

THE REPRESENTATION OF IMAGE BEHBUDIY AND INTERPRETATIONS OF HIS PLAY “PADARKUSH” IN UZBEK THEATRE

Xamidova Charos Toxir qizi

Doctoral Student at the Institute of Fine arts

Academy of sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: charosxamidova47@gmail.com

Abstract

The creative legacy of Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy plays a significant role in the formation and development of professional Uzbek theater. The article examines the history of the representation of Behbudiy's image and the staging of his play “Padarkush” at the Samarkand Regional Musical Drama Theater and their place on the Uzbek stage. Related issues are analyzed from a theoretical perspective.

Keywords: Theatre, a historical figure, a performance, director, conflict, hero, character.

Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the traditional theatre in Turkestan gradually began to give way to European-style theatre. First and foremost, it is necessary to explain what is meant by European-style theatre. The term “new Uzbek theatre” refers to a dedicated building with designated seating for spectators, a stage intended for theatrical performances, as well as a creative ensemble comprising actors, a director, a stage designer, musicians, and administrative staff. Spectators attend performances by purchasing tickets, which is also a characteristic feature of this type of theatre.

“This theatre was alien to the literary life of Turkestan and emerged after the Russian conquest of the region in the form of a “Russian theatre”, intended to serve the Russian nobility, intellectuals, military personnel, and other representatives of various professions who had been resettled there” [Tursunov T., 2010: 30].

At the same time, active representatives of the newly emerging Jadid movement, who were familiar with the cultures of related peoples—Azerbaijanis and Tatars—as well

as their views on theatrical art, realized that theatre was an important means of developing the cultural life of the people.

The aspirations of our people to establish a national European-style theatre began to be realized in 1913. A new work was created in the genre of drama, which was more complex than other literary genres, and its name became inseparably associated with Mahmudhoja Behbudiy. He emerged as an organizer and advocate of the new Uzbek theatre. The first national play, “Padarkush” (The Parricide), became a cornerstone in the formation of the new type of Uzbek theatre.

In 1916, the Russian orientalist A. N. Samoylovich published an article about the play and its author entitled “Dramatic Literature of the Sarts” in St. Petersburg, in the collection Bulletin of the Imperial Society of Oriental Studies. In the article, he noted that Samarkand was the centre of the new literature of Turkestan, while the mufti Mahmudhoja Behbudiy served as an inspiration to young writers. He also regarded Behbudiy’s play “Padarkush” as one of the earliest dramatic works.

“In the journal “Oina”, which he published, Behbudiy sought to demonstrate that theatre was an important sphere of culture at the state level by highlighting its significance in European countries. He provided statistical data on the number of theatres and the ratio of their number to the population in seven countries. For example, according to Behbudiy’s data, Italy had 544 theatres (one theatre per 65,000 people), France had 596 (one per 66,000), Spain had 228 (one per 68,000), England had 372 (one per 97,000), Germany had 364 (one per 123,000), Austria had 215 (one per 133,000), and Russia had 149 (one per 850,000 people), emphasizing that Turkestan was completely deprived of this form of art” [Tursunov T., 2010: 33].

Mahmudhoja Behbudiy did not limit himself to expressing his views on theatrical art; he also proceeded to put them into practice in Turkestan. First and foremost, he attempted to publish his first play. After overcoming certain censorship obstacles, in 1913 the play was submitted to the Tiflis Censorship Committee for approval on the occasion of the centenary of the Russian army’s victory in the Battle of Borodino during the Russo-French War, which made it possible for the play to be published.

Following its publication in the journal “Oina” (No. 10, November 28, 1913), it was reported that the first amateur theatrical troupe had been organized in Samarkand. Its founder was Mahmudhoja Behbudiy. On January 15, 1914, the premiere of the play “Padarkush, or The Fate of an Illiterate Son” took place.

Through the plot of the work, the author reveals the threat that ignorance and lack of education pose not only to an individual family but also to society as a whole.

“Although the director’s name is not indicated in the first production, it is known that the Azerbaijani Aliaskar Asgarov had a significant influence on the organization of the stage performance. Moreover, Professor Abdulla Avloniy claimed that he himself served as the director. According to other sources, the directorial duties were performed by Mahmudhoja Behbudiy himself,” writes the distinguished theatre scholar Miyon Buzruk Salikhov.

Following the staging of the play “Padarkush” at the People’s House in the new part of Samarkand, a troupe of Tatar amateur performers also presented the play “Deceived and deceivers”. Between the acts, the renowned singer Khoja Abdulaziz performed songs.

In No. 14 of the journal “Oina”, published in 1914, a review stated: “On January 15, the drama “Padarkush” and the play “Deceived and deceivers” were staged. The fact that “Padarkush” was performed at a high level was confirmed by the approval of all the spectators present. So many people gathered that, due to a shortage of tickets and seats, three to four hundred people were forced to leave. The theatre auditorium (ibratkhona) could accommodate 320 people, and even the additional 50 seats prepared did not meet the demand. All tickets had been sold out two days before the performance... From seven o’clock in the evening, thousands of people headed towards the theatre, but there were no tickets left. In view of this, the theatre manager respectfully apologized to the audience.”

According to the researcher Miyon Buzruk Salikhov: “Eleven actors took part in the first Samarkand production: one was Azerbaijani, one was Tatar (born and raised in Samarkand), and the remaining nine were representatives of the local community” [Salikhov M., 1935: 72].

The preparation of the performance took place under the direct supervision of Mahmudhoja Behbudiy. This fact is also confirmed by theatre enthusiast Abdulhamid Azamat: “Rehearsals began, and most of the participants were local young men. There were no women among them, so female roles were performed by men. Behbudiy-Afandi held one of the rehearsals in his own courtyard under his supervision, explaining to the participants the significance of theatre, its service to the people, as well as the characteristics and behaviour of the characters in the play.”

It follows from this that Mahmudhoja Behbudiy had probably attended performances at a Russian or Turkish theatre during his travels; otherwise, he would not have been able to develop such a profound understanding of directing and acting [Sirojiddin Ahmad, 2024: 247].

Although the performance had been prepared by amateurs, it was successful and received positive reviews in the contemporary press. In the February 1, 1914 issue of the journal “Oina”, a review by an unknown author entitled “The First National Theatre in Turkestan” was published. This response can be regarded as the first manifestation of theatre criticism in the region.

The reviewer noted that the event was significant for the cultural life of the region, that the audience received the performance with great enthusiasm, and that the acting was positively evaluated. In particular, it was emphasized that the role of Liza (a fallen woman), performed by Abdulla Badri, was exceptionally convincing; the role of the wealthy man, played by Abdusalom Abdurahimov, revealed the character’s fanaticism, pride, and tragic downfall. Toshmurod, played by Abbos, Ziyoli (the intellectual), played by Mirza Numan, and the wealthy man’s son, played by Yazdonqul Muhamedov, also received applause from the audience. Spectators of different nationalities—Uzbeks, Tajiks, Tatars, Russians, and Jews—exclaimed, “Bravo! Bravo!”, demonstrating the profound impression made by the performance [Rakhmonov M., 2016: 30].

Following the successful premiere, the fame of “Padarkush” quickly spread throughout Turkestan. The production was staged in a number of cities, including Tashkent, Kokand, Andijan, Namangan, Kattakurgan, and Bukhara. Already in 1914, the play was performed 15 times, marking an important stage in the development of the national Uzbek theatre.

Mahmudhoja Behbudiy was engaged not only in writing and staging plays but also in an in-depth study of the theory of theatrical art. His articles “What Is Theatre?”, “Theatre, Music, Poetry,” and “Theatre” demonstrate that the educator’s views and knowledge of theatre were distinguished by depth, systematicity, and philosophical maturity.

He wrote: “Theatre is a form of performance in which general phenomena of life are depicted in a visual manner, so that those who can see may see them, while the deaf and those without hearing may perceive them with their hearts. The essence of theatre is to instruct and warn, to openly demonstrate the harm and depravity of bad customs

and traditions. Theatre speaks the truth without sparing anyone; it is a manifestation of truth – “Qulil haqqa walaw kāna murran” (‘Speak the truth, even if it is bitter’)) [Mahmudhoja Behbudiy, 2021: 15].

On this basis, Behbudiy concludes that theatre should be treated with seriousness and respect as one of the most important cultural institutions of society.

In 1916, the theatrical troupe in Samarkand that had first staged the play “Padarkush” disbanded. Attempts to revive its activities were unsuccessful. Due to Mahmudhoja Behbudiy’s active involvement in socio-political activities, the work of Samarkand’s amateur theatre performers was temporarily suspended.

Following Behbudiy’s assassination on March 25, 1919, in Karshi, theatrical life in Samarkand effectively came to a standstill. Only sometime later were theatrical troupes reorganized and placed under state patronage.

Unfortunately, theatre practitioners began to turn to Behbudiy’s image and his creative legacy only during the years of Uzbekistan’s independence. His play “Padarkush” was staged in various interpretations and genres at the Khorezm Regional Musical Drama Theatre, the State Theatre of Satire of Uzbekistan, the Andijan, Syrdarya, and Samarkand Regional Musical Drama Theatres.

One of the notable productions was the tragedy “Padarkush”, staged in 2020 at the Samarkand Regional Musical Drama Theatre by the young director Murodjon Turdiyev. Set designer Bakhrom Safojev, taking into account the format of the studio theatre, created a three-part stage space consisting of the wealthy man’s house, a room for conversations with the intellectual, and Artun’s tavern. However, the uniformity of the set design, expressed in the use of the traditional Uzbek adras fabric in all the scenes—even in the tavern—raised certain questions among the audience.

The performance begins with the figure of Behbudiy, who reflects on the mission of art and gives the actors guidance on portraying their roles. The performance of Bakhrullo Rakhimov, who played both Behbudiy himself and the role of the wealthy man, was distinguished by naturalness and inner authenticity. The actors portraying the intellectual, the mullah, Toshmurod, and the wealthy man’s wife also sought to reveal their characters and convey the author’s ideas to the audience. The cast as a whole endeavored to convey the spirit of the era and the ideological content of the work.

In addition to staging the play itself, directors and actors from various theatres have sought to portray Behbudiy himself on stage, highlighting his educational mission and

life journey. In particular, performances dedicated to Behbudiy have been staged at the Syrdarya Regional Musical Drama Theatre, the State Young Audience Theatre of Uzbekistan, the Mukimi State Academic Musical Theatre, and, most symbolically, in his native Samarkand, where the educator was born and raised.

Every theatre practitioner who creates the image of a spiritually mature individual with a strong will—one who sincerely aspired to see his people among the free and progressive nations of the world, sought the unity of the nation in pursuit of great and noble goals, and did not retreat in the face of the contradictions and difficulties encountered along this path—sets out to demonstrate to contemporary audiences, through artistic and expressive means, the great convictions of our ancestors and their struggle for these ideals.

In this regard, the creative work of the Samarkand Theatre, where significant works of art are being created, deserves particular attention. One striking example is the recent production of the drama “Behbudiy”, directed by Farhod Boynazarov. The author of the play is the playwright Farmon Toshev, whose language is distinguished by its expressiveness and clarity; the monologues and dialogues delivered by the actors are equally accessible and comprehensible to the audience.

Set designer Bakhrom Safoyev employed a pavilion-style stenographic system, creating a two-store house with an avian (veranda), columns, and a staircase. In different episodes, the revolving stage transforms into the protagonist’s home, an interrogation room, an assembly hall, and a prison cell where Behbudiy delivers his monologue. To convey the dynamics of the action and the tension between the characters, the director employed dance movements, lighting effects, and a musical chorus, thereby creating a symbolically generalized artistic image.

The role of Behbudiy was performed by Lazizbek Mamatkulov, who portrayed on stage the image of the educator and prominent public figure. The performance reflects his efforts to improve the socio-cultural life of Turkestan and to reform the system of education in schools and madrasas. Perhaps for this reason, the actor’s performance relies more heavily on monologues than on action: he directs most of his energy towards oratorical performance, which, however, to some extent prevents a deeper revelation of the protagonist’s character. The other characters remain somewhat in the shadow of the central figure; nevertheless, the audience still senses the spirit of a complex and contradictory era.



The activities and goals of the Jadids, who lived in an era dominated by ignorance and backwardness, were far from easy. Every one of their actions and manifestations of courage remains relevant even today. A particularly vivid example is the life and creative work of the leader of the Jadid movement, Mahmudhoja Behbudiy.

References

1. Tursunov, T. History of Uzbek Theatre in the 20th Century. Tashkent, 2010, p. 33.
2. Salikhov, M. Materials on the History of Uzbek Theatre. Tashkent, 1935, p. 72.
3. Sirojiddin Ahmad. Mahmudhoja Behbudiy. Tashkent, 2024, p. 247.
4. Rakhmanov, M. History of Uzbek Theatre Criticism. Tashkent, 2016, p. 30.
5. Mahmudhoja Behbudiy. Selected Works. In 2 volumes, Vol. 2. Tashkent: Akademnashr, 2021, p. 15.