

MAHALLA AND GOOD NEIGHBORLINESS — HARMONIOUS VALUES

Ernazarov O.

PhD in History, Associate professor, UNESCO Chair on Religious Studies and Comparative Study of World Religions, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan
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Abstract

This article examines the role of the mahalla institution in ensuring social stability and harmony in society. Mahalla and good neighborliness are analyzed as interconnected values rooted in the historical, cultural, and religious traditions of the Uzbek people. The study explores the historical origins of the mahalla institution, Islamic teachings concerning the rights and responsibilities of neighbors, and the development of state policies aimed at strengthening mahalla during the years of Uzbekistan's independence. Particular attention is devoted to the mahalla's function as a bridge between citizens and the state, as well as its role in promoting social solidarity, mutual assistance, and moral education. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of mahalla and neighborly relations as unifying forces in the context of globalization and urbanization.

Keywords: Mahalla, good neighborliness, social harmony, cultural values, historical roots, Islamic teachings, state policy, stability, solidarity, civil society

The role of the mahalla institution in ensuring social stability and harmony in society is invaluable. In particular, good neighborly relations formed within the framework of the mahalla constitute an inseparable part of the national and spiritual values that have developed among the Uzbek people over centuries. Mahalla and good neighborliness are mutually complementary and harmonious social phenomena that strengthen the atmosphere of solidarity, mutual assistance, and tolerance within society.

The mahalla is one of the oldest and most stable social institutions in Uzbek society. It functions not only as a territorial unit but also as a unique school of moral upbringing, a system of social support, and a mechanism of community-based social control. Through the mahalla, people establish social connections, solve problems collectively, and transmit national values to younger generations.

As emphasized by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the mahalla serves as the most important bridge between the people and the state, enabling local communities to address social problems directly:

“Throughout history, regardless of the severe trials we faced, we drew strength primarily from unity. During difficult times, our people and the members of mahalla communities stood shoulder to shoulder and overcame hardships together. Families supported other families, and neighbors helped one another. We must always remain faithful to this unique value and educate our younger generation in this spirit.”

Historical Roots of the Mahalla Institution

The mahalla institution possesses deep historical roots in Central Asia, particularly in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan. Historically, it developed not merely as a territorial community but also as a system of social governance, moral regulation, and mutual assistance.

The origins of the concept of mahalla can be traced back to ancient Eastern civilizations. Archaeological and historical sources indicate that the populations of ancient Sogdiana, Bactria, and Khorezm lived within tribal and territorial communities characterized by self-governance, collective responsibility, neighborhood

solidarity, and communal labor traditions. Local residents resolved issues related to water distribution, land use, security, and ceremonies through collective agreements. These features demonstrate the early formation of the mahalla as a social model.

With the spread of Islam in Central Asia, the mahalla acquired a deeper socio-legal and spiritual character. It evolved into a territorial community centered around the mosque. Mosques, schools (*maktab*), cemeteries, springs, and markets served as the social and cultural centers of the mahalla. Within this framework, the community provided assistance to the poor, cared for orphans and vulnerable individuals, regulated ceremonies and traditions, and mediated conflicts.

Islamic concepts such as neighborly rights, collective responsibility, charity (*sadaqah*), and almsgiving (*zakat*) significantly contributed to strengthening the mahalla institution. During this period, the mahalla became officially recognized as a social unit administered by respected community elders, often referred to as *oqsoqol* or *arbob*. The mahalla also acted as an intermediary between state authorities and the population.

Mahalla During the Soviet and Independence Periods

During the Russian imperial period, the mahalla institution survived, although its formal powers were limited. Under Soviet rule, the mahalla was often viewed as a “remnant of the old order.” Nevertheless, it continued to exist as an informal social institution through which family traditions, ceremonies, and neighborhood relations were preserved. This demonstrates the strong connection between the mahalla and the historical memory and cultural traditions of the Uzbek people.

Following Uzbekistan's independence, the mahalla gained official recognition as an important social institution. It was legally reinforced through the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and special legislation, obtaining the status of a “self-governing body of citizens.”

During the thirty-five years of independence, the development and significance of the mahalla institution

were directly emphasized three times in the official annual state programs:

2003 — “The Year of the Prosperous Mahalla”;

2022 — “The Year of Human Interests and Mahalla Development”;

2026 — “The Year of Mahalla Development and Social Progress.”

These initiatives demonstrate that strengthening the mahalla institution and enhancing its role in social protection, public stability, and civic life have become major priorities of state policy.

In 1993, Uzbekistan adopted the Law “On Self-Governing Bodies of Citizens,” which transformed mahallas into official legal institutions. The law defined their formal powers, administrative responsibilities, and social functions. Subsequently, the legislation was revised several times—in 1999, 2013, and 2021—to adapt it to contemporary reforms.

In the period referred to as “New Uzbekistan,” especially during the 2020s, the concept of “mahalla-based governance” (*mahallabay ishlash*) was elevated to the level of state strategy. This approach aims to identify and solve social problems directly at the community level and has become a fundamental mechanism in the activities of many state institutions.

In recent years, approximately one hundred normative legal acts have been adopted to strengthen the mahalla institution. These reforms addressed neighborly rights, election procedures, the authority of mahalla chairpersons, and mechanisms for interaction between society and the state. For instance, the term of office for chairpersons of citizens’ assemblies was extended from three to five years, and new procedures for conducting elections were introduced.

As a result of these reforms, millions of citizens have received social services through the mahalla system, reinforcing its role as a direct mechanism for supporting the population. Today, the mahalla effectively serves as a bridge between citizens and state authorities, facilitating social oversight and improving the identification and resolution of local social issues.

Good Neighborliness in Islamic Teachings

Historically, the mahalla institution in the Muslim societies of the East has been closely connected with the principle of good neighborliness. Neighborly relations occupy a significant place in the traditional lifestyle and worldview of the Uzbek people. Folk sayings such as “If your neighbor lives in peace, you live in peace” and “The neighbor’s right is God’s right” reflect the sacred status of neighborly relations in popular consciousness.

Human beings cannot live isolated from society. Throughout life, individuals establish social relations within the family, neighborhood, and broader community. Consequently, they acquire rights and obligations toward others. One of these obligations is the right of neighbors, to which Islam gives particular attention.

The Holy Qur’an states: “Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and show kindness to parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the distant neighbor, the companion at your side, the traveler,

and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are arrogant and boastful” (*Surah An-Nisa, 4:36*).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Jibril continued to advise me concerning the neighbor until I thought he would make him an heir” (*Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari*).

Another narration from Abu Hurairah reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should treat his neighbor kindly” (*Narrated by Imam Muslim*).

One of the manifestations of kindness among neighbors is the exchange of gifts during holidays and joyful occasions. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“O Muslim women! Let not a neighbor consider insignificant even the gift of a sheep’s hoof from another neighbor” (*Narrated by Imam Muslim*).

Similarly, Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) once asked the Prophet (peace be upon him):

“To which of my two neighbors should I give a gift?” He replied: “To the one whose door is nearest to you” (*Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari*).

These narrations emphasize the ethical importance of maintaining close and compassionate neighborly relations.

Islamic history also contains many examples illustrating the significance of good neighborliness. Hasan al-Basri stated:

“Good neighborliness is not merely refraining from harming one’s neighbor, but also patiently enduring harm from them.”

Historical sources also narrate the famous story of Imam Abu Hanifa and his shoemaker neighbor, demonstrating patience, compassion, and moral guidance through neighborly relations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mahalla and good neighborliness cannot fully exist independently from one another. The mahalla environment strengthens neighborly ties, while good neighborliness enhances the social power and cohesion of the mahalla. Community events, collective work (*hashar*), holidays, and ceremonies bring people closer together and reinforce solidarity.

Healthy neighborly relations formed within the mahalla contribute to social stability, reduce conflicts and crime, and educate young people in the spirit of national and moral values. In the context of globalization and urbanization, when direct human interaction is gradually weakening, the values of mahalla and good neighborliness are becoming increasingly important as forces that unite society.

In particular, the mahalla plays a crucial role in encouraging youth social participation, preventing alienation and loneliness, and strengthening civic solidarity. Therefore, preserving and developing the traditions of mahalla and good neighborliness remains one of the essential conditions for ensuring social harmony and sustainable development in modern Uzbek society.