

NATIONAL VALUES AND THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY IN THE MAHALLAS OF KHOREZM

Otazonova M.

Historian

E-mail: madinaotojonova03@mail.com

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the mechanisms for preserving national values and historical memory in the mahallas (neighborhood communities) of the Khorezm oasis. As a socio-cultural institution, the mahalla performs a mediating function in transmitting tangible and intangible heritage from generation to generation. The article highlights the process of ensuring the continuity of memory through the “master-apprentice” (ustoz-shogird) tradition, family and community rituals, and examples of folk art.

Historical memory is of decisive importance in preserving the national identity of any people. Historical memory means the re-manifestation, veneration, and appreciation of the material and spiritual wealth created by ancestors in people’s consciousness and daily activity; a people has no future without its historical memory. Historical memory serves as the primary source for the formation and development of the principles of high spirituality, which is why the task of strengthening it has been at the center of attention of statesmen and scholars in every era.

The values that arise as a result of the interconnection of human generations — that is, the spiritual heritage of ancestors and descendants — join the treasury of universal cultural heritage and gradually turn into historical memory. The question of how this process takes place, that is, through which social institutions values are preserved and passed on to subsequent generations, is a distinct subject of research for historical science.

In Uzbek society, the most stable social mechanism for transmitting this memory from generation to generation is the mahalla. The mahalla is not only an administrative-territorial unit but also a “living archive” that preserves values, customs, and cultural codes in a living form.

The Khorezm oasis, with its multi-thousand-year history and its distinctive architectural, musical, and craft traditions, is one of the regions of Uzbekistan where national values have been most consistently preserved. For this reason, studying the mechanisms of preserving national memory using the example of Khorezm’s mahallas is of not only local but also nationwide significance.

In the mahallas of Khorezm, the upbringing and education of young people is carried out, as in the family and in educational institutions, also on the basis of the “master-apprentice” (ustoz-shogird) tradition. In this process, depending on the young person’s ability and interest, both professional and spiritual formation is ensured by teaching them a craft they love and

instilling diligence [1]. This tradition has been of great importance in improving the field of national crafts and in raising the young generation, and it has ensured that crafts characteristic of Khorezm — such as zardo'zlik (gold embroidery), pottery, embroidery, and ganchkorlik (carved plasterwork) — have survived to the present day.

Scholarly research notes that the master-apprentice system serves as a vehicle not only for professional knowledge but also for moral and spiritual values, and that the bonds of mutual trust, respect, and responsibility between master and apprentice have not lost their significance even in modern society [2]. Such relationships are usually formed within the mahalla, through neighborly and kinship ties, which defines the mahalla not only as a territorial unit but also as a social network that transmits values.

Among the items on Uzbekistan's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, family rituals — the cradle ceremony (beshik to'yi), circumcision ceremony (sunnat to'yi), the muchal (twelve-year cycle) celebration, wedding ceremony (nikoh to'yi), and sallabandon — as well as seasonal rituals such as Navruz, the sumalak festival, and Ramadan rites, hold a special place [3]. In the mahallas of Khorezm, all these rituals are traditionally carried out with the participation of the entire mahalla community, which transforms the memory of an individual family into the shared memory of the mahalla community.

The Khorezm lazgi is one of the most vivid symbolic images of the region, embodying the people's aspirations and historical memory. According to modern analyses, the lazgi is not simply a dance but a symbolic language expressing the people's national identity and social spirit, whose roots reach back to the religious rites and cultural environment of ancient Khorezm. In December 2019, at the session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Colombia, "Khorazm lazgi — traditional dance art" was officially inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [4]. This international recognition can be regarded as the practical result of the tradition of teaching lazgi performance from generation to generation in the mahallas of Khorezm.

Recent studies present the elements of the Khorezm region's intangible cultural heritage — traditional national dances, the poetic-musical traditions of bakhshi performers, craftsmanship, and the culture of hospitality — as the region's distinctive and competitive wealth [5]; in this context, the preservation of local identity is analyzed as being directly linked to the socio-economic development of the region.

Documentary exhibitions organized by the Khorezm regional state archive and local museums are also among the institutional means of preserving historical memory and passing it on to the younger generation. At such events, memories connected with the people's past are presented to the public through archival photo-documents, rare records, and periodical publications.

In addition, representatives of the older generation in the mahallas of Khorezm — elders (oqsoqol), veterans, and renowned craftsmen — continue the tradition of orally passing their memories on to the younger generation. At mahalla gatherings and at "gap-gashtak" and conversational meetings organized on the eve of national holidays, stories about past events, the history of the mahalla, and the notable figures who once lived there are told. This form of

oral memory transmission, alongside written sources, serves as an important source for reconstructing local history.

In the mahallas of the districts and cities of Khorezm region — Khiva, Urgench, Khonqa, Shovot, and others — varied yet mutually harmonious practices for preserving national values have taken shape. In the mahallas of the city of Khiva, due to their proximity to the historic Ichan-Qala, special attention is paid to preserving examples of traditional architecture and craftsmanship; many mahalla craftsmen teach young apprentices the arts of woodcarving and ornamental carving in their own workshops.

In mahallas of a more rural type, seasonal rituals connected with farming and livestock breeding — including harvest festivals and traditional customs related to the irrigation system — have survived to this day. This shows that the preservation of national memory in the mahallas of Khorezm does not follow a single pattern but manifests itself in a distinctive form corresponding to each mahalla's historical and economic profile, which in turn opens rich opportunities for comparative research in the future.

During the years of independence, reviving national values and preserving historical memory became one of the priority directions of state policy in Uzbekistan. During this period, national holidays (Navruz, Independence Day) were revived, forgotten customs began to be studied scientifically, and the activity of local museums and archives was reinvigorated. In Khorezm region, this nationwide policy was harmonized with local conditions and implemented through the cooperation of the regional and district administrations, mahalla citizens' assemblies, and educational institutions. With the aim of fostering a sense of patriotism and national pride among young people in the mahallas of Khorezm, events such as meetings with elders and veterans, discussions on local history, and visits to craft workshops are regularly organized. Such practices not only increase young people's knowledge of their own mahalla, its history, and the notable figures who lived there, but also cultivate in them a sense of responsibility toward their mahalla — and, by extension, toward their homeland.

In conclusion, the mahallas of Khorezm serve not merely as passive witnesses but as active mediators in preserving national values and historical memory. Through the master-apprentice tradition, the heritage of craftsmanship; through family and community rituals, customs; and through artistic examples such as the Khorezm lazgi, the region's symbolic and artistic memory continue to be transmitted from generation to generation. During the years of independence, the convergence of state policy and local initiative institutionally strengthened this process; however, under conditions of globalization, new approaches are now required.

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