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# IDEAS OF NATIONAL AWAKENING IN THE JADID PRESS: THE CASE OF MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI'S JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITY

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**DOI:**https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23158783

**Abstract:** This article examines the ideas of national awakening in the Jadid press through the journalistic and editorial activity of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, one of the leading intellectuals of early twentieth-century Turkestan. The study approaches the Jadid press not merely as a channel of information but as a mechanism for social mobilization, public education, cultural self-reflection, and the formation of modern civic consciousness. Particular attention is paid to Behbudi's newspaper Samarqand and the magazine Oyina, both of which became important platforms for discussions on schooling, language, social responsibility, national dignity, modernization, and engagement with the wider world. Using historical-comparative, textual, and discourse-analytical methods, the article identifies the recurring semantic fields through which Behbudi translated the general Jadid program into accessible journalistic arguments. The analysis shows that his journalism linked national revival with practical reform: education was presented as the foundation of social strength, the press as a school for public reasoning, language as an instrument of collective self-awareness, and knowledge of world affairs as a condition for overcoming isolation. Behbudi's editorial practice therefore contributed to the emergence of a modern national public sphere in Turkestan and helped establish a model of journalism that combined enlightenment, criticism, civic responsibility, and cultural modernization.

**Keywords:** Jadid press, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, national awakening, Samarqand newspaper, Oyina magazine, enlightenment, journalism, Turkestan, modernization, national identity.

## INTRODUCTION

The Jadid movement emerged in Turkestan at a moment when traditional social institutions, colonial administration, expanding imperial communication networks, and new forms of knowledge were interacting with unusual intensity. For the reformist intelligentsia, the central question was not simply how to adopt individual European or Russian innovations, but how to renew Muslim society without dissolving its cultural foundations. Print culture became one of the most effective means of answering this question. Newspapers and journals allowed reformers to address readers beyond the classroom and the mosque, connect local problems with broader political and intellectual developments, and turn education, language, economy, ethics, and public responsibility into matters of collective discussion. Recent scholarship increasingly treats Jadidism as an intellectual and cultural modernization project that contributed to the formation of new concepts of identity and social agency in Central Asia. Within this process, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi occupies a central place because he united several roles that were normally separate: teacher, textbook author, playwright, publisher, editor, journalist, and public figure. His activity illustrates how the Jadid project moved from educational experimentation to a wider program of national renewal.

Behbudi's press activity was especially significant because it gave organizational form to the intellectual energy of Samarqand and connected that environment with other reformist centers. In 1913 he established the newspaper Samarqand and, after the newspaper faced financial difficulties, continued his publishing work through the magazine Oyina. Contemporary testimony and later research indicate that these publications combined Turkic and Persian materials, addressed

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educational and social problems, reported on regional and international events, and invited contributors from different parts of Turkestan The press thus functioned as a public classroom in which readers were encouraged to compare social practices, recognize the causes of backwardness, and imagine concrete pathways toward improvement. The purpose of the present article is to analyze the main ideas of national awakening expressed through Behbudi's journalism and editorial practice, to determine the communicative strategies by which these ideas were transmitted, and to explain why his press activity became an important stage in the development of Uzbek national journalism. The study relies on historical-comparative analysis, close reading of Behbudi's publicistic themes, and discourse analysis of the concepts most frequently associated with reform: knowledge, school, nation, language, progress, responsibility, and freedom. The focus is not on reconstructing every issue of Samarqand or Oyina, but on identifying the intellectual structure that made Behbudi's journalism a vehicle of national awakening.

The first important feature of Jadid journalism was its understanding of the press as an institution of social education. This understanding distinguished the new press from purely administrative information or literary entertainment. The Jadids regarded public communication as part of reform itself: society could not change unless people first learned to discuss common problems in a language that was intelligible, persuasive, and linked to everyday experience. Abdirashidov's research on the formation of an independent press in Turkestan demonstrates that the early twentieth century witnessed the gradual emergence of periodicals that attempted to represent local Muslim social interests and create a space for autonomous public discussion. Behbudi's work belongs directly to this transformation. His editorial program did not isolate education from other spheres. School reform was tied to economic competence, linguistic development, family responsibility, political awareness, and the ability to understand international processes. In this sense, the national awakening promoted in Jadid journalism was not a single slogan. It was a comprehensive effort to change the habits by which society produced knowledge and judged its own condition. The public was invited to move from passive acceptance to comparison, questioning, self-criticism, and organized action.

Education occupied the central position in this system because Behbudi regarded ignorance as a structural cause of weakness. His journalistic arguments repeatedly connected the fate of the nation with the quality of schools, the usefulness of textbooks, the training of teachers, and the acquisition of both religious and secular knowledge. The idea was practical rather than decorative: a community unable to teach geography, history, arithmetic, languages, and modern sciences to its children would remain dependent on others in trade, administration, technology, and political representation. The 2018 edition of Behbudi's selected works makes visible the consistency with which he approached education as a national institution rather than a private family concern. Modern studies also emphasize that Behbudi's linguistic and pedagogical writings sought to make knowledge functional and socially accessible. His journalism therefore created a direct rhetorical chain: education produces understanding; understanding produces initiative; initiative produces social strength. National awakening was framed as a disciplined process of learning rather than as emotional self-celebration.

A second component of Behbudi's national program was the creation of a communicative community through the press. Samarqand and Oyina addressed readers as participants in a shared social project. The very editorial logic of inviting correspondents, publishing reports, discussing the condition of schools and cities, commenting on cultural events, and presenting international news expanded the reader's geographical and intellectual horizon. Research on Oyina stresses that the magazine became one of the first stable Uzbek-language platforms for systematic discussion of social reform and modern public life. Its significance also lay in multilingual openness: Turkic remained central, but Persian materials and occasional Russian-language elements reflected the complex

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linguistic environment of Turkestan. Behbudi's approach to language was therefore neither isolationist nor indifferent. He recognized the need for a clear literary medium capable of reaching ordinary readers while also encouraging knowledge of other languages necessary for education and international communication. Abdirashidov shows that Behbudi's reflections on language extended beyond grammar to questions of society, dialect, cultural anthropology, and the practical status of a modern Uzbek literary language. Journalism became the place where language was tested as an instrument of modern thought.

A third theme was national self-awareness. In Behbudi's journalistic discourse, the concept of the nation was inseparable from responsibility. To speak about the nation meant to ask who would finance schools, who would read books, who would support useful publications, who would train specialists, and who would defend collective interests through lawful and informed public participation. This is why his writing often used criticism as a form of moral pedagogy. Social inertia, wasteful customs, indifference to education, and lack of organized cooperation were treated as obstacles that could be corrected. Such criticism did not deny religious or cultural identity; rather, it argued that genuine loyalty to the community required the improvement of its institutions. Recent historical syntheses place Jadidism within a broader Central Asian encounter with empire, new technologies of communication, and competing visions of modernity. From this perspective, Behbudi's press activity can be understood as an attempt to create a locally grounded modernity: the society should learn from global experience, but the purpose of learning was to strengthen its own intellectual independence and collective dignity.

**Table 1. Main national-awakening themes in Behbudi's journalistic discourse**

| Theme | Problem addressed | Journalistic function | Expected social effect |
|---|---|---|---|
| Education and science | Illiteracy, outdated schooling, shortage of practical knowledge | Explanation, persuasion, advocacy of new-method schools and useful subjects | Formation of an educated and socially active generation |
| Language and press culture | Fragmented communication and limited access to modern knowledge | Development of an accessible publicistic language; publication of diverse viewpoints | Expansion of readership and a shared intellectual space |
| National self-awareness | Social passivity and weak collective responsibility | Critical reflection on the condition of the community and its institutions | Strengthening of civic responsibility and national dignity |
| Social reform | Wasteful customs, indifference, lack of organization | Public criticism, comparison, moral argument, practical recommendations | Reorientation of social behavior toward usefulness and cooperation |
| Global awareness | Isolation from international developments | Reports and commentary on foreign experience, technology, politics, and culture | Ability to compare, learn selectively, and participate in modern processes |

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The table demonstrates that Behbudi's journalism transformed abstract ideas of revival into a set of connected social tasks. Education was not presented separately from communication, and communication was not separated from public ethics. This integrated structure helps explain the influence of the Jadid press. A reader could encounter an article on schooling, a report on another country, a discussion of language, a note on theater, or criticism of a social custom, yet these materials were linked by a common logic: the community had to acquire the intellectual tools necessary to understand the modern world and act within it. In this respect, Oyina was aptly conceived as a "mirror." The metaphor of the mirror is important not only as a title but as a model of journalism. A mirror reflects existing reality, but in reformist journalism reflection is intended to produce self-correction. The press shows the community its achievements and weaknesses so that the community can change. Research devoted to Behbudi's editorial legacy has similarly emphasized the combination of analytical criticism, work with authors, and the development of national press culture.

Behbudi's journalistic method also depended on comparison. He frequently looked beyond Turkestan and treated knowledge of other societies as evidence that reform was both possible and necessary. For Jadid thinkers, travel, translation, newspapers from the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus, Crimea, Russia, and other regions created a transregional field of reference. Modernity was not imagined as a single foreign model to be copied mechanically. It was a collection of institutions and practices that could be studied, evaluated, and adapted. Khalid's recent history of Central Asia shows how imperial conquest and global exchange intensified local debates about education, society, and political organization. Behbudi's journalism translated these large historical processes into arguments understandable to local readers. When he discussed schools, languages, public organizations, or events abroad, the implicit question was what lessons Turkestan could draw from them. Such comparison strengthened national consciousness because it forced readers to locate their own society in a wider world rather than accept isolation as natural.

Another important characteristic was the combination of moral authority and rational explanation. Behbudi wrote from within the ethical vocabulary of Muslim society, but he also demanded evidence, usefulness, calculation, and institutional discipline. This dual register made Jadid journalism persuasive to readers who might have rejected reform if it had been presented as a rejection of tradition. Instead, reform was represented as a responsible response to changing historical conditions. The new school did not have to mean the abandonment of faith; the study of foreign languages did not have to mean cultural dependence; engagement with international knowledge did not require the loss of national identity. The rhetorical strategy was to remove false oppositions. Religion and science, national identity and international knowledge, cultural continuity and institutional change could be presented as mutually reinforcing when directed toward the common good. This strategy is one reason Behbudi's journalism became a foundational example for later Uzbek publicistic writing.

The role of the editor was equally important. Behbudi did not act only as an individual author. By establishing a publication, selecting topics, encouraging correspondence, maintaining a multilingual and multidisciplinary agenda, and sustaining a network of contributors, he created an infrastructure for collective intellectual work. The historical significance of Samarqand and Oyina therefore cannot be measured only by circulation figures or duration of publication. Even relatively short-lived periodicals can be influential when they introduce new genres of discussion, establish expectations of public accountability, and connect previously scattered readers and writers. Contemporary research on Behbudi's role in the national enlightenment movement continues to highlight the close relationship between his journalism, educational reform, theater, and political thought. These activities were different forms of the same project: to create a society capable of

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speaking to itself, educating itself, representing its interests, and making informed choices about its future.

From the perspective of journalism history, Behbudi's legacy lies in four durable professional principles. First, journalism should explain social problems rather than merely announce them. Second, criticism should be connected with a constructive program; exposing ignorance or institutional weakness has value only when the reader is shown an alternative. Third, the national press should not become intellectually provincial; knowledge of international developments strengthens rather than weakens serious national discussion. Fourth, an editor is responsible for building a community of authors and readers, not simply filling pages. These principles help explain why the Jadid press is associated with national awakening. It changed the social function of writing. Publicistic texts became tools for organizing attention, establishing priorities, and teaching readers how to connect personal behavior with collective outcomes. In this sense, the press participated directly in the formation of modern civic subjectivity.

The national awakening articulated by Behbudi should therefore be understood as a layered process. At the cultural level, it strengthened interest in language, literature, history, and shared identity. At the educational level, it demanded schools that could prepare students for contemporary life. At the social level, it criticized passivity and encouraged cooperation. At the communicative level, it created a public sphere in which ideas could circulate beyond narrow local circles. At the political level, it prepared readers to think about representation, rights, public institutions, and the relation between society and power, even when direct political expression was constrained by the colonial environment. A recent study of Jadidism and Uzbek national identity similarly emphasizes the movement's role in linking educational reform, political mobilization, and modernization into a coherent identity-forming project . Behbudi's contribution was to make this coherence visible in ordinary journalistic practice. His articles and editorial choices translated the language of reform into repeated public habits of reading, comparison, criticism, and aspiration.

## CONCLUSION

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's journalistic activity demonstrates that the Jadid press was one of the principal laboratories of national awakening in early twentieth-century Turkestan. Through Samarqand and Oyina, the ideas of reform were organized into a consistent public program in which education, language, social responsibility, cultural dignity, and awareness of the wider world supported one another. Behbudi did not reduce national revival to political rhetoric. He treated it as a practical transformation of institutions and habits: better schools, stronger reading culture, clearer public language, informed discussion, responsible criticism, and collective investment in knowledge. His editorial practice also expanded the meaning of journalism. The newspaper and magazine became not only sources of information but instruments for forming a public capable of evaluating its own condition and learning from other societies. This explains the continuing relevance of Behbudi's legacy for the history of Uzbek journalism. The professional model he helped establish united enlightenment with analysis, national commitment with openness to global experience, and criticism with a constructive reform agenda. In the history of the Jadid movement, Behbudi's press activity therefore occupies a decisive place: it converted the idea of awakening into a communicative process through which readers could recognize shared problems, acquire new conceptual tools, and imagine themselves as participants in the future of the nation.

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