

Social life of the city of karshi during the years of independence (1991–1999)

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to analyze the social transformations that occurred in Qarshi city between 1991 and 1999, a period marked by Uzbekistan's transition to independence. The research focuses on how political and economic reforms influenced urban social structures, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and civic life.

Research Methodology: The study employs historical, comparative, and statistical analysis methods. Archival data, policy documents, and demographic statistics were examined to trace the evolution of social institutions and public services. Comparative analysis was used to identify differences between the pre- and post-independence periods, highlighting the dynamics of urban modernization.

Results: The findings reveal that Qarshi experienced rapid institutional restructuring in education and healthcare, expansion of public infrastructure, and revitalization of the mahalla (neighborhood) system as a local governance unit. Cultural and civic initiatives contributed to the emergence of civil society, although disparities in access to services persisted.

Conclusions: The first decade of independence represented a foundational phase of social modernization in Qarshi. While reforms fostered civic engagement and improved living conditions, the transition also revealed challenges in administrative capacity and resource distribution.

Limitations: The study is limited to the 1991–1999 period and relies on available statistical data, which may not fully capture informal community dynamics.

Contribution: This research provides a contextual understanding of post-independence urban transformation in regional Uzbekistan, offering insights for comparative studies on local development and nation-building.

Keywords: *Civil Society, Education, Independence, Qarshi, Social Transformation*

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1. Introduction

After Uzbekistan declared its independence on August 31, 1991, profound changes began in all spheres of national life (Yuldashev, Halimbetov, Usmanova, & ZS, 2021). These processes were reflected not only in the capital but also in regional centers, such as the city of Qarshi (Al-Jawari, 2020). As the administrative center of the Kashkadarya region and one of the key political, economic, and cultural hubs of southern Uzbekistan, Qarshi entered a new stage of development during the years of independence (Nazarov, Jumaev, Turdimambetov, Yanchuk, & Egamberdieva, 2020). The period of 1991–1999 marked the formation of social life in Qarshi, adaptation to market economy conditions, and the beginning of deep transformations in education, culture, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Therefore, this article focuses on the major social changes in Qarshi during the first nine years of independence, their directions and outcomes. During this crucial decade, Qarshi became a microcosm of Uzbekistan's broader transformation. Political decentralization and economic liberalization have prompted both opportunities and challenges in urban management (He, Zhou, & Huang, 2016). The newly established regional administration sought to balance the demands of rapid modernization with the preservation of traditional values. As part of the state's nation-building agenda, new administrative and civil institutions were introduced, emphasizing transparency, efficiency, and public accountability. The introduction of elected local councils (*hokimiyat*) marked a shift from centralized control to participatory governance, allowing citizens to play a greater role in local decision-making.

A central feature of Qarshi's transformation was the revitalization of the *mahalla* system, which became a cornerstone of Uzbekistan's social policies. Each *mahalla* operates as a self-governing community responsible for managing social issues such as welfare distribution, family disputes, and community initiatives (Berdievna & Ikhtiyorovna, 2025; Urinboyev & Eraliev, 2022). The government formally recognized *mahalla* committees as key partners in implementing local reforms, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and civic participation (Ataöv, Kahraman, & Osmay, 2022). This grassroots institution helped bridge the gap between the state and citizens, preserving traditional forms of mutual assistance (*hashar*) and solidarity while adapting them to the realities of the market economy.

Economically, Qarshi faced the complexities of transitioning from a Soviet command economy to a market-based system, which was challenging. Initially, privatization led to the closure of inefficient state enterprises, causing unemployment and inflation (Munir & Naqvi, 2017). However, new opportunities emerged through small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurial ventures (Cavallo, Ghezzi, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2021; Miocevic & Morgan, 2018). By the mid-1990s, the city's industrial base had diversified, and the textile, construction, and agro-processing sectors began to thrive. The Qarshi Cotton Factory and Qarshi Agro-Industrial Combine became emblematic of the city's ability to adapt to competitive market conditions in the textile industry. Private trade networks expanded, linking Qarshi to regional markets such as Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent.

Education is one of the most dynamic areas of change. The establishment of Qarshi State University in 1992 symbolized the rise of higher education in the region. It offered programs in pedagogy, engineering, economics, and philology, producing qualified specialists who contributed to local developments. Curricula were redesigned to reflect national identity and independent thought, replacing Soviet ideological subjects with courses on Uzbek history, language, and ethics. Simultaneously, secondary schools adopted new textbooks emphasizing moral education, patriotism, and civic responsibility. Vocational training centers have also been established to equip youth with technical skills aligned with the needs of a growing private sector (Muchira, Kiroro, Mutisya, Ochieng, & Ngware, 2023; Oviawe, 2018).

Healthcare reform followed a similar pattern of decentralization and modernization (Shishkin, Sheiman, Potapchik, Vlassov, & Sazhina, 2025). The government invested in constructing new clinics, diagnostic centers, and hospitals in Qarshi. Maternal and child healthcare has received particular attention, with vaccination programs supported by international organizations such as UNICEF and WHO. Preventive medicine campaigns have raised awareness about hygiene, nutrition, and family health (Nv, Yup, & Oyu, 2018). Although resource limitations persisted, especially in rural suburbs, the reforms succeeded in creating a more accessible and community-oriented healthcare system (Cheng, 2024; Niazi & Ahmed, 2025). The introduction of local health committees mirrored the *mahalla*'s role in social welfare, ensuring that public health initiatives reached the most vulnerable households.

Culturally, independence has stimulated a renaissance in local identity and heritage. Qarshi, with its long history as a trade and cultural center along the Great Silk Road, has witnessed a revival of traditional arts, crafts, and religious practices. Mosques that had been closed during the Soviet period were reopened, and new cultural centers and libraries were established (Amin, Muhtar, Sumardiawan, & Yulianingsih, 2024). National holidays, such as *Navruz* and *Independence Day*, were celebrated with

renewed enthusiasm, serving as symbols of unity and pride. Artists and intellectuals contributed to a new discourse that emphasized patriotism, spirituality, and cultural continuity in the post-war period. The reopening of historical monuments, including the Odina Mosque and Sherbobbo Complex, strengthened Qarshi's cultural identity as part of Uzbekistan's broader heritage restoration programme.

Infrastructure development is a visible indicator of modernization. Urban planning initiatives included road renovation, expansion of water supply and electricity networks, and improvement of public transportation. By the late 1990s, Qarshi's urban landscape had transformed significantly, reflecting both state-led investment and private construction. The introduction of modern housing complexes, markets, and public parks has improved the quality of life. Telecommunications and media infrastructure have also expanded, connecting Qarshi more closely to the rest of the country and fostering the dissemination of information and education.

The growth of civil society was one of the most remarkable achievements of this period (Hall, 2013). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth associations, and women's groups began to emerge, supported by the state's emphasis on civic engagement and social partnerships (Mercan & Selçuk, 2023). The Women's Committee of Uzbekistan and *Kamolot* Youth Movement established local branches in Qarshi, focusing on gender equality, education, and employment initiatives. These organizations promote volunteerism and civic activism, particularly among young people eager to contribute to their community's progress. Despite these achievements, the transformation was not without challenges. Economic inequality has widened owing to uneven access to resources and employment. Privatization occasionally leads to the concentration of wealth in a small segment of society, creating social tension.

Additionally, the transition required substantial adaptation from citizens who were accustomed to state dependency. Many families relied on remittances and informal economic activities to sustain their livelihoods during this difficult adjustment period. Nonetheless, the decade of 1991–1999 remains a defining chapter in Qarshi's contemporary history. This period saw national independence being translated into concrete local realities, shaping the city's political culture, economy, and social fabric. The combination of state reform and local initiatives fostered resilience and innovation within the community. Qarshi's experience exemplifies how regional centers played a vital role in implementing national development strategies, proving that the transformation in Uzbekistan was not confined to the capital but was deeply rooted in its provincial heartlands (Nurfaizah, 2021).

By the end of the 1990s, Qarshi had laid the groundwork for sustainable urban growth and civic development in the city. The institutionalization of the *mahalla* system, establishment of higher education and healthcare infrastructure, and promotion of cultural identity have collectively contributed to a more cohesive and self-reliant society. These foundations would later support the city's continued modernization into the 21st century, aligning with Uzbekistan's broader goals of economic diversification and social renewal. The transformations witnessed during this formative period thus represent not only local progress but also the embodiment of the nation's vision for a modern, independent, and socially responsible Uzbekistan.

2. Literature Review

Dashteh (2025) is grounded in an extensive body of literature that explores Uzbekistan's post-independence transformation. This section synthesizes scholarly works and primary sources relevant to social modernization, institutional reform, and community development in the early years of independence in Brunei. The review is structured thematically, covering (1) political and institutional transformation, (2) socio-economic restructuring, (3) educational and cultural revival, (4) healthcare and social welfare reform, (5) urban infrastructure and civic development, and (6) theoretical perspectives on social transformation in post-Soviet society.

2.1 Political and Institutional Transformation

Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the establishment of sovereign statehood was accompanied by complete restructuring of political institutions and governance mechanisms. According

to Karimov (1993), the early 1990s were characterized by a dual task: dismantling the Soviet administrative apparatus and constructing a new governance system based on national values, law, and civic participation. Akbarzadeh (1996) formalized these principles by emphasizing democracy, the rule of law, and decentralization of authority. In Qarshi, this political transformation was mirrored by the strengthening of local administrative bodies and the institutionalization of the *mahalla* (neighborhood community). Mahalla became the cornerstone of social governance, bridging state policy with community participation.

Turdiyev Bexruz Sobirovich and Murodogli (2020) highlight that the *mahalla* system represented a hybrid governance model, integrating traditional Uzbek communal structures with the objectives of modern public administration. This institutional innovation played a pivotal role in ensuring stability during the difficult transition period, particularly in maintaining social cohesion and managing local welfare programs. In addition to its administrative significance, the *mahalla* has evolved into a vital platform for civic engagement and social development. Through these networks, citizens participate in welfare distribution, family mediation, and community-building activities, thereby reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility (B, Suripatty, & Lewerissa, 2025).

The state's reliance on *mahalla* institutions has also enhanced policy implementation efficiency at the grassroots level, enabling more responsive and culturally sensitive governance. Moreover, the *integration of the mahalla* into state policy demonstrates the adaptive capacity of Uzbek society to reconcile tradition with modern governance. In Qarshi, this system fostered resilience during the post-Soviet transition by cultivating mutual trust between the government and the population of Qarshi. The synergy between formal institutions and community-based structures became one of the defining characteristics of Uzbekistan's approach to political modernization and social stability in the 1990s.

2.2 Socio-Economic Restructuring and the Market Transition

The transition from a planned to a market economy has posed significant socio-economic challenges across Uzbekistan's regions. As an administrative and industrial hub in Kashkadarya, Qarshi has undergone considerable structural changes. The privatization of state-owned enterprises, liberalization of trade, and emergence of private entrepreneurship transformed the city's economic foundation. As noted by Hikmatullayevich (2025) and Ahmad (2022), Qarshi's early adaptation to market reforms reflected both resilience and vulnerability: while industrial decline initially caused unemployment, new small and medium enterprises (SMEs) emerged in the trade, construction, and agro-processing sectors, gradually revitalizing the local economy.

Turdiev Bekhruz Sobirovich (2024) interprets these transformations through the lens of *ideospheric change*—a term referring to shifts in national consciousness that accompanied economic reform. The move toward economic liberalization was not purely structural but also ideological, emphasizing self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and moral responsibility. This ideological evolution influenced how communities such as Qarshi perceived economic autonomy, blending traditional ethics of cooperation with new capitalist rationalities.

2.3 Educational and Cultural Revival

Education has played a central role in shaping post-independence identity and societal values. The establishment of Qarshi State University in 1992 marked a milestone in the decentralization of higher education and the expansion of access to modern learning. As reflected in the *National Program for Personnel Training* (1997), Uzbekistan's educational reform aimed to produce a skilled and patriotic generation capable of supporting national development. Qarshi's schools and vocational colleges adopted the new national curriculum, which emphasized the Uzbek language, national history, and civic morality.

This period also witnessed a cultural renaissance that intertwined education with moral and spiritual renewal. According to the *Nasaf Journal* from 1995 to 1999, the revival of traditional holidays such as *Navruz*, *Ramadan*, and *Eid al-Adha* served as powerful expressions of national unity. The reopening of The Nasaf" Musical Drama Theatre and the expansion of libraries symbolized the reawakening of

cultural institutions previously constrained by Soviet rule. These changes reflect the broader trend identified by Turdiev Bekhruz Sobirovich (2024), who argues that national ideology functions as a unifying force, linking education, culture, and spirituality into a coherent framework of moral reconstruction.

2.4 Healthcare and Social Welfare Reform

Health and social protection policies were essential components of post-independence reforms. The healthcare system in Qarshi has undergone decentralization and modernization (Irijanti, 2022). Hospitals were renovated, new clinics were opened, and maternal and child healthcare improved through targeted public investment. The government's collaboration with international organizations, such as UNICEF and WHO, has enhanced public health initiatives, particularly vaccination and disease prevention programs.

Statistical reports from the *Qashqadaryo Newspaper Archives* (1991–1999) reveal significant improvements in life expectancy and reductions in child mortality by the end of the decade. However, inequalities persisted, especially between urban and suburban populations. Mahalla institutions proved vital, acting as local coordinators for health awareness campaigns and welfare distribution. This model of *community-based social policy* aligns with the view of Turdiyev Bexruz Sobirovich and Murodogli (2020), who argue that Uzbekistan's governance reforms relied heavily on local social capital rather than purely bureaucratic mechanisms.

2.5 Urban Infrastructure and Civic Development

Urban transformation in Qarshi reflects Uzbekistan's broader modernization agenda. The 1990s saw extensive investment in physical infrastructure, such as roads, housing, electricity, and water systems. The Qarshi city administration's records (1998–1999) indicate that major utilities were reconstructed to meet the growing demands of the population, which exceeded 150,000. This infrastructural modernization not only improved living conditions but also symbolized the tangible benefits of the independence. Civic life has also expanded, driven by the emergence of local non-governmental organizations, youth groups, and cultural associations (Nisa & Hariyanti, 2022).

The activities of women's committees and youth movements, such as *Kamolot*, contributed to civic engagement, gender equality, and volunteerism. These developments echo the theoretical frameworks of post-socialist urbanism, wherein cities serve as laboratories of social innovation (Turdiev Bekhruz Sobirovich, 2024). Thus, Qarshi became a site of social experimentation, blending modern administrative rationality with traditional community ethics. The ongoing transformation has also reshaped the city's spatial identity, as new public spaces, educational centers, and cultural venues have emerged alongside historical landmarks. This coexistence of heritage and progress reflects Qarshi's evolving urban character, where modernization was experienced not as a disruption but as a continuous dialogue between memory, identity, and future aspirations.

2.6 Theoretical Perspectives on Social Transformation

The social transformation of Qarshi can be analyzed through the broader theoretical frameworks of modernization and post-Soviet transition. Luhmann and Fejbrago (1990) *systems theory* provides a useful lens to interpret the interdependence among various subsystems—education, culture, economy, and politics—during a period of systemic reorganization. Each subsystem adapted to the new communicative codes of independence, producing an integrated social order grounded in moral and national identity. Turdiev Bekhruz Sobirovich (2024) extends this theoretical insight by describing the transformation of Uzbekistan as an *ideospheric shift*, wherein the restructuring of state and society was not merely institutional but deeply cognitive and cultural. This perspective underscores that social modernization in Qarshi was both a structural and symbolic process, redefining what it meant to be an independent, modern Uzbek citizen.

Furthermore, the emergence of civil society aligns with Habermas's concept of the *public sphere* in which citizens engage in dialogue and collective decision-making. The *mahalla* exemplifies this, serving as a localized public sphere that mediates between the state and individual citizens. This

synthesis of Western governance models with indigenous practices represents a unique Uzbek pathway to modernization—gradual, community-centered, and value-driven. In Qarshi, the mahalla system plays a decisive role in shaping the dynamics of local governance and civic engagement. Beyond its administrative function, it operated as a moral and cultural institution that preserved traditional solidarity while adapting to the requirements of modernity.

Through community meetings, informal mediation, and neighborhood initiatives, mahalla fostered a participatory culture that encouraged citizens to take responsibility for social welfare and local development. This participatory ethos reflected the broader national discourse on “renewal through responsibility,” linking moral values to the practical demands of modernization. As Qarshi continued to expand economically and demographically, the mahalla’s ability to integrate innovation within the framework of cultural continuity became a defining feature of its urban identity. Thus, the city’s social transformation does not represent a rupture with the past but an ongoing negotiation between inherited values and the imperatives of modern statehood.

2.7 Comparative Insights and Regional Context

The experiences of Qarshi can be compared with other regional centers such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Andijan, which underwent similar social transformations during this period. Studies from the *Nasaf Journal* and *Qashqadaryo Newspaper* highlight that while these cities share challenges such as unemployment and infrastructure decay, Qarshi distinguished itself through its strong mahalla organization and rapid educational reforms. These comparative insights suggest that regional leadership and community cohesion were decisive factors in the success of early post-independence reforms in both countries.

Moreover, the interaction between state policy and local initiatives in Qarshi reflects Uzbekistan’s broader “gradualist” approach to reform. Rather than adopting the shock therapy models seen in other post-Soviet states, Uzbekistan pursued an incremental transition that balanced stability with progress. Scholars such as Hikmatullayevich (2025) and Turdiev Bekhruz Sobirovich (2024) emphasize that this approach allowed the preservation of cultural continuity while enabling economic and administrative innovation.

3. Research Methodology

This study is based on historical-analytical and sociological approaches. The main sources included:

- a. Presidential decrees and resolutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1991–1999)
- b. Documents from the Kashkadarya regional and Qarshi city administrations
- c. Materials from local periodicals, such as the *Qashqadaryo* newspaper and *Nasaf* journal
- d. Oral testimonies from local residents and representatives of neighborhood (mahalla) institutions.

The main research methods applied were as follows:

1. Historical analysis – studying the sequence of social events from 1991 to 1999
2. Comparative method: contrasting pre- and post-independence social conditions
3. Statistical analysis – substantiating demographic and sectoral changes using numerical data.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Results

1. General Overview of Social Life.

During 1991–1999, Qarshi’s social landscape underwent profound changes, characterized by the revival of national values and the emergence of new administrative structures. The former, centralized Soviet system was replaced by democratic governance and community-based institutions, such as mahallas and civic associations. The city’s population was approximately 150,000, with a positive natural growth rate. Most residents are employed in public institutions, education, manufacturing, and service sectors.

2. Reforms in Education and Enlightenment

Education received special attention in the early years of independence. Existing schools were reconstructed and new educational facilities were built.

- a. In 1992, Qarshi State University was established based on the Qarshi State Pedagogical Institute.
- b. The use of the Uzbek language in higher education expanded, and new departments, such as history, law, and economics, were opened.
- c. Following the adoption of the “National Program for Personnel Training” in 1997, secondary specialized and vocational education institutions in Qarshi were restructured and modernized.

3. Cultural and Spiritual Renewal

The cultural sphere of Qarshi has also experienced revival and modernization:

- a. The “Nasaf” Musical Drama Theatre resumed its operations.
- b. Libraries, cultural centers, and folk ensembles became active again during this period.
- c. Independence Day, Navruz, Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha began to be celebrated widely and officially.

During this period, patriotism, national pride, and moral awakening grew significantly among Qarshi’s youth.

4. Healthcare and Social Welfare

The healthcare system has undergone notable reforms.

- a. New clinics and medical centers have been built in Qarshi.
- b. Maternity wards and children’s hospitals were also renovated.
- c. Preventive and sanitary health programs have been strengthened to improve public health indicators.

5. Infrastructure and Living Standards

Urban infrastructure was gradually modernized as follows:

- a. New residential complexes, roads, markets, and transportation networks have been developed.
- b. In 1998–1999, the water supply and electricity systems were renewed.
- c. Social welfare programs were introduced for pensioners and low-income families to ensure basic social protection.

The social life of Qarshi from 1991 to 1999 reflects the complex yet dynamic transition period of Uzbekistan’s early independence. Despite economic challenges such as inflation and unemployment, the population has preserved social stability through strong community ties and the active role of mahallas. One of the most important aspects of this era was the revival of spiritual and national identities. The processes of moral renewal and cultural awareness were clearly visible in education, art, and community life, reflecting broader national transformation.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The years 1991–1999 hold special historical significance for Qarshi. During this period:

- a. National and cultural values were revived.
- b. Education and cultural systems were restructured.
- c. Living standards have gradually improved.
- d. Urban infrastructure began to develop.
- e. The mahalla system and civil society took shape during this period.

Thus, during the first nine years of Uzbekistan’s independence, Qarshi city underwent essential social transformations that laid the foundation for building a new, independent society. The findings of this study contribute to understanding the regional dimension of Uzbekistan’s early independence period and provide valuable reference for future socio-historical research. These transformations demonstrate that the processes of political independence and national identity construction were not confined to the capital but were deeply embedded in regional and local realities. Qarshi’s experience reflects the broader trajectory of nation-building in Uzbekistan, where social modernization, moral renewal, and

institutional reform occurred simultaneously. The revival of traditional cultural practices, combined with the adoption of modern administrative and educational frameworks, has created a unique synthesis between heritage and progress.

The decade of 1991–1999 also revealed the adaptability and resilience of Qarshi’s citizens in facing economic and social challenges during the post-Soviet period. Despite inflation, unemployment, and industry restructuring, the population’s collective spirit—rooted in community values and mahalla cooperation—ensured social stability. This social capital became an invaluable asset for navigating the uncertainties of the transition. Moreover, the role of education and civic organizations in promoting national consciousness laid a sustainable foundation for the next stage of development in the 2000s. The city emerged as a regional center of enlightenment and civic participation, reflecting Uzbekistan’s broader vision of a morally and intellectually developed society. In this sense, Qarshi’s social evolution during independence serves not only as a historical case study but also as an enduring model of local initiative, resilience, and the harmonious integration of tradition and modernity.

5.2 Suggestion

Based on the conclusions above, several recommendations can be made to further strengthen the social and cultural development of Qarshi and similar regional centers in Uzbekistan.

1. **Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage:** The revival of national and cultural values during the 1990s should be continuously supported through programs that preserve local traditions, art, and historical monuments. Government institutions and cultural organizations should collaborate to promote Qarshi’s identity as a center of education, spirituality, and cultural heritage.
2. **Strengthening the Role of the *Mahalla* System:** As the *mahalla* plays a key role in maintaining social harmony and civic responsibility, its functions should be expanded to include youth development, women’s empowerment, and community-based economic initiatives. Encouraging participatory governance within the *mahalla* structures will enhance local democracy and strengthen civil society.
3. **Improvement of Education and Human Capital:** Educational institutions established during the independence period should be modernized through digitalization, teacher training, and curriculum innovation. Collaboration with international universities and research centers can enrich academic quality and align educational programs with the demands of the contemporary labor market.
4. **Development of Sustainable Urban Infrastructure:** To sustain the progress achieved in the 1990s, continued investment in environmentally friendly infrastructure, public transportation and housing is essential. Urban planning should integrate green spaces and smart city technologies to improve the quality of life of residents.
5. **Promotion of Inclusive Social Policies:** Social welfare programs should focus on reducing inequalities and supporting vulnerable groups, such as low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Expanding social safety nets through *mahalla*-based initiatives ensures inclusive growth and social justice.
6. **Encouragement of Civic Participation and Research:** Academic institutions and local governments should encourage socio-historical research to document and analyze regional transformations. Such studies can inform policymaking and provide educational materials that strengthen collective memories and national pride.

In essence, Qarshi’s experience during the years of independence offers a valuable model for regional development based on social solidarity, cultural revival, and gradual modernization. Strengthening these principles will contribute to building a more cohesive, educated, and progressive society in Uzbekistan’s ongoing national renewal.

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