

THE HEALTHY GENERATION DREAMED BY MAHMUDKHOJA BEHBUDI

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The name of the great enlightener Mahmudkhoja Behbudi began to be heard more widely after our country gained independence. During the former Soviet era, various opinions were expressed about him. Some proudly said, “He was the leader of the land called Turkestan,” while others accused him of being “a representative of the bourgeoisie” and labeled him as an “enemy of the people.” Many such contradictory views could be cited.

In reality, Behbudi was a man with a deep, enlightened heart that understood the world in its entirety. Unlike materialists, he did not deny God; unlike superstitious people, he did not believe in false myths such as “the Earth rests on a bull’s horn and the bull stands on a fish.” He did not reject progress either. Behbudi believed that “worldly sciences not only do not harm Islam, but even benefit it,” and therefore, he made great efforts to introduce secular sciences into schools. To achieve this, he wrote and published several textbooks, opened a new Jadid-style school, allocated space for it in his own courtyard, and provided it with books and financial support.

He constantly reminded the youth that our ancestors had written and studied many books long before us, encouraging them to pursue all branches of knowledge. In his book “*Selected General Geography*” (1905), Behbudi wrote extensively about scholars of Turkestan such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Abu Nasr Farabi, listing over twenty scholars and their scientific works — many of whom remain unknown to most people even today.

Why do we frequently mention figures like Amir Temur, Alisher Navoi, Mirzo Ulugbek, and Zahiriddin Bobur today? Mainly to help our nation recognize its identity and progress — to set examples of our most outstanding ancestors. Mahmudkhoja Behbudi began this very mission at the beginning of the 20th century, even when our land was still under colonial oppression.

The success of his new educational methods was even reported in the 1906 Russian-language newspaper *Samarkand*, which wrote that “*students in Behbudi’s school learn in one year what students in old schools take three to four years to master.*” (*Samarkand newspaper*, May 20, 1906)

For Behbudi, the term “healthy generation” had a broad meaning. He dreamed of a generation that was not only spiritually and intellectually developed but also physically strong. In his article “*The Needs of the Nation*” (Samarkand newspaper, 1913, No.3), he wrote:

“If we look at other nations, we see that they have regular schools where, along with religious sciences, worldly sciences and knowledge are also taught. Because to live in this world, worldly knowledge is necessary.”

This excerpt once again proves that Behbudi was a supporter of science and enlightenment. He concluded decisively:

“A nation deprived of the knowledge and science of its time will be trampled by other nations.”

To achieve such knowledge, Behbudi believed, the youth must also be physically strong and active. He waged a determined struggle against all social ills that weakened the physical and moral health of young people. In several issues of the *Samarkand* newspaper, which he himself edited, Behbudi sharply criticized opium users and the beer shops imported from Russia and spread among Muslims.

For example, in issue No. 26, it was reported:

“In the Muslim part of Samarkand, seven beer shops have been opened, which serve to increase immorality among the people. Some of these shops are located near schools and mosques.”

Although the Tsarist authorities allowed the sale of alcohol among Muslims, Behbudi insisted that it should at least be sold far from educational institutions, arguing:

“It is necessary to complain about the beer sellers. Otherwise, the number of such shops will increase, and as a result, theft, murder, and immorality will also rise. Russians drink differently, but simple Muslims drink in disgraceful ways. This must be prevented.”

Behbudi constantly wrote about the dangers of alcohol, believing it distracted the nation from enlightenment and from the struggle for freedom.

He often lamented that “we go to doctors but cannot express our illnesses; we have no doctors of our own,” emphasizing again and again that the root of this problem was the lack of education. In his newspaper, he frequently shared medical news and useful information from world media. For instance, in issue No. 40 of *Samarkand*, he wrote under the heading “*Number of Doctors*”:

“Today, there are 25,927 doctors in Russia, of whom 23,734 are men and 2,193 are women. There are 2,576 dentists and 4,726 veterinarians.”

He also informed his readers about declining birth rates in Germany:

“In Germany, the number of newborns is decreasing every year. In 1900, there were 37 births per thousand people; by 1907 — 32, and by 1909 — 31.”

Behbudi wrote extensively about the **harm of tobacco and snuff** as well. His articles were reprinted in other publications, and in the first issue of his own magazine *Oyna* (“Mirror”), he wrote an introductory article on tobacco:

“What is tobacco? Tobacco is the name given to the leaves of a plant called *tabacum* brought from America. Europeans call it ‘tabak,’ the Turks — ‘tutun,’ and the Arabs — ‘dukhon.’”

He traced the history of tobacco back to Christopher Columbus, explaining how his sailors brought it from America to Europe, and by 1517, it had already spread across the continent:

“Before Columbus, there was no such plant in the Old World. The seeds were brought to Spain, and by 1517, this poison had spread throughout Europe.”

These facts clearly show Behbudi’s deep awareness and commitment to enlightening the public. Moreover, like all our great ancestors, he also cared deeply about the moral and sexual education of young men. In issue No. 53 of *Oyna*, he warned the youth against harmful habits and explained their consequences from both moral and medical perspectives.

It is evident that Mahmudkhoja Behbudi called upon everyone to raise a comprehensively healthy generation — one that is strong in mind, spirit, and body. To achieve this, we must never forget his teachings, and by following them, we honor the spirit of our great ancestor.

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