

# Comparative Analysis Of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's Work “A Brief History Of Islam”

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the content, historical significance, and comparative aspects of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's work “A Brief History of Islam.” The study examines the author's religious-educational approach, his method of presenting Islamic history in a simple and accessible language, as well as his innovative role in conveying religious history to the public on a scientific basis. Through comparative analysis, the article identifies the place of Behbudi's work in the Islamic thought of his time and highlights its methodological and conceptual differences from the writings of historians such as al-Tabari, Jurjani, Ibn al-Athir, and Ahmad Donish.

**Keywords:** Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, A Brief History of Islam, Jadidism, religious and educational reform, historiography, Islamic civilization.

**Introduction.** Mahmudkhoja Behbudi (1875–1919) occupies a special place among the enlightened intellectuals of the Uzbek people as one of the founders of the Jadid movement and a great thinker who harmonized religious and secular knowledge. In his activities, he united Islam, science, education, and national awakening under a single principle — “*to lead the nation from ignorance toward enlightenment and progress.*” Among his works, “*A Brief History of Islam*” holds particular importance, as it played a crucial role in awakening the religious and spiritual consciousness and historical memory of the Uzbek nation.<sup>1</sup>

“*A Brief History of Islam*” was first published in 1914 in Samarkand and is regarded as one of the earliest Uzbek textbooks dedicated to presenting the history of Islam in a concise, popular, and comprehensible manner. In this work, Behbudi analyzed the history of Islam from political, spiritual, and educational perspectives, harmonizing it with the viewpoints of medieval historians such as al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, and al-Suyuti, as well as with early 20th-century Muslim reformist thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the traditional Islamic historiographical approach, Behbudi sought to explain religious events through their social and political causes, to explore the role of science and enlightenment within Islam, and to connect Islamic history with global historical processes. In this sense, “*A Brief History of Islam*” represents a new stage in the renewal of Eastern historical thought.

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that, in today's age of globalization, examining religious sources within their historical and cultural context through comparative analysis provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding national identity and reviving the traditions of Islamic enlightenment. The content of Behbudi's work holds significant scholarly value for contemporary Islamic studies, historiography, and cultural studies, as it advances the idea of interpreting the history of Islam not merely as a religious phenomenon but as a moral and educational process.<sup>3</sup>

The article also presents a comparative analysis of Behbudi's “*A Brief History of Islam*” with Ibn al-Athir's “*Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*,” al-Suyuti's “*Tarikh al-Khulafa*,” as well as with the historical perspectives of thinkers such as Zaki Validi To‘g‘on and Ahmad Donish. Through this approach, the elements of renewal, critical thinking, and educational interpretation found in Behbudi's work are identified.

## Content and Purpose of the Work.

<sup>1</sup> Dinora Eshboyeva, Mahmudxo‘ja Behbudi asarlarining ahamiyati. (2023). *Proceedings of Scientific Conference on Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2(3), 83-86.

<sup>2</sup> Dinora Eshboyeva, Mahmudxo‘ja behbudi asarlarining ahamiyati. *Proceedings of International Scientific Conference on Multidisciplinary Studies*.

<sup>3</sup> Parpiyev B., Mahmudxo‘ja Behbudiyning “Muxtasar tarixi islom” asari.... Имом Бухорий номидаги Тошкент ислом институти.

Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy's "A Brief History of Islam" was published in 1914 in Samarkand and is one of the first scholarly and religious-historical treatises written in the Uzbek language. The work, though concise, is rich in content and aims to present the history of Islam in a simple, clear, and comprehensible manner for readers — particularly school students and emerging intellectual reformers. In his work, Behbudiy interprets history not merely as a chain of religious events, but as a phenomenon deeply connected with human progress, science, morality, and social reform.

*Purpose of the Work.* In the introduction, Behbudiy writes: "To know the history of Islam is the foundation of faith, the honor of the nation, and the path to self-knowledge for humankind."<sup>4</sup>

This idea reveals the author's main objective — namely:

- to encourage people to study Islamic history, reflection, and knowledge;
- to prepare the younger generation for understanding their religious and spiritual identity;
- to call for an understanding of Islam based on knowledge and enlightenment rather than ignorance.

**Comparative Analysis.** Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy's "A Brief History of Islam," published in Samarkand in 1914, represents an important example of the new Islamic-educational historiographical school that emerged in Central Asia at the beginning of the 20th century. To analyze this work comparatively, it is scientifically appropriate to examine it alongside the writings of classical Muslim historians (Ibn al-Athir, al-Suyuti, al-Tabari) and reformist intellectual authors (Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Ahmad Donish).

#### *Comparison in Terms of Content and Structure.*

Behbudiy wrote "A Brief History of Islam" in a concise, systematic, and didactic form tailored to the Uzbek reader. He divided Islamic history into four stages: *the beginning (the period of revelation)*, *expansion (the caliphate)*, *flourishing (the age of science and culture)*, and *decline (the age of ignorance)*. This structure resembles the chronological approach found in Ibn al-Athir's "Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh," yet Behbudiy emphasizes philosophical and social analysis more strongly.

For example, while Ibn al-Athir presents historical events year by year with limited attention to their causes, Behbudiy selects significant events and analyzes them in terms of their impact on social progress. In this sense, "A Brief History of Islam" is not merely a collection of historical facts but can be regarded as a school of historical thought.

#### *Scientific Approach and Methodological Differences*

Author / Work	Type of Approach	Attitude Toward Historical Events	Evaluation of Knowledge and Enlightenment
al-Tabari – "Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk" <sup>5</sup>	Narrative-based chronological description	Strictly religious perspective	Views knowledge as religious heritage
al-Suyuti – "Tarikh al-Khulafa"	Political-biographical history	Praises the virtues of the caliphs	Presents religious leaders as models of scholarship
Ibn al-Athir – "Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh" <sup>6</sup>	Sequential presentation of historical facts	Emphasizes political processes	Pays little attention to scientific achievements
Behbudiy – "A Brief History of Islam"	Analytical and educational approach	Focuses on religious, social, and moral causes	Interprets knowledge as the foundation of Islamic progress

This comparative analysis demonstrates that Behbudiy integrated classical historiography with a modern scientific worldview. He interpreted history not merely as a "chronology of prophets and caliphs" but as successive stages of intellectual, political, and cultural development in the Islamic world.

For example, he explains the flourishing of science and culture during the Caliphate period through the Qur'anic principle of "the call to knowledge," aligning his view with the reformist ideas of Muhammad

<sup>4</sup> Behbudiy, M. (1914). Muxtasar islom tarixi. Samarqand: Matbaai Behbudiya.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Tabariy. "Tarix ar-rusul va-l-muluk"

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Asir. "Al-Kamil fit-tarix"

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Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani on the necessity of Islamic renewal (*al-Afghani, Risalat al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*, 1884).

#### *Harmony Between Religious History and Enlightenment*

Although Behbudiy's work presents the key events of Islamic history in a religious context, he interprets them as moral and social lessons. For instance, he portrays the Battle of Badr and the Hijra not simply as historical episodes but as symbols of unity, devotion, and patience among Muslims.

In this respect, Behbudiy's analytical style is close to that of Ahmad Donish in "*Navodir al-Vaqoe*." Like Donish, he used historical narratives to justify the necessity of social reform and enlightenment. However, Behbudiy differed in that he viewed history as the stages of awakening for the Islamic Ummah.

#### *Historical Lessons and Purposeful Analysis*

Unlike classical historians who were content with merely recording the past, Behbudiy urged readers to *draw conclusions* from history. He explained the reasons for the decline of the Muslim world as the result of "*abandoning knowledge, succumbing to ignorance, and distancing from intellectual reflection*." (*Behbudiy, A Brief History of Islam*, 1914).

This analytical approach brings him closer to the historiography of the European Renaissance, as he regarded history as a source of instruction for social transformation. According to Behbudiy, a nation that knows its Islamic history can draw inspiration from its "*glorious past*" and rebuild its future through knowledge and unity.

#### *From the Perspective of Ideological and Spiritual Renewal*

Behbudiy did not subordinate history to religious dogma but interpreted religious values as instruments of moral reform. In this regard, his approach is similar to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's views on "*the role of religion in social movements*."

While al-Afghani saw history as a catalyst for unity in the Muslim world, Behbudiy treated Islamic history as a lesson in national revival. For him, history was a means to restore both national and religious identity. This is precisely why he wrote Islamic history in the Uzbek language, in a style accessible to ordinary people. In doing so, he became a pioneer in adapting classical Arabic sources to a national and educational context.

**Behbudiy's Historical Views.** Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy (1875–1919) was one of the most prominent representatives of the Turkestan Jadid movement in the early twentieth century — a theologian, historian, and enlightened intellectual who analyzed the issues of Islam and national revival in interconnection. His work "*Mukhtasar Islam Tarixi*" (*A Concise History of Islam*, 1914), stands out for its attempt to explain historical events on the basis of religious principles, the Qur'an and Hadith sources, while also applying modern scholarly approaches. The work fully reflects Behbudiy's conviction that "knowing history is the key to understanding and reforming the nation."

Behbudiy interpreted history as a source of spiritual progress and religious awakening for the people. According to him, the history of Islam is not merely a sequence of prophets' lives or political events, but an expression of humanity's moral and spiritual evolution. Relying on Qur'anic verses and historical evidence, Behbudiy explained the flourishing of early Islamic civilization through the principles of knowledge, justice, unity, and honesty. He believed that the foundation of Muslim power and greatness lay in education, justice, and social solidarity.

For Behbudiy, the primary goal of studying history was to guide society toward enlightenment through the lessons of the past. He viewed history as a "source of moral instruction." In "*Mukhtasar Islam Tarixi*," he sought to convey Islamic history to the younger generation in a religious yet modern and pedagogically accessible manner. Written as an educational manual, the book served as a stimulus for renewing the teaching of history in traditional madrasas.

From a comparative perspective, Behbudiy's approach to history is close to that of Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), who, in his "*Muqaddimah*," defined history as a science that reveals the inner laws of human society. Similarly, Behbudiy viewed history as a process of general development, though he interpreted this process through the lens of Islamic values and spiritual unity.

Behbudiy was also familiar with the ideas of European Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and Rousseau, who emphasized the role of reason and progress in historical thought. However, he opposed their concept of "religion-free enlightenment," advocating instead that "religion must be reformed to strengthen

enlightenment.” In this regard, he shared intellectual kinship with Islamic reformers like Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.

At the core of Behbudi’s historical thought lies the analysis of the stages of rise and decline in Islamic civilization. He attributed the backwardness of the Muslim world not to external invasions, but to internal stagnation — ignorance, indifference to science, and rigid religiosity. In “*Mukhtasar Islam Tarixi*,” he openly stated: “In the early centuries of Islam, Muslims brought knowledge, justice, and culture to the world, but in later times they forgot these blessings and sank into the darkness of ignorance.”

Behbudi’s ideas resonated with those of other Jadid intellectuals of his time — Abdurauf Fitrat, Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhanov, and Abdulla Avloni. However, while Fitrat analyzed history more from a philosophical and political standpoint, Behbudi approached it through a religious, educational, and moral perspective.

**Conclusion.** Mahmudkhoja Behbudi’s “*Mukhtasar Islam Tarixi*” is recognized not only as a religious but also as a historical, educational, and philosophical work of great relevance for its time. Through this book, the author interpreted Islamic history not as a mere chronicle of the past but as a living source serving the spiritual awakening of the nation. Behbudi’s historical outlook demonstrates that he saw history as a force reflecting the moral development of humanity and urging social reform.

In his analysis, Behbudi identified ignorance, indifference to knowledge, and loss of unity as the main causes of decline in the Muslim world. He believed that learning from history was the guarantee of future progress. From this point of view, “*Mukhtasar Islam Tarixi*” is not only a religious text but also a theoretical foundation for national self-awareness and enlightenment.

Comparative analysis shows that Behbudi’s approach to history aligns with Ibn Khaldun’s philosophy of social history, Muhammad Abduh’s ideas of religious reform, and the educational orientation of the Jadid movement. Yet, in his concept, history is not merely a socio-scientific phenomenon — it is a synthesis of faith, morality, and intellectual awakening.

Moreover, Behbudi regarded historical thinking as an integral part of the education system. “*Mukhtasar Islam Tarixi*” was designed as a textbook for madrasas and schools to cultivate not only religious knowledge but also historical consciousness and national identity among students.

Ultimately, Behbudi’s historical vision represents not only the ideological foundation of the Jadid movement of his time but also remains a valuable source for modern studies of Islamic civilization, spiritual heritage, and historical thought. He viewed history not as an object of worship of the past but as a means to learn, renew thinking, and advance toward progress.

Through his historical insights, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi preserved the living spirit of Islamic cultural heritage and harmonized it with the ideals of knowledge, justice, and enlightenment — leaving an indelible mark in the history of Muslim intellectual thought.

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