public in a simple language. Therefore, he sought to turn the “Oyina” journal into a mass educational resource in various sciences. “We have knowledge, but it is trapped within specific barriers. Delivering it to the people is our duty,” he believed, considering the press as the main tool for spreading knowledge. In April 1913, he began publishing the “Samarkand” newspaper. Although only 45 issues were published due to financial problems, it quickly became the main ideological platform for many patriotic intellectuals and gained public attention. After the closure of “Samarkand,” Behbudiy continued his noble activities through the “Oyina” journal in the same year.

Behbudiy – the first Uzbek dramatist

For Behbudiy, opening new schools and the press alone were not enough for the cultural development of the nation. If the Jadid ideology is compared to a tree, education would be its roots, the press its body, and theatre its fruit. Theatrical performance could visually represent the effects of strong roots and a healthy body. Therefore, for the Jadids, theatre was not just entertainment, but an effective means of reforming society, awakening the people, and spreading enlightenment. “Theatre is a school seen with the eyes and understood with the mind,” wrote Behbudiy — reflecting belief in the educational power of theatre. Theatre is a reality performed live. Behbudiy understood well that newspapers and books may not reach everyone, but theatre could influence every person. Through theatre, social criticism could be delivered gently to society. For this reason, he was determined to use theatrical art to awaken national consciousness, call for science and enlightenment, and abandon old views.

This intention led to the creation of the drama “Padarkush” in 1911. Despite being financially stable, a father who refused to invest in his son’s education eventually becomes a victim of his ignorant child. Behbudiy referred to this drama as a “national tragedy” that held a mirror to society. It highlighted that a child who does not study or work may become ignorant, reckless, and even criminal. While criticizing ignorance, immorality, resistance to innovation in “Padarkush,” Behbudiy targeted systems and mindsets rather than individuals.

After many debates and resistance, “Padarkush” was staged for the first time in 1914. The public warmly accepted the characters, new themes, and simple language of the play. Later, the play was restaged in other theatres. It is noted that Abdulla Avloni played the role of the rich man when the play was staged in Tashkent. “Padarkush” influenced society like water poured on dry land. Inspired by it, other Jadid writers began working in drama.

Behbudi — polyglot

Studying Behbudi's diverse activities shows that he was a polyglot — an intellectual who knew many languages. He spoke, read, and wrote in Arabic, Persian-Tajik, Turkic (Uzbek), Russian, and a little French. Sources state that he translated and analyzed works written in Russian, Arabic, and Persian. Historically, many people knew Persian and Turkic equally. Those who studied in madrasahs knew Arabic well. Learning Russian was connected to the activities of Jadids, who saw the language as a tool to enter the modern world and become familiar with the latest achievements of science. In addition, the Jadids also understood Ottoman Turkish and Tatar. Moreover, Behbudi believed that learning Western languages, such as French, was necessary. He hired a teacher to teach French to his daughter Parvina (Surayyo). She later worked as a French teacher throughout her life.

Behbudi believed: "If a nation is limited to only its own language, it isolates itself from the world. The gates of science open with language." In the first issue of the "Oyina" journal, he published an article titled "Not two, but four languages are necessary." According to him, Turkestanis should know and communicate in four languages — "Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and Russian" — to keep pace with the modern world and benefit from modern science and ideas. Turkic was the main spoken language, Persian was the language of madrasahs and literature, Arabic was needed to read religious books, and Russian was necessary for trade, industry, politics, and social progress. "Learning Russian is necessary not only in science, but also in state and commercial affairs. But it should not come at the cost of forgetting one's own language," he stated, emphasizing preserving the mother tongue while learning foreign languages.

It should be noted that Behbudi raised the issue of learning foreign languages not only as a cultural-educational matter but also as a political one, and he believed this would help create intellectuals capable of serving the interests of the homeland.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi was a prominent intellectual of his time and one of the leading representatives of the Jadid movement, working in nearly all areas of society and contributing significantly to modern thinking, national awakening, and the development of enlightenment. He created hundreds of articles, treatises, and works in education, press, dramaturgy, history, geography, religion, ethics, and social reforms with the aim of awakening the people and leading society to a new civilization. His striving to analyze knowledge at the intersection of various sciences, applying scientific approaches to complex social issues, and conveying them to the public in a simple and effective form reveals Behbudi's identity as an encyclopedic scholar. His creative and practical heritage — especially his journalistic activities in the local press, reformist ideas in theatre and education — further strengthen this view.

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