

MAHMUDKHODJA BEHBUDI – THE BEACON OF INTELLECT

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Abstract: *This article provides insights into the life of Mahmudkhodja Behbudi, the founder of the Uzbek Jadid movement. It also discusses the articles and short stories of the prominent Jadid figure, Mahmudkhodja Behbudi.*

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"In general, we must deeply study the movement of Jadidism and the legacy of our enlightened ancestors. The more we study this spiritual treasure, the more we will find correct answers to the many questions that trouble us today. The more actively we promote this invaluable wealth, the more our people, especially our youth, will understand the value of today's peaceful and free life."⁴⁵

Shavkat Mirziyoyev

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Mahmudkhodja Behbudi was born on January 20, 1875, in the Yomini neighborhood of Samarkand, in the family of Imam-Khatib Behbudkhodja Solikhkhodja ugli. His father was a descendant of Ahmad Yassawi. His paternal great-grandfather, Niyozkhodja, was originally from Urgench and moved to Samarkand at the end of the 18th century during the reign of Amir Shahmurad. Following the invasion of Samarkand by Russian soldiers in 1868, his father, Behbudkhodja, moved the family to the village of Bakhshitepa, where he served as an Imam. Behbudi's mother was the sister of Mufti Odil Mansur ugli. Behbudi initially studied the Quran with his father and later achieved literacy at the age of 6 or 7 under the tutelage of his uncle, Muhammad Siddiq. At the age of 15, he was educated by another uncle, Mulla Odil, in a madrasa where the latter taught. He was raised in an enlightened and intellectual family; his two sisters were also educated. He possessed a profound knowledge of the Quran. In 1893, his mother passed away, followed by his father in 1894. At the age of 18, Behbudi began working as a clerk under his uncle Muhammad Siddiq, who served as a judge (qadi) in the Chashmai Ob volost. After working with his uncle for two years, he continued his clerical duties under Mulla Zubayr Yakhshiboy ugli, the judge of the Kobud volost, as his uncle had been dismissed from his position. Through his work as a clerk and in the judiciary, he eventually rose to the rank of Mufti in Jomboy. Behbudi owned 10 dessiatines of land in the

⁴⁵ Jadidlar: Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy, page 3

Kabut district and was a man of means and prosperity. In 1899–1900, Behbudi embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina with his friend Haji Baqo from Bukhara. During this journey, he traveled through Russia, Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. He traversed the world using all modes of transportation—train, ship, horse, and on foot. During these travels, his resolve to open "New Method" (Usuli Jadid) schools grew stronger. In 1914, during his second pilgrimage, he visited Damascus, Jerusalem, Odessa, Istanbul, and other cities. He regularly sent his travel memoirs to the editorial office of the *Oyina* journal published in Samarkand. Between 1903 and 1904, he visited Moscow, St. Petersburg, Orenburg, Kazan, and Crimea, where he studied the educational experiences of Russian and Tatar figures. Mahmudkhodja Behbudi first met Ismail Gaspirinski in 1897 during Gaspirinski's visit to Turkestan in Samarkand. This meeting had a profound impact on his subsequent life. The second meeting between Ismailbey and Behbudi took place in the summer of 1914.⁴⁶

It is impossible to write enough about Mahmudkhodja Behbudi, the founder of the Turkestan Jadid movement, who lived and worked nearly a century ago and dedicated his life to the education and development of the nation. Nevertheless, we find it essential to express our thoughts on this matter; for every generation must be informed about their ancestors, recognize the value of their sacrifices, and grow into great individuals who serve the nation with a clear purpose. Behbudi was, first and foremost, a teacher. He was both the theorist and practitioner of the "New Method" schools in Turkestan. Through his intense creative and practical efforts, he rose to the status of a "National Teacher" and one of the spiritual leaders of Turkestan. He was a great enlightener. Enlightenment (*Ma'rifat*) does not merely signify science and its promotion, nor does it mean an enlightener is simply one who executes these tasks. History knows dozens, even hundreds of geniuses who mastered science brilliantly but vanished fruitlessly like a flash of lightning, or became a destructive force that ruined prosperous lands. True enlightenment is the radiance that science bestows upon the heart. Behbudi was a genuine patriot. He never positioned his nation against another; on the contrary, he was a broad-minded educator who viewed all nations of the world, including the Russian and European peoples, with respect and compassion. He regarded languages, including European ones, as the "keys to science." He famously advocated that "not two, but four languages are necessary." He believed that every Turkestani should know Persian, Arabic, Russian, and even French in addition to their mother tongue; otherwise, it would be impossible to keep pace with the world. He felt a deep, heartfelt necessity for universities to ensure national progress. In 1918, he sincerely congratulated the opening of the Turkestan Muslim University in Tashkent. By opening its branch in Samarkand that same year, he contributed significantly to the foundation of what is today our National University.⁴⁷ Indeed, his article "Not Two, but Four Languages are Necessary" remains relevant today. In the modern era, becoming an enlightened person requires a robust database of knowledge, where language proficiency is a crucial factor. Especially in the context of "New Uzbekistan,"

⁴⁶ Mahmudkhodja Behbudi. Wikipedia (https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmudxo'ja_Behbudiy)

⁴⁷ O'zbekiston adabiyoti va san'ati (Uzbekistan Literature and Art) newspaper, Issue 4, 2005.

numerous opportunities are being created for language learning. A prime example is the "Ibrat Farzandlari" project and mobile application, established by the Youth Affairs Agency. Today's youth have the opportunity to learn any language freely and easily through this app; all that is required is its wise utilization. It is also pertinent to highlight another notable work by Behbudi, which resonated deeply when published in the Oyina journal: "A Story About a Faithful Woman" (Bir vafolik zaifaning xususida hikoya). The protagonist is portrayed as a woman of loyalty, strong will, and devotion. In this work, the author reminds us that the family is a sacred sanctuary and honors the woman struggling to preserve it. It clearly demonstrates that a woman's loyalty is superior to all wealth and that she is the source of faithfulness and upbringing. We can conclude that if a woman is loyal and wise, the children she raises will also be conscientious and devoted to the nation.

Despite the unprecedented opposition from both the Tsarist government and local reactionary forces, Mahmudkhodja Behbudi was among the first to spearhead the establishment of modern schools in our country, the creation of necessary textbooks, and the founding of publishing houses and theaters. Behbudi did not limit himself merely to opening schools; he advanced the philosophy that "The greatest of all structures in the world is the school." Through his dedicated efforts, the national press and theater became the primary instruments for enlightening the people's intellect. As a skilled publicist, he authored numerous significant works and over two hundred articles addressing the pressing issues of his time. Simultaneously, he founded the Samarqand newspaper and the Oyina journal. In 1914, he laid the cornerstone of theatrical art in our region with the play Padarkush (The Patricide), staged at the "Turon" theater. Tragically, this eminent writer, public figure, and thinker fell victim to hostile forces at the young age of 44.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Behbudi placed a distinct emphasis on linguistic issues in his articles. The Jadids, led by Behbudi, aimed not only to reform education but to revitalize the entire society. They recognized that the only way to rescue the people from the quagmire of superstition and ignorance was through science and art. Consequently, every work and every endeavor by Behbudi remains an example of great courage that served to restore national pride and self-awareness. The physical elimination of Behbudi could not kill his ideas. The schools he established and his powerful slogan, "Rights are not given, they are taken!" became the foundation for the awakening of subsequent generations. Today, the name of this great figure has been fully exonerated, and his scientific and literary heritage is highly valued by our state. Indeed, the memory of those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom and enlightenment of the nation shall live forever.

⁴⁸ "Mahmudxo'ja behbudiy ilmiy-adabiy merosini o'rganishning dolzarb masalalari"

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