Rights of Neighbors in Islam

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And be good to the neighbour who is your relative and to the neighbour who is not a relative . . .
(Qur'an, 4:36)

Islam has great respect for the mutual rights and duties of neighbours. The Holy Prophet said: Jibra'1 always used to advise me to be generous with neighbours, till I thought that Allah was going to include the neighbours among the heirs of a Muslim.

The rights of neighbourhood are not meant for Muslim neighbours only. of course, a Muslim neighbour has one more claim upon us - that of Islamic brotherhood; but so far as the rights of neighbourship are concerned, all are equal.

Explaining it, the Holy Prophet said:

Neighbours are of three kinds:

(1) that one who has got one right upon you;

(2) that one who has got two rights upon you;

(3) that one who has got three rights upon you.

The neighbour having three rights upon you is the one who is also a Muslim and a relative. The neighbour having two rights is the one who is either a non-Muslim or a non-relative Muslim. The neighbour having one right is the one who is neither a Muslim nor a relative. Still he has got all the claims of neighbourhood-rights upon you.

Here are some more traditions which show the Islamic love towards the neighbours:

The Holy Prophet said: That man is not from me who sleeps contentedly while his neighbour sleeps hungry.

Al-Imam `Ali ibn al-Husayn (a. s.) in his Risalat al-Huquq, said: These are your duties towards your neighbour: Protect his interests when he is absent; show him respect when he is present; help him when he is inflicted with any injustice.

Do not remain on the look-out to detect his faults; and if, by any chance, you happen to know any undesirable thing about him, hide it from others; and, at the same time, try to desist him from improper habits, if there is any chance that he will listen to you. Never leave him alone at any calamity. Forgive him, if he has done any wrong. In short, live with him a noble life, based on the highest Islamic ethical code.