

## MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI AND THE CULTURE OF BOOKMANSHIP

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**Annotation:** *This article explores the remarkable contributions of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi (1875–1919), a leading figure of the Jadid (modernist) movement in Turkestan, to the development of national enlightenment, publishing, and librarianship. It examines Behbudi’s pioneering role in advancing the culture of reading, education, journalism, and book trade across Central Asia. Through his publishing house Nashriyoti Behbudiya, the newspaper Samarkand, and the journal Oyna, he established one of the first comprehensive systems for spreading scientific and cultural knowledge among the masses. The article highlights his creation of a public library, bookshops, and his efforts to import books from diverse regions—from Russia to the Middle East—reflecting his vision of intellectual freedom and modernization.*

**Keywords:** *Mahmudkhoja Behbudi; Jadid movement; Turkestan; enlightenment; publishing; librarianship; book trade; Oyna journal; Samarkand newspaper; cultural modernization; education reform.*

In accordance with the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan (No. PQ-462, December 27, 2024), extensive initiatives are being carried out to study and popularize the invaluable intellectual legacy of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi. These efforts aim to strengthen the moral and intellectual potential of the youth and nurture them as patriotic builders of the New Uzbekistan. Scholarly and popular publications, films, and public programs have been organized to highlight Behbudi’s vital role in shaping national consciousness.

At the beginning of the 20th century—a complex and transformative era for the region—Mahmudkhoja Behbudi emerged as one of the founders of the Jadid (new method) movement in Turkestan. As a reformist intellectual, playwright, publicist, religious scholar, and community leader, he devoted his life to the advancement of science, education, literature, art, and the press. His ultimate goal was to elevate the intellectual level of the nation and lead it toward freedom through enlightenment. Behbudi made major contributions to journalism and publishing. In April 1913, he founded the bilingual newspaper Samarkand (in Uzbek and Tajik), which was issued twice a week. Though initially a two-page publication, it later expanded to four pages. Despite financial difficulties that ended its print after 45 issues, Samarkand became a significant voice for modernization. The same year, on August 20, he launched the illustrated weekly Oyna (“The Mirror”)—a multilingual journal mainly in Uzbek, with poems in Persian and announcements in Russian. Oyna was published until June 15, 1915, releasing 68 issues in total. Its editorial office was located in Behbudi’s home in the “New Town” district of Samarkand. The magazine circulated not only across Turkestan but also reached readers in the Caucasus,

Tatarstan, Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Turkey. He viewed books as the main source of moral and intellectual awakening. By publishing textbooks, journals, and religious works in a modern style, Behbudi encouraged critical thinking and independent learning. His printing house in Samarkand became a symbol of cultural renewal, where ideas about science, history, and civic responsibility were widely discussed. Through his newspaper “Samarkand” and the magazine “Oina”, he created a public platform for education and dialogue, helping people to connect traditional values with modern ideas. However, Behbudi’s dedication to enlightenment also led to conflict with conservative circles and colonial authorities, who saw his work as a threat to their power. Despite this, his efforts laid the foundation for the modern culture of reading and publishing in Uzbekistan . In essence, Behbudi’s legacy demonstrates that books are not merely objects of knowledge, but instruments of national identity and social transformation.

In 1913, Behbudi established his own private publishing house, Nashriyoti Behbudiya, named after his father. At the same time, he founded a network of bookshops in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Andijan, Kokand, and Namangan. The Samarkand store was located in his residence. His entrepreneurial vision laid the foundation for the book trade and reading culture in the region .

The Behbudiya Public Library—a combination of library and bookstore—became a unique institution. Visitors could both read and purchase books from the library’s collection. The library also featured a comfortable reading room, where, according to Behbudi’s grandson Nodim Behbudi, visitors were offered hot tea with sugar—a gesture reflecting Behbudi’s belief that tea refreshed the mind and strengthened memory during study.

Behbudi’s library collection was exceptional. He imported books not only from across Turkestan but also from St. Petersburg, Kazan, Bakhchisaray, Baku, and Orenburg, as well as from Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, India, Egypt, and Lebanon . This required immense organizational skill, international connections, and a deep understanding of book marketing and management.

By the early 20th century, Behbudi’s libraries and bookshops became centers of enlightenment in Turkestan, where readers could access thousands of volumes. Later research confirms that Jadid organizations in Tashkent, Samarkand, Kokand, and Andijan not only led independence movements but also established public libraries holding tens of thousands of books—continuing Behbudi’s vision of an educated nation.

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi’s contribution to the culture of writing, publishing, and librarianship represents one of the cornerstones of modern Uzbek intellectual history. His endeavors laid the foundation for public access to knowledge, transforming Turkestan into a hub of enlightenment . Today, his ideas remain profoundly relevant for the spiritual renewal and intellectual development of New Uzbekistan as well as he distributed his publications, including the magazine "Oyna," to regions beyond Turkistan, such as the Caucasus, Tatarstan, Bashkiria, Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Turkey; traveled extensively, collecting information on history, culture, and monuments, which informed his writing and publishing activities . Furthermore, Behbudi produced textbooks for modern schools and supported the

Jadid education system, which combined traditional moral values with modern knowledge. His efforts helped to form reading habits and respect for books among young generations. Mahmudkhoja Behbudi’s dedication to bookmanship went far beyond publishing. He created an intellectual movement that connected reading, education, and moral growth — a legacy that continues to inspire Uzbek society today.

In summary, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi’s remarkable contribution to the culture of bookmanship represents one of the most significant intellectual achievements in the history of modern Uzbekistan. Through his tireless work as a publisher, educator, and reformer, he transformed the act of reading and publishing into a national mission aimed at awakening cultural and moral consciousness. His establishment of printing houses, libraries, and bookshops across Turkestan not only made knowledge accessible to the broader public but also created a sustainable system of intellectual exchange between the East and the West. Behbudi’s vision of enlightenment—rooted in faith, reason, and progress—paved the way for generations of scholars, teachers, and readers who continue to shape the nation’s identity today. Ultimately, his legacy reminds us that the printed word is not merely a tool of communication, but a force capable of nurturing freedom, wisdom, and social transformation.

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