

## UNIQUE FEATURES OF UZBEK MAHALLAS (ON THE EXAMPLE OF KASHKADARYA REGION)

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the distinctive characteristics of the mahalla institution formed in the territory of Uzbekistan from historical and social perspectives using the example of the Kashkadarya region. The research highlights the role of mahallas in social life, their significance in the system of social governance, and their contribution to strengthening solidarity and mutual assistance among the population. In addition, the historical formation of mahallas in Kashkadarya region, their traditional governance methods, spiritual and educational activities, and their role in socio-economic life are examined on a scientific basis. During the research process, historical sources, statistical data, and modern scientific literature were used. The article also substantiates the importance of the mahalla institution in preserving national values, ensuring social stability, and developing civil society. Based on the activities of mahallas in Kashkadarya region, the study scientifically generalizes the role and prospects of the mahalla system in contemporary social development.

### Keywords

mahalla institution, Kashkadarya region, mahalla governance, social solidarity, civil society, national values, mahalla traditions, social governance system, spiritual and educational activity, development of the mahalla system.

**INTRODUCTION.** The mahalla institution plays an important role in the life of Uzbekistan. The mahalla serves as one of the most significant structures for the formation and development of historical traditions, national and universal values, customs, as well as feelings of humanism and patriotism. In today's Uzbekistan, where the mahalla institution is steadily developing within a multiethnic society, each region has its own specific characteristics, including particular ethnoregional features that are also typical of the mahallas of Kashkadarya.

It is known that the Kashkadarya region was established on November 1, 1924. From February 17, 1927 to January 15, 1938 it functioned as the Kashkadarya district (okrug). On January 15, 1938 it was incorporated into the Bukhara region. On January 20, 1943 it was reorganized again. On January 25, 1960 it was merged with Surkhandarya region[1]. On February 7, 1964 it was re-established. The region is located in the southwestern part of the republic, in the Kashkadarya basin, on the western edge of the Pamir-Alai mountain system, between the Amu Darya and Zarafshan rivers, and the Hissar and Zarafshan mountain ranges. It borders Bukhara region in the northwest, Surkhandarya region in the southeast, Turkmenistan in the southwest and west, and Tajikistan and Samarkand regions in the east. Its area is 28.6 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. It includes 14 rural districts (Dehkanabad, Kasbi, Kitab, Koson, Mirishkor, Muborak, Nishon, Chiroqchi, Kokdala, Shahrisabz, Yakkabog, Qamashi, Qarshi, Guzor), 12 cities (Beshkent, Kitab, Koson, Muborak, Tallimarjon, Chiroqchi, Shahrisabz, Yakkabog, Yangi Nishon, Qamashi, Qarshi, Guzor), and 4 urban-type settlements (Dehkanabad, Miroqi, Eski Yakkabog, Kashkadarya). The administrative center is the city of Qarshi[2].

The average population density is 83.7 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The urban population was about 587.5 thousand people. As of 2021, 768 citizens' assemblies were operating in the region. In the regional center Qarshi city, where 250.8 thousand people reside, the population mainly consists of Uzbeks (91%), as well as Tajiks, Turkmens, Russians, Kazakhs, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis,



Koreans, Kyrgyz, Turks, Belarusians, and representatives of other nationalities[3]. In total, there are 1,046 settlements.

At the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in order to raise the mahalla governance system to a new level in accordance with modern requirements for the development of civil society, the decrees “On measures to further improve the mahalla institution” (PF-4944, February 2017) and “On measures to radically increase the role of the mahalla institution in addressing population problems” (No. 5700, April 2, 2019) were adopted. These reforms play an important role in strengthening the position and significance of the mahalla in society.

In the region, 6 city councils (Shahrisabz city, Guzor, Qamashi, Muborak, Nishon, Mirishkor) and 337 mahalla citizens’ assemblies do not have their own buildings. The population is 3,261,240 people, including 1,650,123 men and 1,611,117 women. Among them are 1,935,708 minors and young people (under 30 years old); 77,961 unorganized youth; 605,619 households; 750,361 families; 60,565 persons with disabilities; 1,062 elderly individuals living alone and requiring care; and 6,271 low-income families, including 11,969 recipients of financial assistance, 42,677 recipients of benefits for children under 14, and 16,031 recipients of benefits for children under 2 years old[4].

**LITERATURE REVIEW.** The mahalla institution, as one of the important social institutions in the historical, social, and cultural development of Uzbek society, has been studied by many researchers. A number of scientific works have provided analytical approaches regarding the formation of the mahalla system, its role in social governance, and the stages of its development. In particular, the historical roots of the mahalla institution and its traditional governance mechanisms have been widely covered by local historians and sociologists.

Research conducted by Uzbek scholars interprets the mahalla as an important component of civil society. These studies emphasize the role of the mahalla in strengthening social solidarity among the population, resolving social problems, and preserving national values. Some scientific works highlight the place of the mahalla in the system of social governance, its activity as a body of citizens’ self-government, and its significance as an important link between the state and society.

In recent years, the transformation of the mahalla institution in modern society, as well as its socio-economic and spiritual-educational activities, has also become an important direction of scientific research. However, the available literature has not sufficiently examined regional characteristics, particularly the specific features of mahallas in the Kashkadarya region in a comprehensive manner. This research is aimed precisely at addressing this issue.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.** The ethnic composition of the population is also complex. For example, in 1989 Uzbeks constituted 85 percent of the population of the region, while by 1995 this figure had increased to 91 percent. According to data from 2013, Uzbeks accounted for 92.3 percent of the region’s population[5]. Tajiks occupy second place with 4.3 percent. Among the remaining nationalities, Turkmens and Russians are more numerous. These changes are associated with migration processes during the early years of independence.

By 2021, the main representatives of other nationalities living in the region included Tajiks, Turkmens, Russians, and Tatars, mainly residing in the city of Qarshi and in the districts of Mirishkor, Dehkanabad, Kitab, Shahrisabz, and Nishon. The language of each nation represents an invaluable treasure for its people. In the region, special conditions have been created for different ethnic groups to preserve and study their languages. Currently, in 29 schools in the region lessons are conducted entirely in Tajik, and in 2 schools in Russian. In addition, in 55 schools classes are conducted in mixed languages by more than 2,600 qualified teachers, which clearly demonstrates effective work in this area[6].



Natural population growth indicators differ between urban and rural areas, with birth rates generally higher in rural areas. This is explained by several objective and subjective factors. In rural areas, women's participation in social life is relatively lower, there is a higher demand for labor in agriculture which requires significant manual work, and national traditions have historically supported higher birth rates. In urban areas, however, women of different ethnic backgrounds tend to be more active in social life, and economic and social factors such as housing issues also contribute to somewhat lower birth rates.

During the years of independence, the population of mahallas in the region increased significantly, especially between 1999 and 2014. For example, during this period the average annual population growth in mahallas of Muborak district was 5.70 percent, in Koson district 4.75 percent, and in Kitab and Nishon districts 4.10 percent. Relatively lower demographic growth was observed in Dehkanabad district (2.40 percent), Qarshi city (2.50 percent), and Kasbi district (2.50 percent)[7].

It should be noted that according to these indicators Muborak district ranks among the leading districts in the republic. Such rapid population growth in the district is related not only to natural increase but also to migration processes. As natural resources were developed, many families moved to this area[8].

Shahrisabz, Yakkabog, and Kitab districts are among the regions of the republic characterized by dense populations and intensively developed economic activity in oasis and valley zones. At the same time, population density indicators are also relatively high in some districts of the lower region, including Kasbi and Qarshi. Natural population movement indicators differ noticeably from other regions, except Surkhandarya. In particular, the birth rate in the region reaches 25.1 per 1,000 people. The highest level was recorded in 2000 in Chiroqchi district, where it reached nearly 34 per thousand[9]. In Yakkabog district the birth rate is also relatively high – 26.7 percent. At the same time, the overall birth rate is lower in the mahallas of Mirishkor district and in Qarshi city and district. In 2013 Chiroqchi district again stood out with a birth rate of 30.0 percent. Among the mahallas of other rural districts there are no major differences, while in the regional center Qarshi city the birth rate was 21.5 per mille[10].

When labor resources are analyzed by districts, higher indicators are observed in Chiroqchi, Koson, Qamashi, and Shahrisabz districts, while the largest number of economically active population is recorded in Chiroqchi district (146.0 thousand people) and in the city of Qarshi (130.6 thousand people). The lowest indicators of economically active population were recorded in Mirishkor (54.7 thousand people) and Muborak (46.2 thousand people) districts. To date, a total of 86,088 households located in 105 mahallas (47,703 in Qarshi city and 38,385 in Guzor district) have been fully registered through a census. As a result of this census, questionnaires were prepared for 91,029 women over the age of 30 (86.6%), including 53,969 women in Qarshi city (84.3%) and 37,060 women in Guzor district (90.3%)[11].

At the same time, during interviews it was revealed that 42,331 women (17,149 in Qarshi city and 25,182 in Guzor district) needed social, legal, and psychological support as well as opportunities for education and vocational training. In order to address their problems, they were included in the "Women's Register" (Ayollar daftari)[12].

There are also numerous pilgrimage sites and sacred places located within the mahallas of the region. For example, the sites of Oqsaroy, Dorussaodat, Dor-ut-Tilovat, and Mavlono Khojagiy Imkanagiy in Shahrisabz; Hazrati Bashir in Kitob district; Katta Langar in Qamashi district; Kokgumbaz, Odina, and Abu Ubayda ibn Jarroh in Qarshi city; Hazrati Imom Mu'in in Qarshi district; Sultan Mirhaydar in Kasbi district; Khusam Shaykh in Koson district; and Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak Marvaziy in Muborak district are among them. The ethnoregional characteristics of pilgrimage sites in the mahallas of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya regions are related to the natural-geographical location of the southern regions of the republic, which differ significantly from other parts of the country in terms of climate and natural conditions[13].



In particular, certain parts of Boysun, Jarkurgan, and Muzrabot districts of Surkhandarya region, as well as Chiroqchi, Yakkabog, and Kitob districts of Kashkadarya region, consist of mountainous, foothill, and steppe areas. These natural conditions have influenced the lifestyle of the population, including legends and religious beliefs associated with sacred sites.

It is also important to consider the implementation of the “Prosperous and Safe Mahalla” principle introduced in the region. According to data for 2021, criteria for implementing a new system based on the “Prosperous and Safe Mahalla” principle were developed and applied to all mahallas in the region. In order to create convenience for citizens when working with appeals, a short-number “Call Centre” (1146) was launched, which received 2,553 appeals, most of which were resolved positively. The activities of 813 mahallas were studied, and methodological and practical assistance was provided to eliminate identified problems. Based on the specific characteristics of the “Sarbozor” mahalla in Qamashi district and the “Varkanza” mahalla in Kitob district, model systems for poverty reduction were developed.

A new system was also developed to address urgent problems and social issues in economically disadvantaged mahallas, using the examples of “Oqoltin” and “Shorbozor” mahallas in Chiroqchi district, “Bostan” in Mirishkor district, and “Arabxona” in Qarshi city. As a result, problems in 77 mahallas were addressed. However, it is still known that some citizens’ assemblies lack service buildings and proper material-technical facilities. For example, as of 2021 this situation was observed in four districts of Kashkadarya region: 29 in Qamashi district, 22 in Qarshi district, 22 in Koson district, and 37 in Chiroqchi district. Meanwhile, in recent years across the republic 1,163 new mahalla offices have been constructed, 3,612 have been reconstructed or repaired, “Mahalla Center” complexes have been established in 110 districts and cities, and libraries have been organized in 4,319 mahalla buildings.

Another important issue in the region is employment, particularly among young people, since employment levels reflect the social indicators of mahallas. Youth employment rates vary across different regions of the republic. According to I. Bobojonov, in October 2018 specialists of the Republican Scientific Center for Employment and Labor Protection under the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations conducted a social survey to determine unemployment and poverty levels in the country. The survey involved 330 self-governing citizen bodies from 66 cities and districts, 3,300 housewives, and more than 17,000 citizens. According to the results, Kashkadarya region had the highest unemployment rate at 9.7 percent. The lowest rate was recorded in Tashkent city at 7.9 percent, while the number of citizens seeking employment reached 1,368.6 thousand people. Among young people (under 30 years old), unemployment reached 15.1 percent; among those aged 16–25 it exceeded 17 percent, and among women it accounted for 12.9 percent[14].

Based on these data, the causes of unemployment in the mahallas of the region can be explained by several factors. First, the majority of the population lives in rural areas where employment opportunities and entrepreneurial activities remain limited. Second, some mahallas are located far from central areas and have unfavorable geographical and natural conditions. Third, population growth and migration processes are also significant factors, as the relatively high birth rate in the region continues to contribute to employment challenges. For example, Muborak district ranks among the leading districts in the republic in terms of population growth. This rapid growth is related not only to natural increase but also to migration processes, since the development of natural resources has attracted many families to the area. Fourth, a considerable portion of the unemployed population does not meet the requirements of the labor market in professions that are in high demand.

In the formation and development of mahallas, natural-economic and social factors play an important role in shaping employment patterns. The development of mahallas in the region is mainly based on agriculture and livestock breeding, partly on handicrafts, and in district centers



and urban mahallas on industry. From this perspective, mahallas can be divided into several categories:

- mahallas where the majority of the population is engaged in agriculture and livestock breeding;
- mahallas where the majority of the population is engaged mainly in agriculture;
- mahallas where the population is engaged in agriculture and handicrafts;
- mahallas where the majority of residents are engaged in entrepreneurship and industrial production;
- mixed-type mahallas.

Mahallas specializing in agriculture, in turn, include communities engaged in horticulture, viticulture, and handicrafts. The productivity of mahallas specializing in agriculture and livestock breeding varies as well. Larger mahallas tend to emerge in districts where irrigated agriculture is developed, whereas settlements of populations engaged in livestock breeding are generally smaller.

Compared with many other regions of Uzbekistan, Kashkadarya region has a noticeable presence of small villages and settlements located in mountainous and foothill areas. In our opinion, in the conditions of Kashkadarya region it would be appropriate to partially optimize rural mahallas according to their classification. For instance, mahallas with up to 500 residents could be grouped into smaller units consisting of up to 100 people, 101–200 people, 201–300 people, and 301–500 people. Such grouping reflects the economic, social, and geographical characteristics of the region and would not be suitable for regions with higher population density and larger rural settlements.

In general, the growth rates of mahalla populations in the region vary significantly at the district level. This depends primarily on lifestyle, employment patterns, environmental influences, the level of urbanization, and other factors. In Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions, the specific natural conditions and geographical location of the region have also contributed to the formation of a distinctive ethnocultural environment in family entrepreneurship and home-based production.

For example, in Surkhandarya region, enterprises such as the “Ostona Hunarmand” carpet-weaving enterprise in Termez district, the “Turon” small enterprise in Termez city, the carpet weaving and felt production workshop in the “Rabot” collective farm in Boysun district, the “Shoyim” handicraft enterprise in Sariosiyo district, and the “Dilafruz” private enterprise in Sherobod processing wool produce about 264 tons of high-quality wool yarn supplied to small textile enterprises.

Similarly, in Kashkadarya region, family entrepreneurship is represented by enterprises such as the “Voha Mash’ali” small enterprise in Kitob district and carpet-weaving workshops in Chiroqchi district. More than 600 craftsmen are registered in Qarshi city and the districts of Guzor, Kitob, Shahrisabz, Chiroqchi, Qamashi, and Muborak. Workshops for jewelry making, traditional musical instruments, embroidery, gold embroidery, and beadwork have been established. This confirms that traditional handicrafts have long been given special attention in these regions.

However, alongside these achievements, several problems remain. Despite the region’s strong industrial potential, the share of imported goods remains high, and the demand for local products in the internal market has not been fully studied. The potential of enterprises producing ready-made clothing and leather goods has not been fully utilized. Until 2012, the internal market of the region was insufficiently supplied with locally produced goods. There were no enterprises producing gypsum board, corrugated cardboard, disposable dishes, paper bags, construction and agricultural machinery components, toothpaste, shampoo, or nails, or if they existed, their activities did not meet demand.



In the service sector, despite existing demand among the population, entrepreneurial entities were not sufficiently involved in areas such as repair services (758 facilities), veterinary services and meat shops (1,078), bathhouses and shoe repair services (1,214), chemical cleaning and household equipment repair services (1,319), and hairdressing and beauty salons (938).

Overall, due to its geographical location, ethnodemographic structure, and geopolitical and geoeconomic factors, Kashkadarya region stands out as a distinctive southern region of Uzbekistan. As a result, the cities, villages, and mahallas located in this region also differ from one another in certain characteristics. Research confirms that the settlement patterns of the population in this region possess unique features shaped by geographical conditions and demographic factors.

At the same time, the study shows that employment in mahallas—especially youth employment—is closely linked with the development of small business and private entrepreneurship, as well as agricultural specialization. Mahallas in the region are often engaged in horticulture, viticulture, and handicrafts. Traditional crafts such as embroidery, carpet weaving, skullcap making, cradle making, and confectionery production have historically developed and continue to thrive. Mahallas specializing in agriculture and livestock breeding (for example in Chiroqchi, Dehkanabad, Kokdala, and Yakkabog districts) show similar levels of production. Larger and more densely populated mahallas tend to emerge in districts where rain-fed and irrigated agriculture are developed.

**CONCLUSION.** In conclusion, the mahalla institution has developed as an important social institution in the historical development of Uzbek society and plays a significant role in regulating the social life of the population. Using the example of Kashkadarya region, the role of mahallas in social, spiritual-educational, and economic life is clearly demonstrated. The mahalla system plays an important role in strengthening social solidarity, preserving national values, and developing civil society. At the same time, as an institution of citizens' self-governance, the mahalla contributes to solving social problems at the local level, protecting the interests of the population, and ensuring social stability. Therefore, further development of the mahalla institution is considered one of the important factors for the progress of society.

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