



The Representation Of Social And Moral Crisis In Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy's Padarkush: The Role Of Ignorance In Leading To Patricide

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy's drama Padarkush, or The State of an Unschooled Boy (1911) through the lens of social and moral crisis. The study's central aim is to demonstrate that the tragedy of patricide staged in the play is not the outcome of an individual's moral failing, but the structural consequence of a merchant class that systematically devalues learning. Using close reading and socio-historical criticism, the article examines the relationships among the Boy, the Domulla, the Ziyoli (reformist intellectual), and Toshmurod. The findings show that the drama methodically stages the pedagogical vacuum created by the father's rejection of both religious and secular paths to knowledge, and traces how that vacuum becomes crime. The Ziyoli's closing monologue functions as the play's explicit thesis, naming ignorance and neglected upbringing as the direct cause of both the murder and the family's ruin. The article repositions Padarkush as a deliberate pedagogical instrument of Jadid reform.

KEYWORDS: Jadidism, Uzbek drama, Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy, Padarkush, ignorance, moral crisis, enlightenment pedagogy, national tragedy.

INTRODUCTION

Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy (1875–1919) occupies a foundational place in the intellectual history of Turkestan as a publisher, pedagogue, and the principal ideologist of the Jadid reform movement. Alongside his newspaper Samarqand and journal Oyna, and his network of new-method (usul-i jadid) schools, Behbudiy turned to the stage as a further instrument of public instruction. In 1911 he wrote Padarkush, yoxud o'qimagan bolaning holi ("The Patricide, or the State of an Unschooled Boy"), a work he himself subtitled Turkiston maishatidan olingan ibratnoma — "a cautionary tale drawn from Turkestani daily life." The play was published only in 1913, after two years of censorship delay, and first staged in Samarkand and Tashkent in early 1914. It is universally recognized in Uzbek literary history as the first indigenous Central Asian drama and the founding text of Uzbek national theatre.

The plot is deceptively simple. A wealthy but unlettered merchant (the Boy) twice refuses counsel — first from a traditional cleric (the Domulla), then from a Europeanized reformist intellectual (the Ziyoli) — to send his adolescent son Toshmurod to school. Left without religious or secular instruction, Toshmurod drifts into a circle of delinquent friends, taverns, drink, and a Russian barmaid, Liza. Debt and desire lead the group to plan a burglary of the Boy's own strongbox; during the break-in the professional criminal Tangriqul kills the father, and Toshmurod is arrested alongside him. The drama closes with the Ziyoli delivering, over the

corpse and the arrested youths, an explicit diagnosis: ignorance and the absence of upbringing (tarbiya) are the root cause of the catastrophe.

The play's didactic intention is unmistakable and has long been acknowledged by Uzbek literary historians [2]. Yet existing scholarship has tended either to situate Padarkush within the broader history of Jadid dramaturgy [3], to catalogue its artistic devices [4], or to examine a single figure such as the female characters [5], without systematically tracing how the causal architecture of the plot itself — scene by scene — builds ignorance into the sole engine of tragedy. This article addresses that gap. Its central research question is: how does Behbudiy's dramatic structure convert a social failure (the refusal of education) into a moral catastrophe (patricide), and what does this conversion reveal about the play's function as Jadid pedagogy? The article argues that Behbudiy deliberately withholds individual villainy from the Boy and, to a significant extent, from Toshmurod himself, redistributing responsibility onto the social conditions — commercial vanity, colonial economic pressure, absent tarbiya — that produced them both.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews existing scholarship on Padarkush and situates the present study's contribution. Section 3 describes the qualitative textual method applied. Section 4 presents the analysis in five stages, moving from the Boy's worldview through the two failed interventions, the vacuum left by neglect, the mechanics of the crime, and the Ziyoli's closing verdict. Section 5 concludes by positioning the play within the broader project of Jadid reform pedagogy.

Literature Review

Uzbek literary historiography has consistently placed Padarkush at the origin point of national dramaturgy. Qosimov et al. [2], in their standard history of the national-awakening period, frame the play as the literary counterpart to Behbudiy's press and school-building activity — theatre understood as a further "mirror" (oyna) held up to the nation. Avazov [3] extends this genealogy forward, arguing that Padarkush functioned as a direct template for the wave of Jadid dramas that followed it, including works modeled on its cautionary structure. This line of scholarship establishes the play's historical significance but treats its internal causal logic mainly as background to its influence on later authors.

A second strand of scholarship examines the play's internal artistic construction. Xaitova [4] surveys the drama's compositional devices — its compression into three acts and four scenes, its restrained emotional register, and its function as what she terms a "national tragedy" — and stresses that the murder is presented as the direct, foreseeable outcome of the son's neglected upbringing rather than as melodrama for its own sake. Xolikova and Tojiboyeva [5] approach the play through gender, contrasting the corrupting figure of Liza with the grieving, victimized mother (Boyvuchcha); they note that nearly every character except the mother is rendered in morally compromised or contradictory terms, which is consistent with a reading of the play as an ensemble portrait of social failure rather than a story of one villain.

What remains comparatively undeveloped in this literature is a systematic account of how the play converts the abstract social critique of ignorance into the concrete dramatic mechanism of patricide — that is, a scene-by-scene causal analysis linking the Boy's economic worldview, the failure of both proposed educational paths, the resulting behavioral vacuum, and the crime's staging. The present article takes up this task, treating the play's structure itself as the primary

evidence for its argument about ignorance as a socially produced, rather than individually inherent, catastrophe.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, text-centered method combining close reading with socio-historical literary criticism. The primary corpus is the full text of Padarkush as printed in Behbudiy's collected works [1], cross-checked against the original three-act, four-scene structure described in early twentieth-century reviews and later literary-historical accounts [2, 4].

The analytical procedure followed three steps. First, each scene was segmented according to its dramatic function (exposition, intervention, temptation, crime, resolution) to identify where and how causal responsibility is distributed among characters. Second, the dialogue of the Boy, the Domulla, and the Ziyoli was examined for its argumentative content, since the play stages its social critique primarily through debate rather than narration. Third, stage directions (remarks) — a device Behbudiy uses with unusual density for the genre's early stage, for example directing that the Boy visibly falls asleep during the Ziyoli's lecture on education — were treated as authorial commentary embedded in performance instruction, and analyzed on the same evidentiary footing as dialogue.

This method is interpretive rather than statistical; its validity rests on the transparency of textual evidence cited throughout the analysis and on triangulation with the existing secondary scholarship discussed above. Its principal limitation is that it does not draw on archival material concerning the play's original 1914 staging or contemporary audience reception, which lies outside the scope of a text-focused literary analysis and is flagged here as a direction for further research.

Results And Analysis

The Boy as Social Diagnosis, Not Villain

Behbudiy takes care, from the opening scene, to present the Boy not as cruel but as consistent within a specific economic logic. When the Domulla urges him to school his son, the Boy answers that in the present age wealth commands more respect than learning: he observes that bankers and merchants ("chilon") are honored above mullahs, and that even non-Muslim traders defer to men of capital. This is not portrayed as personal arrogance alone; it reflects a real historical shift the Domulla himself concedes — that over the preceding twenty or thirty years, commerce in Turkestan had passed increasingly into the hands of Armenian, Jewish, and other outside merchants precisely because local traders had not adapted through education. The Boy's refusal, in other words, is staged as the residue of a genuinely obsolete but once-workable worldview, not as gratuitous malice. This framing matters for the play's overall argument: if the father is not exceptional in his error, the crisis he produces cannot be dismissed as an isolated moral failure.

Two Failed Interventions: Religious and Secular

The first act structures its argument around two consecutive, and pointedly contrasted, attempts at intervention. The Domulla represents the case for religious education, insisting that schooling is a religious obligation (farz) for every Muslim and that an educated son would bring

both worldly and spiritual benefit. The Boy rebuffs him bluntly, and the Domulla exits in anger, delivering a warning that the family's negligence will bring divine and social consequence.

Immediately afterward, the Ziyoli — a reform-minded intellectual in European dress — arrives and delivers what is, in textual terms, the longest speech in the play: a systematic proposal distinguishing two categories of learned men Turkestan requires, the *olimi diniy* (religious scholars, trained through Turkestan, Bukhara, and eventually Mecca, Medina, or Istanbul) and the *olimi zamoni* (modern professionals — physicians, engineers, jurists — trained through Russian gymnasiums and universities in St. Petersburg or Moscow, and even in Europe or America). The Ziyoli's proposal is notable for its breadth: it does not choose between religious and secular education but insists both are necessary, and that wealthy men such as the Boy bear a civic duty to fund such schooling for the community's poorer children, citing the examples of Caucasian, Orenburg, and Kazan Muslim merchants who had already done so.

The scene's staging supplies the play's most damning image: as the Ziyoli speaks, Behbudiy's stage directions show the Boy nodding off, briefly rousing, and finally falling fully asleep — his last audible reply reduced to a wordless snore. This device converts abstract social critique into visible, almost comic, dramatic evidence: ignorance is here embodied not as an absence of information but as literal unconsciousness in the face of it. Two structurally opposite paths to knowledge are offered in immediate succession, and both meet the same fate, establishing that the coming catastrophe cannot be attributed to any single ideological failure but to the Boy's blanket refusal of instruction as such.

The Vacuum Left by Neglect

The second act relocates the audience from the merchant's guest room to a tavern, where Toshmurod — now identified simply as *boyvachcha*, "the rich man's son" — appears among a circle of idle companions: Davlat, Nor, and the hired criminal Tangriql. Their conversation revolves entirely around drink, debt, and desire for the Russian barmaid Liza, whose services are explicitly priced (fifteen manats plus carriage fare) against the seven-som monthly wage the Boy pays his own literate servant Xayrullo — a contrast several scholars have read as Behbudiy's deliberate juxtaposition of the price of vice against the price of literacy [5].

Crucially, none of this behavior is framed as innate corruption in Toshmurod. He is fifteen to seventeen years old, and the text repeatedly signals that his defiance — his rudeness to his father in Act One, his casual dismissal of the elder's warning against "bad places" — is the behavior of a child whose only structuring influence has been indulgence. Where the two educational paths were refused, no comparable framework of discipline or purpose has been substituted; the group's drinking, debt, and eventual criminal plot fill precisely the space the Domulla and the Ziyoli had each, in their own idiom, tried to occupy.

The Crime as an Almost Mechanical Consequence

The burglary and murder in Act Three are staged with a notable absence of premeditated cruelty. It is Davlat, not Toshmurod, who proposes robbing the father's strongbox as a solution to the group's shortage of funds; Toshmurod's contribution is logistical — describing which door leads where inside his own house — and his agreement is presented as compliance within peer pressure rather than independent design. When the father wakes during the break-in, it is Tangriql, the hired professional, who inflicts the fatal knife-wound; Toshmurod's recorded

action at that instant is to seize the stick, not the blade. This distribution of agency is dramatically significant: Behbudiy structures the killing so that the son who set events in motion through neglect-born delinquency is not the same hand that delivers the fatal blow, while nonetheless making clear that complicity by omission and complicity by neglect are, in the play's moral accounting, sufficient to bear the name padarkush — patricide.

The mother's reaction in the scene immediately following underscores this reading. Boyvuchcha's grief is not directed solely at Tangriqul as the literal killer; her lament — "voy, padarkush! Toshmurod!" — names her own son as the patricide, even though he did not strike the blow. The play thus locates guilt in the causal chain of neglect rather than in the isolated physical act, reinforcing the thesis that the tragedy belongs to the household's failure of upbringing as a whole.

The Ziyoli's Closing Verdict as the Play's Thesis Statement

The drama's final scene — the arrest of Tangriqul and Toshmurod at the tavern — closes with the Ziyoli's return, this time not as an unheeded advisor but as a moral chorus commenting directly on the completed catastrophe. His monologue is the clearest textual statement of the play's argument: he states plainly that had the father educated his son, neither the crime nor the drinking that enabled it would have occurred, and that the family's ruin, together with the youths' sentence to Siberian exile, is the direct "fruit and consequence" of ignorance and lack of upbringing (ilmsizlik va betarbiyalikning mevasi va natijasidur). He generalizes this diagnosis beyond the single family, attributing the broader condition of colonized, impoverished, and subjugated peoples to the same root cause, and insists that education is the only remedy.

Structurally, this monologue functions as the play's explicit thesis, closing the circle opened by the Domulla's and the Ziyoli's earlier, unheeded speeches in Act One. Behbudiy positions the same character — the reform intellectual — at both the point where catastrophe could have been prevented and the point where its cause is named after the fact, which frames the entire drama as a demonstration of a single argument rather than a sequence of unrelated misfortunes. The final line belongs not to grief but to diagnosis, confirming that the play's dramatic purpose throughout has been didactic: to make an audience of merchant fathers see, through fiction, the consequence their own real-world choices might produce.

Conclusion

This analysis has traced how Padarkush converts an ordinary social failure — a wealthy father's refusal to educate his son — into the extreme moral catastrophe of patricide, and has argued that Behbudiy constructs this conversion deliberately rather than incidentally. The Boy's worldview is shown to be historically intelligible rather than uniquely wicked; both proposed remedies, religious and secular, are given full and serious articulation before both fail on the same ground; the resulting vacuum is filled by delinquency that is presented as symptomatic rather than innate; the murder itself distributes agency in a way that implicates neglect as much as any single hand; and the closing monologue names ignorance, explicitly and generally, as the mechanism binding all of these stages together.

Read this way, Padarkush is best understood not primarily as a tragedy of character but as a piece of applied Jadid pedagogy: a fictional demonstration built to be watched by the very class of merchant fathers it depicts, designed to make visible a causal chain — from refused

schooling, to absent discipline, to social ruin — that reform rhetoric in the press and school-founding could describe but not dramatize. This reframes the play's historical significance beyond its status as "the first Uzbek drama": its formal innovation (debate-driven scenes, symbolic staging such as the Boy's onstage sleep, and a moralizing final monologue) is inseparable from its ideological project.

Further research might usefully extend this textual analysis in two directions: an examination of archival material on the play's 1914 stagings in Samarkand and Tashkent to assess how audiences actually received its didactic address, and a comparative study of Padarkush alongside the later Jadid dramas it directly influenced, such as Abdulla Qodiriy's *Baxtsiz kuyov* (1915), to determine which specific structural devices — rather than themes alone — were inherited by the genre it founded.

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