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MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI'S JOURNALISTIC LEGACY AND ITS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UZBEK NATIONAL JOURNALISM

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Abstract: This article examines Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's journalistic legacy and its significance in the formation and development of Uzbek national journalism. The study treats Behbudi's journalism not as an isolated literary activity but as a coordinated program of public enlightenment that linked the press with educational reform, linguistic modernization, civic discussion, national self-awareness, publishing, and cultural renewal. On the basis of recent Uzbek and foreign scholarship published mainly within the last decade, as well as modern studies of the newspaper Samarqand and the journal Oyina, the article analyzes the thematic structure, editorial principles, communicative strategies, and historical functions of Behbudi's publicistic writing. Particular attention is paid to his understanding of the newspaper and journal as institutions capable of shaping public opinion, widening the social circulation of knowledge, and creating a new intellectual audience in Turkestan. The analysis shows that Behbudi contributed to Uzbek journalism in at least four interconnected dimensions: he expanded the thematic range of the national press; strengthened the explanatory and analytical character of journalistic prose; established an editorial model based on public dialogue and social responsibility; and connected national journalism with transregional Muslim reformist networks. His experience with Samarqand and Oyina also demonstrates that the emergence of modern Uzbek journalism was inseparable from struggles over education, language, censorship, readership, and cultural modernization. Behbudi's legacy therefore remains important not only as a historical phenomenon but also as a foundational stage in the development of professional Uzbek publicistic thought and national media culture.

Keywords: Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Uzbek journalism, Jadidism, national press, Samarqand newspaper, Oyina journal, publicism, editorial activity, enlightenment, national awakening.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the twentieth century was a decisive period in the history of Turkestan's public communication. New-method education, publishing, theatre, translation, and periodical press gradually created a new cultural sphere in which social problems could be discussed beyond the traditional settings of mosque, madrasa, market, and administrative office. The Jadid reformers understood that social modernization required not only new schools but also new mechanisms for circulating information and arguments. Mahmudkhoja Behbudi occupied a central place in this process. He combined the roles of educator, writer, publisher, editor, publicist, and social activist, and he consistently treated the press as an instrument of intellectual renewal. Recent research by Zaynabidin Abdirashidov, Nodira Egamqulova, Hamidulla Boltaboyev, Nilufar Namozova, Gulnora Nishonova and other scholars has further clarified the scale of Behbudi's editorial work, his relations with Ismail Gasprinsky, his participation in reformist periodicals, and the role of Oyina in the development of national press culture .

The relevance of the topic is determined by the need to distinguish Behbudi's historical importance from purely commemorative assessments and to identify the concrete journalistic mechanisms through which his ideas influenced the development of Uzbek media. This article therefore focuses on the structure and function of his publicistic activity: what themes he brought into

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the press, how he addressed readers, how he linked journalism with education and national development, and what editorial principles can be observed in the periodicals associated with him. Methodologically, the study uses historical-contextual analysis, comparative interpretation, and qualitative thematic synthesis of recent scholarship. The main source base consists of research published from 2019 to 2026, including Uzbek, Turkish, and English-language works, while Behbudi's early twentieth-century articles and periodicals are treated through modern scholarly editions and analyses. Such an approach makes it possible to evaluate his contribution not only as the biography of an outstanding Jadid but as part of the institutional history of Uzbek journalism.

Behbudi's approach to journalism developed within the wider Jadid conviction that the press was a school for adults and a mechanism for social self-examination. His contacts with the broader Muslim reformist press, especially the intellectual environment created by Ismail Gasprinsky's Tarjimon, shaped his understanding of periodical publication as a transregional forum for education, language reform, and civic thought. Abdirashidov's comparative study of Gasprinsky and Behbudi demonstrates that their relationship was not limited to personal respect; it involved shared debates about education, language, social reform, political participation, and the communicative role of print. This connection is essential for understanding why Behbudi's journalism was both local and transregional. He wrote about the concrete needs of Turkestan while simultaneously situating those needs within wider discussions taking place among Muslim intellectuals of the Russian Empire and the Ottoman cultural sphere.

Behbudi's own publishing initiatives gave this conception an institutional form. The newspaper Samarqand, launched in 1913, appeared in a multilingual environment and sought to combine news, commentary, educational material, and public debate. Although its publication was short-lived, modern studies emphasize its importance as a practical experiment in establishing a locally rooted reformist newspaper under difficult financial and political conditions. The journal Oyina, also founded in 1913, provided Behbudi with a more durable platform for systematic publicistic work. Recent scholarship describes Oyina as a publication that addressed social, cultural, educational, linguistic, historical, religious, and political questions, while also drawing readers into a new culture of public discussion. Behbudi's choice of the title 'Oyina'—'mirror'—was itself programmatic: the journal was designed to reflect society back to itself, expose weaknesses, recognize achievements, and make reform a subject of collective thought rather than private complaint.

The significance of this model lies in the shift from information transmission to public reasoning. Behbudi did not reduce journalism to the reporting of events. His articles typically moved from a concrete issue to explanation, evaluation, and a call for intellectual or practical change. Questions of school organization, literacy, language use, theatre, geography, history, political representation, social customs, and newspaper reading were presented as parts of a single problem: the capacity of society to understand its condition and act consciously. This analytical tendency strengthened the publicistic character of Uzbek prose. It encouraged readers to interpret causes and consequences, compare local conditions with experiences elsewhere, and see knowledge as a practical resource. In this sense, Behbudi helped turn the press into an institution of social education and argument.

One of Behbudi's most important contributions was the expansion of the thematic boundaries of the national press. Earlier printed communication in Turkestan had developed under strong administrative control and often remained limited in its ability to sustain autonomous public discussion. Behbudi's publicism widened the agenda by treating education, language, national identity, economic activity, theatre, history, geography, social behavior, political representation, and international events as interconnected matters of public concern. This thematic diversity was not accidental. It reflected a modernizing worldview in which social progress required informed citizens capable of understanding both their local environment and wider processes. Recent work on

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Behbudi's linguistic views shows that he approached language not only as a philological subject but also as an issue of social communication, cultural identity, schooling, and intellectual accessibility. The same integrative logic can be observed in his treatment of other subjects.

Education formed the core of this agenda because Behbudi regarded ignorance as a structural obstacle to collective advancement. Yet his journalism did not merely repeat the general slogan of enlightenment. It discussed practical questions: the content of schooling, the usefulness of secular knowledge, the study of geography and history, the need for linguistic competence, the social position of teachers, and the relationship between education and economic or political participation. Such writing introduced an explanatory mode into the press. The reader was not simply told that knowledge was valuable; he was shown how insufficient education affected employment, public administration, family decisions, cultural production, and the ability to defend communal interests. The journalistic argument thus linked abstract reformist ideals with everyday consequences.

Behbudi's treatment of national identity was similarly concrete. His writings on language, historical memory, and collective naming reveal an effort to develop a vocabulary through which Turkestan's population could discuss itself in modern public terms. Scholars have noted his interest in the language question and his participation in debates over literary language and multilingual competence. Rather than interpreting multilingualism as a contradiction, Behbudi often treated knowledge of several languages as a practical advantage while simultaneously defending the cultural value of the native language. This position was especially important for journalism because it connected accessibility with intellectual openness. A national press, in his conception, had to speak to local readers in a comprehensible language while also opening windows onto broader regional and global knowledge.

Cultural modernization constituted another major dimension. The press, publishing, literature, and theatre were understood as mutually reinforcing forms of public education. Behbudi's famous dramatic work Padarkush belonged to the same reformist ecosystem as his journalism: both exposed the social consequences of ignorance and attempted to move the audience from passive recognition toward moral and intellectual response. Modern scholarship on Behbudi repeatedly emphasizes this interdependence of his educational, theatrical, editorial, and journalistic activities. For the history of Uzbek journalism, the importance of this synthesis is that it established the journalist as more than a reporter. The publicist became an organizer of intellectual life who selected urgent problems, introduced new concepts, mobilized authors, interpreted social change, and created bridges between specialized knowledge and the general reader.

Table 1. Functional dimensions of Behbudi's journalistic legacy

Dimension	Typical issues	Journalistic function	Contribution to national journalism
Educational	New-method schools, literacy, geography, history, practical knowledge	Explanation and public instruction	Strengthened the press as a form of continuing social education
Linguistic and cultural	Native language, multilingualism, terminology, cultural memory	Identity formation and accessibility	Expanded functional journalistic language and audience reach
Social and civic	Customs, responsibility, public participation, social problems	Criticism, persuasion, civic discussion	Developed analytical and problem-oriented publicism

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Editorial and institutional	Samarqand, Oyina, authorship, readership, publishing, censorship	Agenda-setting and organization of public dialogue	Created an early model of professional national editorial practice
Transregional	Gasprinsky, foreign press, international events, Muslim reform networks	Comparison and circulation of ideas	Connected Uzbek journalism with wider reformist media networks

Editorial Practice, Readership, and the Problem of Censorship

Behbudi's historical significance is also visible in his conception of editorial work. The emergence of a national press required more than talented individual writing: it required regular publication, financing, printing infrastructure, selection of contributors, communication with readers, and the ability to operate under censorship. The experience of Samarqand and Oyina exposed all of these problems. Recent studies of Oyina's publication history show that military censorship and administrative supervision affected the journal's working environment and shaped the practical limits within which editors operated. Financial pressure and insufficient subscription culture were equally serious. The weak habit of purchasing and regularly reading periodicals made national journalism economically fragile, while political supervision restricted the range and form of public expression. Behbudi therefore had to work simultaneously as writer, editor, publisher, promoter, and organizer of readership.

This combination of roles helped establish norms that later became fundamental to professional journalism. First, Behbudi treated the editorial agenda as socially responsible selection. The most valuable topic was not necessarily the most entertaining one but the one that clarified an urgent problem for society. Second, he regarded the press as a collaborative institution. He published and encouraged other intellectuals, thereby creating a network of authors rather than a one-person publication. Third, he paid attention to audience formation. A newspaper or journal could not have influence without readers who considered periodical reading necessary. Namozova's recent analysis emphasizes Behbudi's repeated concern with the absence of a strong newspaper-reading culture and his efforts to bring the press closer to ordinary readers. This attention to readership is one of the clearest signs of modern editorial thinking in his work.

Fourth, Behbudi's editorial activity linked journalistic ethics with civic responsibility. His critical writing was directed not only against external restrictions but also toward internal weaknesses: indifference to education, resistance to useful innovation, insufficient reading, social passivity, and the inability to distinguish constructive criticism from personal hostility. This point is important because it shows that his publicism was not built exclusively on political opposition. Its deeper logic was reformist: the press had to identify problems truthfully, explain them in a language understandable to readers, and direct discussion toward socially useful action. Such an approach helped shape a tradition of Uzbek analytical journalism in which public criticism, enlightenment, and national responsibility were closely connected.

Behbudi's Place in the Development of Uzbek National Journalism

Behbudi's role in Uzbek national journalism can be assessed at the levels of content, form, institution, and professional identity. At the level of content, he expanded the public agenda and normalized the discussion of education, language, social reform, culture, politics, and international affairs within a common journalistic space. At the level of form, he strengthened explanatory, argumentative, critical, and persuasive prose. His publicistic method often moved from an observed problem to comparison, reasoning, and practical conclusion. This structure encouraged the development of journalism that interpreted reality rather than merely recorded it. At the institutional level, Samarqand and Oyina demonstrated that national journalism required publishing infrastructure,

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editorial planning, contributors, subscribers, and financial sustainability. At the level of professional identity, Behbudi embodied the editor-publicist as a public intellectual responsible for both the quality of discourse and the intellectual growth of readers.

Foreign and transregional scholarship helps place this contribution in a broader historical framework. Adeeb Khalid's modern history of Central Asia emphasizes the significance of Jadid intellectual networks in the region's encounter with empire, modern education, and new political and cultural forms. Within that setting, Behbudi appears not as an isolated national figure but as part of a wider movement that adapted print culture to local conditions. Abdirashidov's research on Behbudi and Gasprinsky reinforces this interpretation by showing how ideas circulated through newspapers, correspondence, education, and personal contacts. Dadakhonov's 2026 review of foreign scholarship also demonstrates that Behbudi's journalism, modernism, and reformist worldview have become objects of international scholarly attention. These studies allow his legacy to be understood simultaneously as a foundational chapter of Uzbek journalism and as part of the broader history of Muslim modernist print culture.

CONCLUSION

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's journalistic legacy represents one of the formative stages in the history of Uzbek national journalism. His importance is not limited to the fact that he founded and edited periodicals. More fundamentally, he helped define what the national press should do: explain social problems, spread useful knowledge, connect local readers with wider intellectual developments, cultivate critical thought, defend cultural self-awareness, and organize public discussion. Through Samarqand, Oyina, his participation in other reformist newspapers, and his extensive publicistic writing, Behbudi expanded the thematic and functional possibilities of journalism in Turkestan. He transformed the press into a space where education, language, identity, culture, civic responsibility, and modernization could be discussed as interconnected issues.

The analysis of recent Uzbek and foreign scholarship confirms that Behbudi's contribution should be studied in four mutually connected dimensions: as a publicist who developed analytical journalistic prose; as an editor who created a socially oriented agenda and worked with authors and readers; as a publisher who confronted the material and censorship constraints of early national periodicals; and as a reformist intellectual who connected Uzbek print culture with wider Muslim modernist networks. For this reason, Behbudi occupies a foundational place in the development of Uzbek journalistic thought. His legacy remains valuable for media history because it shows that professional journalism emerges not only from printing technology or political permission but from a sustained culture of reading, argument, editorial responsibility, and social demand for knowledge.

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