



## JUSTICE MUST BE EARNED, NOT GIVEN: HONORING MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI'S LEGACY AND THE PROCESS OF PERPETUATING HIS HERITAGE IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Annotation:** This article explores the contemporary efforts in Uzbekistan to commemorate and institutionalize the legacy of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi — one of the most influential figures of the Jadid reformist movement. The study examines how Behbudi's memory is being honored through education, cultural policy, scholarly research, and public initiatives. By analyzing various monuments, memorial events, school programs, and media representations, the article assesses the extent to which Behbudi's intellectual and national heritage has been preserved, revived, and integrated into the modern nation-building narrative of Uzbekistan. Special attention is given to the symbolism behind these actions and their impact on youth education, historical awareness, and national identity.

**Keywords:** Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Uzbekistan, Jadidism, cultural memory, historical legacy, national identity, educational reform, commemoration, intellectual heritage, historical justice.

The revival of historical memory plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of post-Soviet nations. In Uzbekistan, this process has involved a conscious re-evaluation of forgotten or suppressed national figures, particularly those associated with the Jadid reformist movement of the early 20th century. Among these reformers, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi stands out not only as a religious scholar and playwright but also as a fearless advocate for modern education, civic consciousness, and national progress.

Despite his execution in 1919 and decades of Soviet-era censorship, Behbudi's ideas have endured, and his memory has gradually re-entered the public sphere, especially after Uzbekistan's independence in 1991. In recent years, a number of initiatives have been launched to honor his contributions: his works are being reprinted, his name is given to schools and cultural institutions, and his intellectual legacy is actively discussed in academic and educational circles.





This paper investigates the scope and depth of these commemorative efforts, seeking to understand how the Uzbek state and society are reconstructing Behbudi's image as a national icon. Why is he relevant today? What values does his legacy promote in the context of contemporary Uzbekistan? And to what extent has the recognition of Behbudi become a symbol of historical justice and national awakening? These questions form the foundation of our inquiry into the ongoing process of immortalizing one of Uzbekistan's most visionary thinkers.

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi was one of the founding figures of the Central Asian Jadid movement — a reformist intellectual stream that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His pioneering ideas on education, nationhood, press freedom, and the emancipation of Muslim societies placed him among the foremost visionaries of Turkestan's modern history. Despite the tragic end he met in 1919 under Bolshevik repression, Behbudi's voice echoes through the generations, particularly in today's independent Uzbekistan, where efforts to revive his memory have gained remarkable momentum.

Since Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, a significant shift has occurred in how historical figures like Behbudi are remembered. No longer viewed through the Soviet ideological lens that labeled Jadids as "bourgeois nationalists," he is now celebrated as a national hero and intellectual martyr. The revival of his legacy is manifested across multiple dimensions: in education, media, public monuments, academic discourse, and national celebrations.

One of the most visible signs of this revival is the naming of institutions and educational centers after Mahmudkhoja Behbudi. Schools, lyceums, libraries, and research centers dedicated to his name have become platforms for both preserving his legacy and promoting modern civic values. His literary works, such as the drama "*Padarkush*" ("The Parricide") and his essays on modernization and language reform, are being reintroduced into school curricula and university syllabi. These texts are not merely historical references; they are treated as guiding materials that still speak to contemporary challenges in education and social development.

In the cultural realm, several monuments and memorials have been erected to honor Behbudi. His birthplace in Samarkand region has been declared a site of historical and cultural importance. Public squares, busts, and plaques provide tangible recognition of his place in the nation's memory. These spaces also serve as venues for





cultural and scholarly gatherings, particularly on the anniversary of his birth and tragic execution.

Television documentaries, historical fiction, and academic conferences have further contributed to the public reimagining of Behbudi as a progressive figure whose thoughts remain strikingly relevant. His advocacy for women's education, the use of print media for social transformation, and calls for Islamic renewal based on knowledge rather than blind tradition are often cited in modern discourses on Uzbekistan's ongoing reforms.

Scholars and cultural policymakers alike have stressed the importance of placing Behbudi within the framework of Uzbekistan's national ideology, which emphasizes enlightenment, patriotism, and respect for historical identity. For instance, in several speeches by state officials and education ministry representatives, Behbudi is portrayed as an example of how knowledge and civic responsibility can serve as the foundation of a strong, modern nation.

However, it is important to recognize that the process of institutionalizing his legacy has not been without its challenges. Some critics argue that public remembrance sometimes leans more toward symbolic representation than critical engagement with his ideas. There is a continuing need to balance hagiographic portrayal with genuine analysis of his works, including their philosophical, political, and literary complexity.

Moreover, the deeper societal impact of these commemorative practices depends on how they translate into the lives of younger generations. If the revival of Behbudi's memory is to move beyond ceremonies and plaques, it must be deeply rooted in pedagogical practice, civic activism, and intellectual discourse. Encouragingly, youth organizations and student forums have begun to integrate Behbudi's teachings into discussions on ethical leadership, freedom of thought, and the importance of critical reasoning — themes that are central to his vision.

In sum, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's re-emergence in the Uzbek public sphere is both a symbolic act of historical justice and a practical investment in the nation's intellectual future. Through a growing array of cultural, educational, and scholarly efforts, Uzbekistan is crafting a legacy that does not simply memorialize Behbudi, but actively brings his principles into the present.

The legacy of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, once silenced under decades of ideological suppression, is today experiencing a powerful resurgence in independent





Uzbekistan. More than a historical rehabilitation, this revival represents a conscious effort to reconnect the nation with its intellectual roots and reformist heritage. Behbudi's ideas about education, modernity, and national consciousness continue to resonate in a society that seeks to balance tradition with progress.

The process of immortalizing Behbudi has taken many forms — from educational institutions bearing his name to public commemorations, cultural productions, and academic research. Each of these initiatives contributes to the broader project of nation-building, offering young generations a role model whose life was dedicated to enlightenment, reform, and service to society.

Nevertheless, true justice to his legacy can only be achieved through sustained intellectual engagement, critical analysis, and the active application of his principles in present-day policy and civic life. Behbudi's memory should not remain confined to statues or anniversaries; it must live on in the ethical values and informed actions of Uzbekistan's citizens.

By honoring Behbudi, Uzbekistan is not only recognizing a key figure of its past but also affirming a vision for the future — one rooted in knowledge, critical thinking, and the unwavering belief that progress must be earned through effort, sacrifice, and intellectual courage.

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