

**THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL REFORM**

(A Look at Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's Efforts in the Development of Education in Turkestan)

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**Annotation.** This article discusses the views of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, a leading figure of the Turkestan Jadid movement, regarding the concept of national reform. M. Behbudi became widely known not only in Turkestan but also in regions such as Central Asia, Turkey, Iran, and Crimea through his efforts to reform the traditional education system, create textbooks and manuals, and his sharp, thought-provoking publicistic writings that clarified issues of science and law. Revealing the significance of these sources in the modern era constitutes one of the main objectives of this paper. The article also highlights the importance and key aspects of the national reform model proposed by Behbudi as an intellectual leader.

**Keywords:** Concept of national reform, Behbudi's enlightenment, Islam in Turkestan, unity of Turkestan peoples, promotion of the national idea in literature.

At a time when Turkestan had lost its freedom and the fate of the homeland seemed to slip away, by the mercy and grace of the Creator, great patriotic figures emerged from among the people. The appearance of such remarkable personalities paved the way for the rise of the national awakening movement in Turkestan. United under the idea of national unity, the Jadids regarded the struggle for the liberation of the Motherland as a sacred duty.

The encyclopedically learned Mahmudkhoja Behbudi developed the program for the national awakening idea, which formed the basis of the Jadid movement in Turkestan. The central issues of this program included the establishment of national statehood, a national army, a national language and literature, national drama, and national schools. Preserving religious and national identity was also the chief goal of the Jadid reformers. To reform school education, Behbudi designed a special national reform project aimed at creating textbooks and renewing the school teaching system. The article turns to historical sources to examine what this national reform project was and what its structure was based upon.

Within Behbudi's concept of national reform, several key areas can be identified as independent directions:

1. Developing a national idea;
2. Forming national journalism;
3. Establishing a national education system;
4. Developing national theater;
5. Addressing issues of national legislation;
6. Promoting the national idea through literature.

At the core of Behbudi's concept of national reform lay the ideas of independence. He saw these ideas as resting on two main pillars — Islam and the unity of the peoples of Turkestan. His concept of reform cannot be imagined without these two components. Behbudi demonstrated through his activities that enlightenment, economic progress, and political freedom could be achieved through his model of national reform.

In any society, education and upbringing are the decisive factors for the nation's future. Global transformations and a country's level of development are directly related to the quality of its educational infrastructure. Therefore, reforms usually begin within the educational system. Having realized the malicious goals of Russian colonizers, the Jadids first paid serious attention to the issue of schooling and education. The colonial authorities, in their desire to keep the local

population under control and spread their ideology, adopted a special policy toward education to promote Russification.

The colonizers aimed to take control of education in order to sever the nation from its history and native language, and to establish Russian as the sole medium of instruction. By restricting religious education and expanding “Russian-native schools,” they sought to distance the people from their national and religious values. To implement this Russification policy, they developed an administrative mechanism to destroy the local education system.

According to Dr. Boymirza Hayit in his book “Turkestan Between Russia and China (From the Second Half of the 19th Century to the End of the 20th Century)”, this process is thoroughly examined. In 1875, a law was drafted to bring all religious schools in Turkestan under Russian administrative control. In 1885, Governor-General Rozenbach demanded strict supervision over religious schools. In 1890, V. P. Nalivkin was appointed inspector of Islamic educational institutions in Turkestan. After the Andijan uprising, in 1899, Governor-General Duxovsky initiated repressive measures against religious schools, promoting the idea that “dividing Islam is our main duty.” At that time, over 4,000 Islamic schools in Turkestan operated without Russian financial assistance, sustained solely by national funding.

From 1886 onward, special “Russian-native schools” were established to promote Russification. However, local families refused to send their children there — sources state that in one year only about 650 Muslim children studied in such schools. Gradually, traditional Islamic education was restricted, while the number of Russian-Uzbek and Russian-Kazakh schools increased. Intellectuals and religious leaders learned to resist colonial policies to the extent possible.

Records indicate that in 1879, seminaries in Tashkent began admitting local Turkic boys. The editor of “Turkestan Viloyatining Gazeti,” Ostroumov, wrote: “Turkestan was conquered by Russian weapons; now it is time to conquer its spirit.”

The colonizers viewed the Islamic faith as the greatest obstacle to controlling the spiritual life of the Turkic peoples. In an effort to dominate the spirit of the conquered land, they sought to manipulate the religious elite — fostering superstition, corruption in the selection of judges, and moral decay in madrasas. In all areas, a mechanism was created to spiritually and morally destroy the nation. Yet this was not easily achieved. The true patriots of the land developed their own programs in opposition to the colonial regime. Behbudi himself countered the policy of destruction with his own national reform concept, effectively opposing the entire colonial system with his intellect and wisdom.

As the prominent statesman Faizulla Khojayevo rightly noted, in terms of his political and social activities and the breadth of his knowledge, no one among the Turkestan Jadids could compare to Behbudi.

The modern educational and social changes occurring in the Muslim world — particularly among Turkic peoples — also played a significant role in awakening reformist sentiments in Turkestan. The national intellectuals began practical efforts toward educational reform. In the national movement against Russian rule in Turkestan, Islam and Sharia principles became central. Muslims regarded Russians as infidels and avoided close contact with them. Religious scholars urged believers to refrain from cooperating with the colonizers. Among Turkestani Turks, Islam and nationality were inseparable concepts — religion embodied both identity and nationhood.

Behbudi believed that the only path for a nation to gain recognition in the world was through knowledge and science. He wrote: “To survive in this world, a nation must possess worldly knowledge and science. A nation deprived of science will be trampled by others.” He emphasized mastering secular sciences alongside religious studies. With his energetic and intellectually rich activity, Behbudi became known as the “father of the Jadids.” As a visionary, erudite scholar, and expert in Islamic law, he placed on the agenda the need to study religious and secular sciences in unity.

None of his journalistic articles or works were written outside the needs of his nation — the spirit of nationality dominates all his writings. Among them are notable works explicitly using the term millat (“nation”):

- “The Duty of the Nation” (1906)
- “The Needs of the Nation” (1913)
- “How Nations Progress” (1913)
- “To the Noble Students, Leaders of the Nation” (1913)
- “An Appeal to the Nation” (1913)
- “The Journal of the Nation” (1913, Oyina, No.10)
- “Who Will Reform the Nation?” (Ibrat, Oyina, 1914, No.12)

Among Behbudi’s articles written in the “usul-i jadid” (new method) style are:

- “On the Samarkand School”
- “The Science of Geography”
- “On the Samarkand Jadid School”
- “On the Examination of the Samarkand Jadid School”
- “The Language of Schools in Turkestan”
- “On the Jadid Movement in Bukhara”
- “Explanation on the Issue of New Schools”
- “On Schools”
- “How to Obtain Permission for Schools”
- “Help for Students”, and others.

Behbudi authored textbooks for Jadid schools based on the requirements of secular science, including:

1. Risolayi Jug‘rofiyayi Umroniy (Treatise on Human Geography, 1905)
2. Risolayi Jug‘rofiyai Rusiy (Treatise on the Geography of Russia, 1905)
3. Risolayi Asbobi Savod Alifboyi Maktabi Islomiya (Primer for Islamic Schools, 1905)
4. Tafakkur ul-Atfol (Treatise on Morality and Thought for Children, 1908)
5. Kitobat ul-Atfol (Book of Writing for Children, 1908)
6. Amaliyoti Islam (Islamic Practices, 1908)

The curriculum of Behbudi’s Jadid schools consisted of two levels, each lasting four years. In the first year of the initial level, students were taught reading and writing using Persian and Arabic alphabets. Arithmetic lessons were organized in playful forms to strengthen memory and thinking. Pupils also memorized short surahs from the Qur’an and were taught the rules and order of prayer.

Starting from the second year, classes on “Faith and Belief” were introduced alongside the subject of Haftiyak (weekly religious readings). Students studied Arabic, Turkic, and Persian texts.

In the third year, subjects such as the Qur’an, Islamic ethics, rules of recitation (Tajwid), Persian and Turkic ghazals, language, history, Islamic history, and geography were taught.

Thus, the first stage of Behbudi’s four-year educational system was organized in this way. After these four years, students graduated from the first level of the usul-i jadid (new method) school. By that time, a student had become literate in both Turkic and Persian, mastered the rules of Qur’anic recitation, and acquired a solid foundation in modern history and mathematics.

The great teacher had full confidence in the school curriculum he had designed and publicly shared the successful results of its trials. The second stage, also lasting four years, was referred to as secondary education.

At first, students studied Arabic, geography, astronomy (shafaqiya), translation from Persian into Turkic, history, Islamic history, Saadi’s “Gulistan”, as well as Persian and Turkic languages.

In the following year, Arabic grammar, health science (shifoxiya), history, Islamic history, ethics, Persian and Turkic languages, and mathematics were taught.

From the third year onward, Russian language was also introduced. Students learned how to write official documents, petitions, and reports.

By the fourth year, the curriculum included practical Arabic, practical Russian, Turkic pedagogy (the science of teaching), literary studies, health education, school and life, and natural sciences. Behbudi constantly urged the youth of Turkestan to understand their identity. He addressed the people saying:

“The money we waste on useless things should be spent on knowledge. Science is our means, our ideal, our desire, our goal, and our destiny. If we do not devote all our strength to learning now, we shall perish.”

In his article “The Needs of the Nation”, Behbudi emphasized:

“Our school, our shop, our factory, our madrasa, and everything we have must be reformed in accordance with the times.”

These words highlighted the main aspects of national reform:

1. School education — forming a new state system in Turkestan through education, increasing literacy, and raising national consciousness.
2. Our shops — ensuring the economic prosperity of the homeland, strengthening the financial system, enhancing national capital, improving the well-being and living standards of the people.
3. Our factories — building and organizing national industry, training specialists, establishing production, and creating small enterprises under a unified plan.
4. Our madrasas — preserving the nation’s spiritual life and religious values, combating ignorance and superstition, promoting enlightenment, and providing education for women and girls. Behbudi viewed the education of mothers as key to achieving national reform.
5. Finally, by “everything we have,” Behbudi meant the necessity of reforming healthcare, the national army, and legal awareness.

Having traveled to various countries, Behbudi — a devoted patriot — observed the situation in Turkestan “from the outside,” comparing and analyzing it. His studies and observations abroad awakened in him a sense of dissatisfaction with existing conditions and inspired a search for solutions and hope for salvation.

Behbudi lamented deeply over the idea that “the caravan of Muslims has fallen behind.” He urged his people to take the following actions:

1. All Turkic peoples — Sarts, Nogais, Tatars, Turkmens, Taranchis, and Dungans — are brothers and must unite in solidarity.
2. Religious scholars should “guide the people toward good, forbid evil, prevent moral corruption and sinful behavior, encourage learning, enlightenment, and labor. For the progress of the nation, everyone — young and old — must unite in spirit and purpose, cherish Islamic brotherhood, and strengthen love and friendship among ourselves day by day.”
3. He pointed out that European nations such as the French, English, and Americans had achieved progress by devoting vast resources and even sacrificing their lives — calling on the people of Turkestan to do the same.
4. In Islam, seeking knowledge is a duty (farz) for every Muslim. Behbudi urged his nation to study, learn, and reform through education.
5. He lamented that “while the children of other nations study in schools, our children work as porters and beggars.”
6. He criticized the subservience of scholars: “Among other nations, scholars guide the people, but among us, scholars obey the ignorant — this will lead to ruin.” He prayed: “O Lord! For the sake of these noble and active servants, grant us insight! Give us ears to hear and minds to understand! Oh, what kind of people they were, and what condition are we in now? Bestow peace and righteousness upon the earth, grant humanity to mankind, destroy oppression, and let justice and truth live on.”

7. He warned: “If our nation fails to reform its schools and madrasas today, if we do not change ourselves, our faith will perish — and the responsibility will fall upon future generations.”

8. He called for the creation of charitable societies (Jamiyati Khayriya), educational foundations (Nashri Maorif), libraries, funds, study circles, journals, newspapers, and publishing houses.

In conclusion, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi’s views on national reform encompassed all spheres of social life. At the core of all his reforms stood education — through which he sought to cultivate a “new Turkestan” generation and, by their efforts, rebuild the land of Turkestan itself. Behbudi fully understood that he might have to pay for this great cause with his own blood and life — and indeed, he did.

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