



MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI'S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UZBEK DRAMA

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18950916>

Abstract

This article examines the contribution of Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy to the development of Uzbek drama and national theater at the beginning of the twentieth century. Behbudiy is widely recognized as one of the leading representatives of the Jadid movement and an important figure in the cultural and intellectual history of Central Asia. His literary and social activities played a significant role in the modernization of Uzbek literature and the emergence of dramatic art.

The research analyzes Behbudiy's dramatic works, particularly the play Padarkush, which is considered one of the earliest examples of modern Uzbek drama. Through this work, Behbudiy addressed important social problems such as ignorance, lack of education, and moral decline in society. The study also examines how his dramatic works contributed to the formation of theatrical culture and the spread of enlightenment ideas among the population.

The article is based on qualitative research methods, including historical analysis, literary analysis, and comparative evaluation of primary and secondary sources. The findings show that Behbudiy not only introduced new dramatic forms into Uzbek literature but also used theater as an effective instrument for social criticism and public education. The study concludes that Behbudiy's literary and cultural legacy played a crucial role in the formation of modern Uzbek drama and continues to influence contemporary studies of Uzbek literature and theater.

Keywords

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Uzbek drama, Jadid movement, Uzbek theater, Padarkush, enlightenment ideas, Uzbek literature, social reform

Introduction

This article examines the pivotal contributions of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi to the nascent stages of Uzbek dramatic arts, analyzing how his innovative approach laid the groundwork for a distinct national theatrical tradition. Behbudi, a central figure in the Jadid movement, leveraged theater not merely as entertainment but as a powerful medium for social commentary and enlightenment, actively shaping





the cultural and intellectual landscape of early 20th-century Turkestan ([Sabridin & Bobomuratovna, 2022](#)). His strategic deployment of dramatic narratives aimed to awaken national consciousness and challenge archaic societal norms ([ILTAS, 2023, p. 1](#)). Specifically, Behbudi utilized his plays to critique ignorance, advocate for modern education, and promote progressive social reforms, thereby contributing significantly to the intellectual discourse of his era ([Ulugov, 2021](#)). His works, therefore, transcended mere artistic expression, serving as vital instruments in the broader Jadidist agenda of cultural and spiritual revitalization within Central Asian society ([Abdullaeva et al., 2022](#)). This exploration will delve into Behbudi's biographical context, the ideological underpinnings of Jadidism that influenced his dramaturgy, and a detailed analysis of his seminal play, "Padarkush," to illuminate its thematic depth and lasting impact on Uzbek literary and theatrical development. The subsequent sections will elaborate on the emergence of Jadid literature and theater in Turkestan, detailing Behbudi's pioneering role within this movement. This analysis will also contextualize "Padarkush" within the broader panorama of Turkic-language literature in the Russian Empire, revealing its antecedents and its inaugural role in establishing the archetypal plot in Uzbek dramatic tradition ([Fort, 2019, p. 57](#)). Such archetypal plots often aimed to evoke feelings of disempowerment, thereby necessitating divine intervention or the emergence of a saintly figure to forward new social imaginaries ([Fort, 2019, p. 75](#)). Furthermore, this examination will explore the profound social and cultural repercussions of Behbudi's dramatic oeuvre, assessing its influence on subsequent generations of Uzbek playwrights and its enduring legacy in shaping national identity and discourse.

Literature Review This section critically reviews existing scholarly works concerning Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, the Jadid movement, and the evolution of Uzbek drama, identifying key theoretical frameworks and historiographical perspectives.

Despite extensive research on Jadidism, a gap persists in thoroughly analyzing Behbudi's unique dramaturgical contributions and their specific impact on the formal development of Uzbek theatrical conventions. This article aims to bridge this gap by offering a granular examination of Behbudi's dramatic techniques and their subsequent influence on the establishment of a distinctive Uzbek theatrical aesthetic. This focused analysis will also differentiate Behbudi's contributions from those of other prominent Jadid figures, such as Munavvar Kori Abdurashidkhon ugli and Abdurauf Fitrat, to highlight the unique facets of his dramatic innovations (["MODERN APPROACH TO JADIDISM AND LITERATURE OF](#)





[\[ADIDS," 2020\]](#). Specifically, while Fitrat's journalistic works spurred national consciousness and educational reform ([\["International Journal of Artificial Intelligence," 2019\]](#), Behbudi directly translated these ideological tenets into theatrical narratives, establishing dramatic archetypes that resonated with public sensibilities. This distinction underscores Behbudi's singular role in transitioning Jadidist ideology from theoretical discourse to performative engagement, solidifying the dramatic form as a potent vehicle for social commentary and cultural transformation within Central Asian society. This transition was crucial for fostering a collective identity and galvanizing public discourse around modernization and self-determination ([\[Dosmaganbetova et al., 2025\]](#)). This study will also analyze how Behbudi's plays, particularly "Padarkush," addressed issues of national identity in Central Asia by reflecting the region's complex historical context, multiculturalism, and religious influences ([\[Musayev et al., 2024\]](#)). It will investigate how these plays served as a platform for articulating and negotiating ethnic identity, thereby contributing to the broader ethnodeformation processes within the region ([\[Adiyeva, 2025, p. 20\]](#)). To achieve this, the article will draw upon primary sources, including Behbudi's own writings and contemporary critiques, alongside secondary scholarly analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of his dramatic legacy.

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine the role of Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy in the development of Uzbek drama. The qualitative method is appropriate for this research because it allows for a detailed analysis of literary works, historical sources, and scholarly interpretations related to the emergence of modern Uzbek drama.

The research is based on the analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Behbudiy's literary works, particularly his well-known drama Padarkush, which is considered one of the first examples of modern Uzbek dramatic literature (2; 23). The analysis of this work helps to understand Behbudiy's contribution to the formation of theatrical culture and the development of social themes in Uzbek drama.

Secondary sources include scholarly studies on the history of Uzbek literature, the Jadid movement, and the development of national theater. Works by researchers such as B. Qosimov, N. Karimov, and A. Yusupov provide important insights into the historical and cultural context in which Behbudiy's dramatic works appeared (3; 112; 4; 94; 9; 140). These sources help to evaluate his role in shaping the foundations of modern Uzbek drama.





In addition, the research employs literary analysis to examine the themes, characters, and social messages presented in Behbudiy's dramatic works. Special attention is given to how his plays reflect the ideas of enlightenment, social reform, and the importance of education in society (1; 71).

Comparative analysis is also applied to compare Behbudiy's dramatic works with later developments in Uzbek theater. This approach allows the study to identify how his ideas influenced the evolution of dramatic literature and theatrical traditions in Uzbekistan.

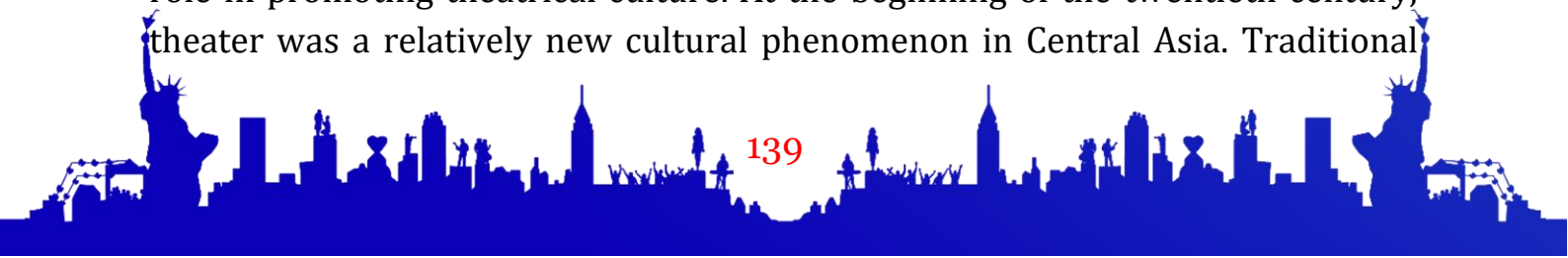
Overall, the methodological framework of this research combines historical analysis, literary interpretation, and comparative evaluation. These methods make it possible to provide a comprehensive understanding of Behbudiy's role in the development of Uzbek drama and his contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of his time.

The analysis of the available sources shows that Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy played a crucial role in the formation and development of modern Uzbek drama. His literary and social activities contributed significantly to the emergence of theatrical culture in Turkestan at the beginning of the twentieth century. Through his dramatic works and intellectual initiatives, Behbudiy introduced new artistic and ideological elements into Uzbek literature.

One of the most significant contributions of Behbudiy to Uzbek drama was the creation of the play *Padarkush* ("The Parricide"). This work is widely regarded as one of the first examples of modern Uzbek dramatic literature and an important milestone in the development of national theater (2; 23). The play addresses serious social issues such as ignorance, lack of education, and moral decline in society. Through the dramatic conflict between characters, Behbudiy demonstrates the destructive consequences of ignorance and the importance of education and enlightenment.

The central theme of *Padarkush* is the relationship between education and social responsibility. The tragedy depicted in the play serves as a symbolic representation of the social problems that existed in Turkestan society during that period. Scholars note that Behbudiy used drama not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a powerful tool for social criticism and public education (4; 94). By presenting social issues through theatrical performance, he aimed to raise awareness among the population and encourage intellectual awakening.

Another important aspect of Behbudiy's contribution to Uzbek drama is his role in promoting theatrical culture. At the beginning of the twentieth century, theater was a relatively new cultural phenomenon in Central Asia. Traditional





cultural forms such as oral storytelling and folk performances existed, but modern drama and theater had not yet developed as institutionalized cultural practices. Behbudiy and other Jadid intellectuals recognized the educational potential of theater and sought to introduce it as a means of social reform (3; 112).

Researchers emphasize that Jadid playwrights considered theater an effective way to communicate reformist ideas to the public. Since many people at that time had limited access to formal education, theatrical performances became an important medium for spreading enlightenment ideas. Behbudiy's dramatic works therefore combined artistic creativity with social and educational purposes (9; 140).

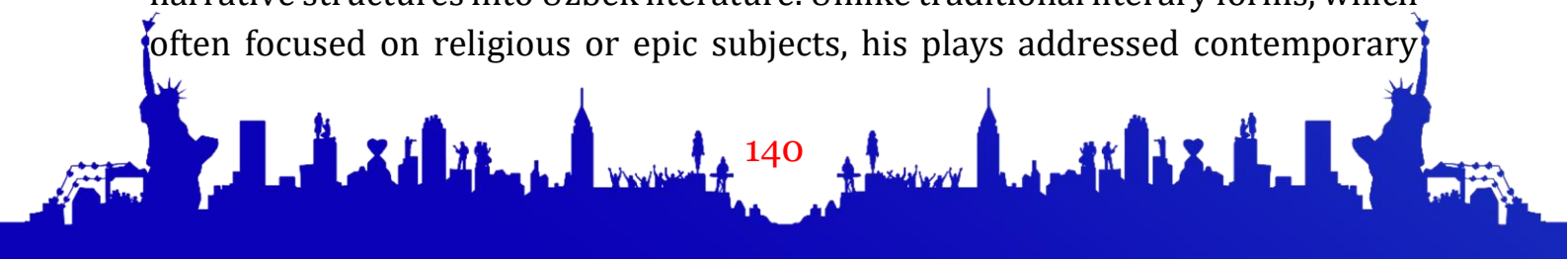
In addition to writing dramatic works, Behbudiy also actively supported the establishment of theatrical performances. Historical sources indicate that early performances of Padarkush attracted significant public attention and played an important role in popularizing theater among local audiences (11; 64). These performances contributed to the formation of a new cultural environment in which theater became a space for intellectual discussion and social reflection.

Another important feature of Behbudiy's dramatic works is their focus on moral and educational values. The characters in his plays often represent different social attitudes toward knowledge, progress, and tradition. Through these characters, Behbudiy illustrates the conflict between ignorance and enlightenment. According to scholars, this ideological conflict reflects the broader goals of the Jadid movement, which aimed to modernize society through education and cultural reform (3; 118).

Furthermore, Behbudiy's contribution to Uzbek drama can also be seen in his ability to integrate literary, social, and pedagogical elements into his works. His plays were not merely artistic productions but also educational texts that encouraged audiences to reflect on social problems and consider possible solutions. In this sense, drama served as a form of public pedagogy that helped to shape the intellectual and moral development of society (6; 14).

The influence of Behbudiy's dramatic works extended beyond his own time. Later generations of Uzbek playwrights and theater practitioners were inspired by his ideas and creative achievements. Scholars argue that the emergence of professional Uzbek theater in the twentieth century was closely connected with the intellectual foundations laid by Jadid playwrights such as Behbudiy (4; 118).

Moreover, Behbudiy's approach to drama introduced new themes and narrative structures into Uzbek literature. Unlike traditional literary forms, which often focused on religious or epic subjects, his plays addressed contemporary





social issues and everyday life. This shift in thematic focus played a significant role in the modernization of Uzbek literature and the development of realistic dramatic narratives (9; 166).

In the broader cultural context, Behbudiy's work contributed to the formation of modern Uzbek national identity. By addressing social issues and promoting enlightenment values, his dramatic works encouraged audiences to reflect on their cultural and intellectual responsibilities. Scholars therefore consider Behbudiy not only a playwright but also a cultural reformer who used literature and theater as instruments of social change (10; 57).

Overall, the analysis of Behbudiy's dramatic works and intellectual activities demonstrates that his contribution to Uzbek drama was both artistic and ideological. His plays introduced new literary forms, addressed important social problems, and promoted the ideals of enlightenment and education. These achievements played a fundamental role in shaping the development of Uzbek drama and theater in the early twentieth century.

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