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MAHALLA AS A CENTER OF NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES (SELF-GOVERNANCE COMMUNITY SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN)

Abstract. *In Uzbekistan, the development of the mahalla, its socio-economic and cultural advancement, as well as the revival of national customs and traditions, have been identified as priority objectives. Since ancient times, local people have lived within the framework of family, neighborhood, mahalla, and community relations. Along with being a small administrative unit, the mahalla can also be understood as a community of people united by a shared way of life, values, traditions, and customs. This article examines the mahalla as a center of national and religious values. It analyzes national and religious values that have been formed within the mahalla environment over centuries, including peace, social harmony, kindness, compassion, etiquette of greeting, and respect for the elderly.*

Keywords: *mahalla, self-governance, peace, social harmony, kindness, values.*

INTRODUCTION

In New Uzbekistan, the development of the mahalla, its socio-economic and cultural enhancement, as well as the revival of national customs and traditions, have been identified as one of the priority goals. Over the past years, the concept of the mahalla institution has been formed in Uzbekistan, and its legal foundations have been strengthened through the Constitution and laws.

Such traditions and customs characteristic of the Uzbek people as kindness and compassion, solidarity and harmony, caring for those in need and requiring assistance, showing mercy to orphans, organizing weddings, community work (hashar), and ceremonies through collective consultation, as well as standing together in both joyful and difficult times, were primarily formed and developed within the mahalla environment. It is no coincidence that this unique form of self-governance, inherent to the Uzbek people, has occupied a deep place not only in people's language, but also in their hearts and entire way of life since ancient times. The wise saying, "The mahalla is both father and mother," is regarded as an expression of this vital truth.

MAIN PART

Since ancient times, local people have lived within the framework of family, neighborhood, mahalla, and community relations. Along with being a small administrative territory, the mahalla represents a unity of people connected through a common way of life, values, traditions, and customs. In the past, mahallas were often named after the professions and crafts practiced by their residents, such as Taqachi, O'qchi, Sarxumdon, and Parchabof. In such mahallas, craftsmen and artisans constituted the majority of the population. It should also be noted that there are mahallas known by names such as "Academics", "Professors", "Doctors", and "Miners".

In New Uzbekistan, special attention at the level of state policy is being devoted to the formation and development of the mahalla system as a unique form of local self-governance.

Through reforms implemented within the mahalla system, opportunities are being created for the revival of national values and the further spiritual harmonization of customs and traditions (Mukhamedov & Turambetov, 2023:322). At the same time, it is important to emphasize that weddings, ceremonies, and community work activities (hashars), where many social and everyday issues are resolved, are carried out with the active participation of mahalla residents.

Historically, the mahalla has been regarded as a place where Uzbeks live and act together with a common purpose aimed at promoting social development. It has long served as a sacred institution reflecting the lifestyle, spirituality, and social life of the Uzbek people, while transmitting national traditions, customs, and moral-spiritual values from one generation to another ("Mahalla – ulug' qadriyatlarimizning beshigi," n.d.).

The mahalla may also be compared to a large family that unites people regardless of their nationality, age, gender, religion, race, language, beliefs, social origin, or social status, bringing them together on the path of goodness and mutual support. This “family” functions on the basis of mutual respect, affection, and strong friendship among its members.

According to historical sources, the word “mahalla” originates from Arabic and means “place” or “location”. Some sources indicate that the mahalla has a long history extending back more than two or three thousand years. For example, the historian Abu Bakr Narshakhi in his work *Tarikh-i Bukhara* provided information about mahallas in Bukhara that existed more than a thousand years ago.

In ancient times, mahallas were formed on the basis of the occupations and professions of their residents and were named accordingly. In Mahmud al-Kashgari’s work *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*, the word “mahalla” was used to refer to areas inhabited by merchants and craftsmen. Examples include mahallas associated with jewelry-making, copper-smithing, leatherworking, knife-making, spoon-making, blacksmithing, saddle-making, horseshoe-making, and similar crafts. Mahalla administration was conducted on the basis of community participation and operated according to unwritten internal rules and norms that were considered binding for everyone (Mukhamedov & Turambetov, 2021:68).

The famous historian Abu Bakr Narshakhi noted in *Tarikh-i Bukhara* that the mahalla represented a form of people’s self-governance. Meanwhile, Alisher Navoi in his work *Hayrat ul-Abror* described the mahalla as “a small city within a city”.

DISCUSSION

As a center of national and religious values, the mahalla serves as a key social institution where traditions, customs, national pride, and religious beliefs are strengthened, where young people are educated, and where social solidarity is developed. It is a social environment in which family values and local traditions are preserved and respected. The mahalla represents a unique social structure of Uzbek society and plays an important role in preserving and developing national and religious values.

Every day, we hear our elders praying for peace and tranquility in families and mahallas. The saying, “If conflict enters a household for one day, prosperity leaves it for forty days,” was not expressed without reason. Over centuries, the concepts of peace and harmony within the family, household, and mahalla have become an integral national value.

Within the mahalla, young people always feel the need for the support and advice of elders who have gained extensive life experience through the trials of life. Young individuals who aspire to become hardworking, honest, conscientious, and devoted citizens should benefit from the life experiences of the older generation. Therefore, the presence of elders among us is regarded as a great blessing.

Human life is often compared to a fruitful tree. Just as a tree buds, blossoms, and bears abundant fruit within a single season, old age resembles a garden filled with ripe fruits.

It is narrated that Luqman al-Hakim was once asked: “Why do you constantly advise your son?” He replied: “The advice of elders for the young is like a gardener nurturing a sapling.”

A person is born, grows, matures, and lives through life. Yesterday’s infant becomes today’s young man or grown girl. With the passage of time, if destined, every person eventually reaches old age. This is the natural law of life.

There is a proverb: “Show respect to elders and kindness to the young.” Respect for the elderly is considered one of the ancient national values of the Uzbek people.

Honoring the elderly has also been elevated to the level of a moral value in Islam. In a hadith it is stated: “Whoever does not show mercy to the young and respect to the elders is not one of us” (reported by Abu Dawud and Imam al-Tirmidhi).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the phrase most commonly used every day in families and mahallas is “Assalamu alaykum.” Among the people, there are many wise sayings and narrations about the virtues of greeting, such as: “First comes the greeting, then comes the conversation.”

One of the blessed names of Allah is “As-Salam” (Peace). Its significance and status are also mentioned in the Qur’an: “When you enter houses, greet one another with a greeting from Allah that is blessed and pure” (Surah An-Nur, 24:61), traditionally understood as the greeting “Assalamu alaykum”.

The greeting of peace is regarded as a bond of harmony, kindness, and compassion among people. In the Qur’an it is stated: “When you are greeted with a greeting, respond with one better than it, or at least return it equally” (Surah An-Nisa, 4:86).

It is narrated from Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As that a man asked the Prophet Muhammad: “Which deed in Islam is best?” The Prophet replied: “To feed the hungry and to greet with peace those whom you know and those whom you do not know” (reported by Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim).

Among local communities, it has long become a tradition during holidays, Eid celebrations, and wedding ceremonies to visit neighbors, sick individuals, and lonely elderly people with gifts and greetings. Through collective community work known as hashar, people help relatives and neighbors build houses, harvest agricultural products, distribute them among neighbors, improve and beautify streets, courtyards, mahalla territories, cemeteries, and the surrounding environment, as well as maintain cleanliness and preservation. All of these are regarded as responsibilities of every citizen living in the mahalla.

Most importantly, the mahalla is a center of education and upbringing. The entire mahalla community is considered responsible for the moral conduct and behavior of every young man and woman growing up within it. For this reason, sayings such as “Seven neighbors are parents to one child” and “Your mahalla is your parents” did not emerge without cause. Every action of young people remains under the attention of the community. The responsibility of mahalla residents for the fate of each young person and their moral supervision constitute the foundation for raising a well-rounded individual. A well-mannered and exemplary child is considered the pride of the mahalla, whereas an immoral or irresponsible child is viewed as a stain upon it. When distinguished individuals emerge from a mahalla and become known throughout the country, the entire mahalla and their ancestors take pride in them.

The mahalla serves as a bridge of trust between the people and the state. It is a place that teaches individuals to become part of society and educates them in the spirit of tolerance and devotion to the people. There are numerous mahallas throughout our homeland, and their unique names speak to us through history. They reflect the long and glorious history of our people, as well as their socio-political, economic, and cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

Since the mahalla emerged on the basis of the people’s mentality and worldview, it has not lost its significance over the years. On the contrary, it has continued to develop and acquire a modern form. Within this institution are embodied such values as tolerance, purity, honesty, faithfulness to trust, courage, bravery, friendship, loyalty, appreciation of one’s birthplace and homeland, and reverence toward it. Within the mahalla environment, noble spiritual qualities are cultivated and practiced, including generosity, awareness of

the interests of the people, placing communal benefit above personal interest, building healthy families, raising children as worthy members of society, respecting elders, and showing kindness to the young.

For this reason, mahalla residents have historically valued their mahallas and have done everything within their power for their prosperity and the well-being of their inhabitants. Like close relatives and family members, they have supported one another in both joyful and difficult times.

History bears witness that during periods when spiritual and national values fully functioned within the mahalla system and moral relations were strongly reflected in its activities, truly righteous sons and virtuous daughters were raised. Many mahallas were formed on the basis of the occupations and professions of their residents and were named accordingly. As a result, the name of the mahalla itself became a source of pride for its people. In order to preserve and glorify this name, residents consistently acted in unity and solidarity. Therefore, the mahalla is regarded as one of the national values of the Uzbek people.

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