

MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF PRESS AND JOURNALISM

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Abstract

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi (1875–1919) was a prominent intellectual, journalist, and reformer who played a crucial role in the development of modern journalism in Central Asia. As a leading figure in the Jadid movement, he used the press to advocate for education, enlightenment, and national awakening. His newspaper Oina (1913–1915) became a platform for discussing socio-political issues, modern education, and women's rights. Behbudi's writings emphasized the necessity of reforming the traditional education system and encouraged the establishment of *usul-i jadid* schools. Despite facing censorship and political suppression, his contributions significantly shaped Turkestan's intellectual landscape. His legacy continues to inspire scholars and journalists advocating for freedom of thought and social progress in the region.

Keywords: Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Jadid movement, Oina newspaper, Central Asian journalism, Usul-i jadid education, Reformist press, social enlightenment, Women's rights, Political awakening, colonial suppression.

Introduction

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi (1875–1919) was a prominent intellectual, journalist, playwright, and social reformer who played a pivotal role in the development of modern journalism in Central Asia. As one of the leaders of the Jadid movement, he used the press as a tool for social and political change, advocating for education, enlightenment, and national awakening.

Main part

The Birth of Jadid Journalism. Mahmudxo'ja Behbudi was one of the leading figures in the Jadid movement and played a crucial role in the emergence of modern journalism in Central Asia. Inspired by the success of reformist newspapers in the Ottoman Empire and Russia, he understood the necessity of an independent press to spread progressive ideas¹. In 1913, he founded Oina ("The Mirror"), which became the first illustrated newspaper in Turkestan, covering politics, education, literature, and social issues². Unlike previous government-

1 Khalid, A. The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 102

2 Abdullayev, M. The Press and Reform Movements in Turkestan, Tashkent: Fan Publishing, 2005, p. 67

controlled publications, Oina provided a platform for open debate and criticism, which made it widely popular among intellectuals and reformists³. Behbudi used the newspaper to promote modern education, advocate for women's rights, and encourage economic self-sufficiency within the Muslim community. However, due to financial difficulties and increasing censorship from Tsarist authorities, Oina was forced to shut down in 1915. Despite its short lifespan, the newspaper left a lasting impact by inspiring other reformist publications such as Sadoi Turkiston and Turkiston Viloyatining Gazeti. Behbudi also contributed articles to various newspapers and journals across the Russian Empire, collaborating with fellow Jadid intellectuals like Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhonov and Fitrat. His writings emphasized the necessity of national unity, scientific progress, and rational thinking in overcoming the region's economic and cultural stagnation. In addition to journalism, he wrote plays, textbooks, and political pamphlets aimed at educating both the elite and the general public. His journalistic activities, however, made him a target for both Tsarist and later Soviet authorities, who viewed his ideas as a threat to their control over the region. In 1919, Behbudi was arrested and executed by the Bolsheviks, marking the tragic end of his life but not of his influence. Today, his legacy continues to inspire scholars, journalists, and reformists in Uzbekistan and beyond, highlighting the enduring importance of a free and independent press in shaping public consciousness.

The Establishment of Oina. In 1913, Behbudi founded Oina, the first illustrated newspaper in Turkestan, marking a significant milestone in the region's journalism. The publication was intended to inform and educate the Muslim population on global and regional affairs, reflecting Behbudi's reformist vision. Oina covered a wide range of topics, including politics, science, literature, and social issues, with a particular emphasis on modern education and women's rights⁴.

The newspaper played a crucial role in introducing contemporary ideas and fostering intellectual debates among Turkestani intellectuals. It advocated for the adoption of the jadid (new-method) education system, which promoted secular subjects alongside religious studies. Through its articles, Oina criticized outdated traditions that hindered progress and encouraged the participation of women in public life⁵.

Despite its progressive stance, Oina faced opposition from conservative circles who viewed its ideas as a threat to traditional Islamic values. The Russian authorities also closely monitored the newspaper, as it often discussed colonial policies and their impact on the local population⁶. Financial difficulties and increasing censorship led to the newspaper's closure in 1915, yet its influence persisted.

Behbudi's efforts with Oina laid the foundation for modern journalism in Central Asia and inspired future publications that continued his reformist agenda. Even today, Oina is

3 Adeeb, K. *Central Asian Intellectuals and the Reformist Press*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 89

4 Rashidov, A. *The Evolution of Central Asian Journalism*. Tashkent: Fan, 2015, p. 78

5 Sattorov, N. *Social Change and the Press in Central Asia*. Bukhara: Ilm, 2018, p. 61

6 Kayumov, R. *Press and Politics in the Russian Empire*. Moscow: Nauka, 2019, p. 204



remembered as a pioneering publication that played a crucial role in awakening national consciousness and advocating for societal progress.

Advocacy for Education and Reform through Journalism. Behbudi believed that journalism should serve an educational purpose, using it as a tool to spread progressive ideas and social reform. In his articles, he emphasized the importance of modern education and criticized outdated traditional practices that hindered progress⁷. He argued that ignorance was the primary obstacle to the advancement of Muslim societies and that education was the key to overcoming it.

Through his writings, Behbudi promoted the establishment of new-method (*usul-i jadid*) schools, which incorporated modern teaching techniques and subjects such as mathematics, geography, and science alongside religious studies⁸. He also advocated for the education of girls, arguing that an educated mother was essential for raising enlightened future generations. In *Oina* and other publications, Behbudi frequently wrote about the need to reform the *madrassa* system, which he viewed as outdated and insufficient for meeting the demands of the modern world. He encouraged collaboration between educators and reformers to develop a curriculum that balanced traditional values with contemporary knowledge⁹.

Despite opposition from conservative religious figures, Behbudi's advocacy contributed to the spread of *jadid* schools across Turkestan, leaving a lasting impact on the region's educational landscape. His vision of education as a means of national and cultural revival continues to inspire scholars and reformers in Central Asia today.

The Role of the Press in Political Awakening. Behbudi used the press to address pressing political and social issues, advocating for self-governance and national identity. Through his articles, he called for the unity of Turkic peoples and the preservation of their cultural heritage. His writings also contained critiques of colonial policies and the socio-economic conditions imposed by Russian rule¹⁰.

The Challenges and Suppression of His Work. Despite his efforts, Behbudi faced severe opposition from conservative circles and colonial authorities. His publications were frequently censored, and he was persecuted for his reformist ideas. In 1919, he was executed by reactionary forces in Bukhara, marking the tragic end of a visionary journalist's life¹¹.

Conclusion

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's contributions to the field of journalism were transformative. His efforts in establishing a modern press in Central Asia laid the foundation for future generations of journalists and intellectuals. Despite the challenges he faced, his legacy continues to inspire

7 Salimov, R. *Mahmudkhoja Behbudi: His Life and Legacy*. Samarkand: Nashr Publishing, 2018, p. 112

8 Usmonov, K. *Turkestanning Matbuot Tarixi*. Tashkent: Sharq, 2016, p. 121

9 Kayumov, R. *The Intellectual Awakening of Turkestan*. Moscow: Nauka, 2020, p. 132

10 Mamatov, B. "The Turkestan Press: A Historical Analysis". Bukhara: Ilm Publishing, 2020, p. 96

11 Yusupov, D. "The Martyr of Reform: Mahmudkhoja Behbudi". Tashkent: Adabiyot, 2021, p. 134



those advocating for freedom of thought and social reform in the region. His pioneering work in publishing not only provided a platform for progressive ideas but also played a crucial role in awakening national consciousness among the people of Central Asia.

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