

International Research Journal on Islamic Studies (IRJIS)
ISSN 2664-4959 (Print), ISSN 2710-3749 (Online)
Journal Home Page: https://www.islamicjournals.com
E-Mail: tirjis@gmail.com / info@islamicjournals.com
Published by: "Al-Riaz Quranic Research Centre" Bahawalpur

Significance of Integrated Subsidiary Functions of the Mosque and Its Inclusive Relationship to City

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To cite this article: Dr. Masooma Shakir. 2025. "Significance of Integrated Subsidiary Functions of the Mosque and Its Inclusive Relationship to City". International Research Journal on Islamic Studies (IRJIS) 7 (Issue 2), 13-29.

Journal	International Research Journal on Islamic Studies Vol. No. 7 || July - Dec 2025 || P. 13-29
Publisher	Al-Riaz Quranic Research Centre, Bahawalpur
URL:	https://www.islamicjournals.com/eng-7-2-2/
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.54262/irjis.07.02.e2
Journal Homepage	www.islamicjournals.com & www.islamicjournals.com/ojs
Published Online:	31 Dec 2025
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Abstract:

The mosque is a building typology that is central to the socio-political representation of Muslim World, carrying forth traditions and their interpretations. Socio-political dynamics influence mosque architecture over history and highlighting their essential role in society and cities, ranging from mosques that acted as 'centers of civilizational imagination' of the Muslim world to basic prayer spaces, community spaces and monumental mosques and complexes. Varying from singular structures for worship to complexes, the architecture and craft of mosque making and ornamentation has received much attention given its significance as a nerve center for the Muslim ummah. Contrastingly, the past fifty years have seen a trend of construction of mosques built in cities with clear sectoral division and management. Their current pattern of operation, management and ownership creates a disconnect between the global worldview of Muslim ummah and spiritual teachings of the religion. The following paper debates on why some mosques were more influential over others, referring to their socio-political dynamics of management and influence and the reasons for a larger sphere of influence in cities and in the Muslim World. Selecting four mosques built at crucial time

periods in history, the paper charts an evolution of the relationship between the socio-political situation, socio-cultural use and organization of the mosque and complex attached. Using literature and some contemporary case analysis of mosques in Pakistan and Karachi city, the paper aims to bring out the reasons for the change in context relationship of mosque architecture and the need to broaden view, create inclusivity and tolerance in attitudes for addressing the contemporary issues. The paper thus aims to highlight that the mosque in general no longer plays a crucial role in establishing global Muslim unity, inclusivity, addressing immediate and long-term community needs. The hypothesis is developed largely through a literature review.

Keywords: Mosque, Subsidiary Functions, Inclusive, Architecture, Community

Introduction

The mosque is a building type that lies at the heart of Muslim architecture. It is a symbol of the presence of faith. It is naturally the most important historic building type the study of which points to an evolution of the Muslim community and attached practices. Mosques are generally also a better-preserved historic building type, representative of variant local styles. The building type has displayed historically to potentially serve as dynamic centers for Islamic development, addressing broader community needs.

Various historic mosques, and some recently built have had the supporting capacity to provide place for refuge, for living, food, accommodation for travelling, teaching facilities, administration and burial, along with the principal function of worship. They may also provide for activities done regularly or occasionally. Thus, it has for centuries accommodated multiple functions within, with many precedence studies recorded.

Hillenbrand (2004) writes about the multifunctional nature of Islamic architecture in the past, ‘Muslims did not worship only in mosques, they received their religious education not only in madrassas, they were buried not only in mausolea when travelling they lodged not only in caravanserais. It was common for any building to serve multiple purposes’.

This paper talks about the role of some important mosques in the world that have had a strong influence in the Muslim community, socio-politically, educationally as well as religiously. Some emerged as nerve centers of the Muslim World, in their initial years. Some were political statements, representing the dawn of the Muslim Empire within the region, thus an evolution may be charted based on its study.

Serageldin (1995) brings up some important questions that may be raised in study of the architecture of mosques. Mosques are emblems that highlight attitudes towards environment,

the relationship of human being / Muslims as stewards of the earth to the building that is associated with a timeless Divine link, as prescribed in the holy book. How Muslims relate to society, what value systems are implicit in the relationships and the image that they want to project are some other questions one can raise in the study of this building type.

The mosque is the place of community prayer. Muslims through prayer affirm their belief in God. It is at the mosque, writes Khan (1990), that Muslims recall the first community of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Thus, the mosque, he articulates acts as a bridge between the present and that time.

Collective prayer is an act of commitment to the community, where the individual becomes less important and the commitment to the collective an acknowledgement. The minimum basic of individual or collective prayer as prescribed by the books, are a clean place and the direction to Kaaba. This place may be outdoors, or indoors. The architectural elements and building spatial demarcations have all developed and signified with time.

"In Islam, once a mosque is built, it does not belong to any human. Its owner is God, which makes the expression "house of God" not only figuratively but legally true under Islamic law. There is no such thing as membership in or of a mosque; every Muslim in the world is equally entitled to attend all functions and to use all facilities. This is a practical result of the mosque being a waqf—a perpetual trust which the donor relinquished all control of by giving it up to God" (Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi 1986:152).

Dissemination of religious and secular knowledge received importance from the time of the Prophet (PBUH) himself. The interrelation of mosque and madrassa attune to a reported hadith by Abu Huraira, 'Whoever enters our mosque to learn good or to teach, he is like a warrior in the way of Allah' [1]. Thence, teaching, prayer and holy war became symbolically and spatially interlinked.

In order to get a good understanding of the subject, it is important to have a larger overview of the evolving tradition attached to collective prayer space that becomes the basis for the emerging architecture.

The evolution in the role of the mosque from the time of its inception during the Prophet's life till today, narrates the evolving disposition of the community, with many external factors shaping its form and function. Supporting functions addressing community needs, social and intellectual development were added as their demand and scope increased.

[1] Amer Alnajjar and Tuğba Erdil Dinçel, "Changing Forms and Functions: The Transformation of Mosque Architecture from The Early Islamic Period to The Present," *Mekansal Çalışmalar Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2024): 94–106.

Serageldin (1995:22) describes Muslim architecture to be characteristically ‘flexible formalist’, having the ability to allow individual expression, ‘while retaining a sense of belonging to an organic whole, rather than the mechanistic view of fitting, straight jacketed, into a geometric ensemble’. The additive qualities of urban areas of Muslim settlements over time have developed this distinct character.

Mosques as Nerve center of Muslim community

The case examples of mosques that are selected for study particularly standout in the study of history of Muslim architecture, given the crucial role they played in the political and social context of their time. While asserting their identity, they may be recognized for their strong role in these domains, even though their architecture may not be characterized as monumental. Their spaces were characteristically inclusive in nature, organized the community and catered to multiple needs of the community. Thus, a larger vision or imagination of Muslim civilization connected with universal ideals and the worldly realities.

The making of the center of civilizational imagination is an interesting analytical frame presented by Gilmartin (2014). The core, in this, is represented by ‘a moral and intellectual center shaping core understandings of humanity's place in the cosmos, and the particularities of mundane power, organization and culture' (p. xvii). Ruling centers of organized and dynamic activity became centers of power and their relation to the periphery is shaped not by objectifiable entities, but ‘patterns of tensions between shared ideals and the plenitude of everyday cultural difference constituted within them’ (p. xviii). According to Gilmartin (2014), these tensions are apparent between ‘ideals and worldliness, between state and society, between legitimation and the operation of power, and also critically importantly, by the tensions defining the struggle for the construction of a 'civilized self'. (p. xviii)

Among the various examples of historic and contemporary mosques, there are structures built and managed by a range of patrons. From dynastic and private patronage to state patronage, the intent and control of mosques management, design, spatial configuration, and representation has varied. Socio-cultural inclusion, dialogue and flexibility are witnessed to be present in buildings of varying patronage types.

Royal patronage led to the making of mosques that served as symbols of power, including many historic mosques, that are markers of important events in history. National landmarks become an expression of nation building, social control, sovereignty and modernity.

The architectural expression of iconic modern mosques may be looked at as symbols of freedom and autonomy in religious practice and its celebration. In the neo colonial political

context, social and administrative structures of connecting to society have altered and embrace a complacency that comes with the shift of the political center. Gilmartin identifies the definition of a moral community through networks of ulama/ religious figures, persistence of an idealized political vision of Muslim community as playing a role in this process. The network of the community, he articulates, included places like places of learning, mystic practices and masjids.

Sacred and the Secular:

Historic precedence highlights an integration of secular and sacred use of spaces in Islamic practice. '..the place of prayer never stood alone but was complemented by other spaces that dealt with general societal interactions' [2]. Thus, integrating with the physical and social context. Facilities like hospitals, madrassahs, and bazaars created context relationship and integration of complexes, accessed as pedestrians. These may have been funded by one or more foundations. The coming together of sacred and secular activities and its interaction within the precincts made ways for potential interaction and open dialogue that bring the physical and the spiritual worlds together. Human beings respond to both. At personal levels, many people face conflicts in their experience of the two worlds. An interaction that allows people to understand both may be immense value.

Flexibility in use and later Separation of buildings into functional Typologies

Research scholars like Hillenbrand highlight the intrinsically multi-purpose and flexible nature of spaces built for prayer, religious, mystic and scientific education and house of the master teacher. At different hours, the configuration of large and small spaces could be used for different activities. Given the simplistic requirement for a prayer space particularly, if the mosque of the Prophet is used as a reference, a wide variety of buildings / spaces could serve or adapt as mosques. The act of collective prayer was more important than the physical monumentality of its architecture.

The following sections presents historic mosques as a reference to elaborate on the mentioned characteristics, that played an important role in creating inclusive mosques. A description of some major mosques, their key roles and the functions they performed is included. Architectural designs of contemporary mosques do explore and manifest spirituality and peace, yet their larger role in relation to global Muslim unity, inclusiveness need to be envisioned through management, intellectual pursuit and architecture.

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[2] Hasan-Uddin Khan, "The Architecture of the Mosque, an Overview and Design Directions," *Expressions of Islam in Buildings*, 1990, 109–27.

Later sections present and highlight the need for this strategy to continue, i.e. the need to understand the larger context and its relevance and relation to mosque.

The Mosque of the Prophet (PBUH)

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers laid the foundations of the new ummah, they brought together 'a sense of Arab nationhood and a new kind of international community' [3]. Features of tribal society including lineage, authority, social relationships and cultural perceptions carried forth into the new community formation. The religion brought a moral order that ascertained individuals with social responsibility, traits of trustworthiness, honesty and piety. Through various personal and social acts, the religious directives were able to achieve social cohesion, bringing together 'the universal with the particular'.

The Mosque of the Prophet became the foreground of various activities, revelations and its transmission to the community of believers. Collective prayer, various issues and problems of the community and individuals were addressed within the space, that was a multifunctional node for community. A clear segregation of the private quarters of the Prophet and the community activities was present. His presence as a leader, guide and decision maker activated the space and its various uses, aimed at guiding individuals and bringing the community together (Brekke et al., 2019; Laugu, 2009; Omar et al., 2019; Raeisian & Badreh, 2013).

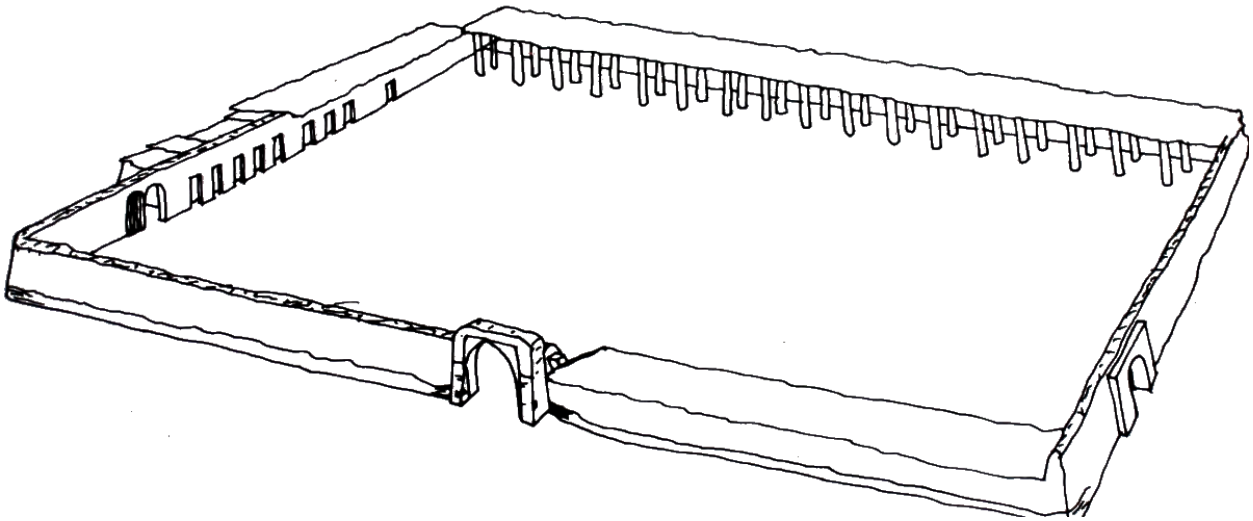


Figure: Reconstructed plan of the initially built Masjid-e-Nabwi and house of the Prophet (PBUH).
Source: Creswell

[3] Antony Black, *History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TjWrBgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=history+of+islamic+political+thought&ots=7ABHSNxCic&sig=URnByzs6HW5Fx0gBm5XZ0xjeNMU.

The Prophets mosque was a simple structure in its image and outlook, made of mud earth blocks, wooden columns and roofing of palm leaves thatch. Congregational prayers were conducted in the thatched shade, while the rest of the spaces were used for various community activities. More than just a mosque, the place was an integrated whole, facilitating community, bringing individual members together with a strong sense of community responsibility. There was no minaret, dome or mihrab in this simplistic structure, still its descriptions, activities create the image of a major role the space played in navigating the newly formed community.

The starkness, austerity of the spatial settings and arrangements of communal prayer of the first Masjid-e-Nabvi has been main precedence for architects, where at different times, the principal defining architectural elements of the mosque have been debated.

As part of the formative period of Islamic society, the architecture can also be described to have been in a state of flux. Various other functions that took place occasionally within the enclosure included teaching, burial, sharing the newly revealed Quranic revelations, along with providing shelter to the Suffa and the poor, the travelers at one end of the premises, with a kitchen offering food to all. Open day and night, connected to living residents, it responded to emerging needs. The multifunctional community space harboured spiritual *and* secular activities and made the Prophets mosque a unique identity for the Muslim community. Another view to this provided by scholars, is about the 'developing' and ambiguous nature of the 'mosque' at this point, since this was an initiation.

'Both the spiritual and the secular life was practiced there simultaneously' (Hillenbrand 2004: 40). The mosque played an instrumental role in the social, cultural and political context, organizing the community and disseminating religious knowledge.

The large size of the initial Masjid-e-Nabwi worked well to accommodate its multipurpose and communal nature. The large courtyard constituted 75 % of the whole space, allowing for substantial flexibility. Hypostyle prayer hall (of palm trunks) and qibla facing wall became its defining features.

The simplicity of the structure was characteristic of its perceived identity. It also became a place where besides prayer, public announcements were made, meetings took place, treasury was located and strategies of war were convened. The mosques of later periods from Umayyads to Ottomans carried forth some of these practices to spatially configure a wide range of facilities, not directly connected to worship but to community well being where the mosque anchored as a main landmark.

Although the initially constructed mosque was simple in its use of materials and layout, it was functionally well utilized, creating a demarcation of private and semipublic spaces, creating zones for the different user groups. It is known that initially, animals including camels and horses were also tied within the boundary at one end, later they were tied to the outside along the wall. After the change of qibla, from Jerusalem to Mecca, the prayer hall was dismantled and built along the opposite edge.

The mihrab, minbar and maqsura appropriate the mosque as a royal monument [4] in later mosques. Many historic mosques were set in urban settings, adapted, modified, incrementally developed, often with less chance to make the built structure fully visible. Thus, the dome, the minaret, portals, façade decorations were features that expressed the monumental presence of structure with the minaret and the dome acting as markers visible from far.

Ornament, materials, and geographic, cultural practices of construction and skills create distinguished landmarks that belong to their contexts. A sanctuary, marked in many as a safe enclosure with a courtyard and a covered communal prayer space were major features. With the domestic space alongside, initially the whole was perceived as an inclusive space and as the first focal point of the new Islamic community.

During the Ummayad period, there was a major transition that took place as patrimonial bureaucracy contended for ascendancy. The configuration of the leadership to a dynastic monarchy, came not without rebellion[5]. The ruling traditions of the regions, Sassanid and Persian Empires became the precedence for the newly formed religious and political leadership. Bureaucracy, court culture, government practices developed with an emerging negotiating dialogue between predecessor ruling traditions and the Islamic ideals of social justice and political organization. Secretaries and advisors to the rulers had a major role to play in this process [6].

The initial mosques are particularly well known for their multi-purpose role within the Muslim community [7]. They were often meeting places, madrassas, casual individual and group reading places, adjoined with kitchen, food and community welfare services. The idea

[4] Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

[5] Local splits in regional rule contended for legitimacy of political leadership.

[6] Black, *History of Islamic Political Thought*.

[7] Auwal Salisu, "The Multifunctional Role of Mosques in the Development of Islam: A Case Study of Al-Malik Khalid Mosque, Universiti Sains Malaysia, and Its Implications for the Nigerian Context," *IJoRIS: International Journal of Religious and Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 2 (2024): 137–50.

of *khidmat* or serving people also arises from a humility begotten from submission to Allah. Thus, the masjid was a place of spiritual nurturing that groomed young and old.

There are two types of mosques in the city as classified by Ibn Khaldūn (2005), the small neighbourhood mosques and the jami mosques for Friday and Eid Prayers. Mosques of small sizes are found from later periods catering to towns, neighbourhoods, specific sects, tribes, profession or other specific social group. The jami masjid aimed to bring together a larger gathering of Muslims for the obligatory Friday prayer. Until the 10th century, the caliphs approval was mandatory for constructing jami masjid [8].

The mosque as an institution has played throughout history, a vital role in the social and cultural life. As Islam prescribes a way of life, so the mosque plays a central role in this, aligned with constructive, secular and spiritual activities that are beyond performed rituals, serving various community functions.

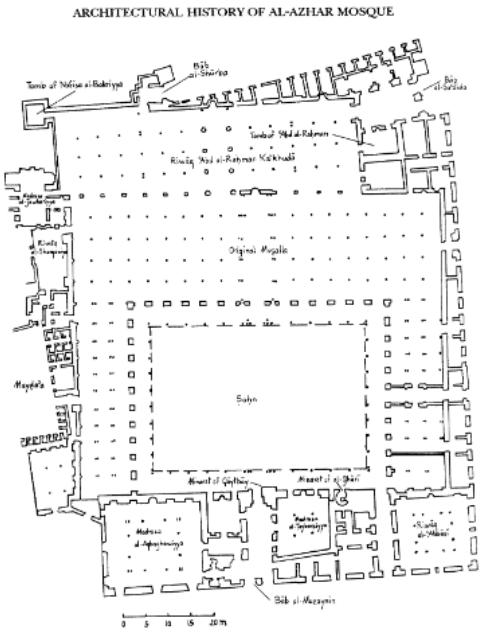


Fig. 5. Al-Azhar mosque. Plan of present mosque. (After Creswell)

Initially, evolving as multifunctional spaces, mosques later became building complexes, as the other functions grew in demand and requirement, adjacent to the prayer space.

The masjid has mostly been constructed as a bounded space with limited entries becoming a sanctuary and refuge enclosure when required. For those located within settlement, the masjid had central and easily accessible location, in urban areas, in the middle of the settlement, market area or popular zone of circulation.

Al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo – Fatimid time:

The second case taken up to highlight the significance of roles played by mosques in history is the Al-Azhar Mosque from Cairo. Built in 970 by Jawhar Al-Saqili during the Fatimid time period (960-1170), the Al-Azhar mosque was set up as a simple layout initially. The Fatimid dynasty, the first Shia dynasty valued transmission of knowledge as a pathway to spiritual

[8] Aila Santi, "His Mosque and His Dwellings - New Perspectives on the Study," *Mantua Humanistic Studies. Volume II* 2 (2018): 97.

and social enlightenment. The Al-Azhar Mosque became the first official and largest university of its time, where learning was imparted under a formal system. Over time, hostel facilities and classrooms, library were added to the central mosque creating a cluster around it, accommodating the needs of the community through additions where space was available in the urban area [9]. The incremental organic nature of the developed form of Al-Azhar mosque and university highlights key characteristics of initial mosques as incremental. They are described as unpretentious, as fragmented exterior view, and carrying an innate flexibility within the mosque to accommodate community needs [10]. Its location in the heart of the royal city of Cairo amid the bustling streets of the city is also of much relevance to its character. The Shia community was very well organized as a survival strategy and its defensive politics. Training of scholars and missionaries was also undertaken within.

Great Mosque of Sultan Hasan, Cairo – Mamluk time

The characteristic architectural and landmark development of Cairo under the Mamluks in the 14th century is described by Grabar (2024) as architecturally thematic through addition of architectural elements like minarets, domes and arches. '…the specific function of many Mamluk buildings… is difficult to identify by visual observation alone, by the simple perceptions of its gate or façade' [11]. Scholars articulate the presence of a rhythmic power of monuments with minarets serving as a visual connect leading from one place to another.

The Great Mosque of Sultan Hasan displays an integrated harmonious space housing the four madrassas of Sunni schools of thought with the central mosque connecting them. In a characteristic four iwan plan, the mosque lies in the heart of an educational complex, integrated well. The mosque is surrounded on its four sides by the four schools including classrooms and hostel facilities. The mosque in the center with its open courtyard acts as a place of interaction and worship between the four schools. The mausoleum of Sultan Hasan is also present next to the mosque as a major monumental structure. The beautiful, simple and well proportioned monumental building complex, with an ornate entrance portal is well configured and is a good example of the potential role of the mosque as a multi functional and inclusive public facility. The Sultan Hasan Mosque Complex was funded by the Sultan of its time, as a waqf, who belonged to the slave dynasty. The Mamluks were not a dynastic

[9] Nasser Rabbat, "Al-Azhar Mosque: An Architectural Chronicle of Cairo's History," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 45–67, https://doi.org/10.2307/1523251.
[10] Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*.
[11] Rabbat, "Al-Azhar Mosque."

regime, and their income was spent on creating monuments in their name, for them to be remembered in history through these landmarks.

The structure is a beautiful reminder of the emergence of the schools of Sunni thought much later in history and its earlier years of open exchange of ideas and their development. Importance given to collective thought is the basic fundamental where consensus, consultation were features even adopted by the Prophet himself with his companions in challenging circumstances.

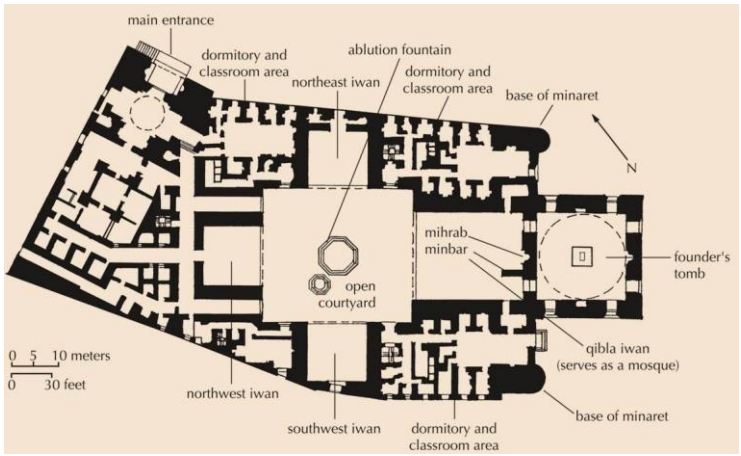
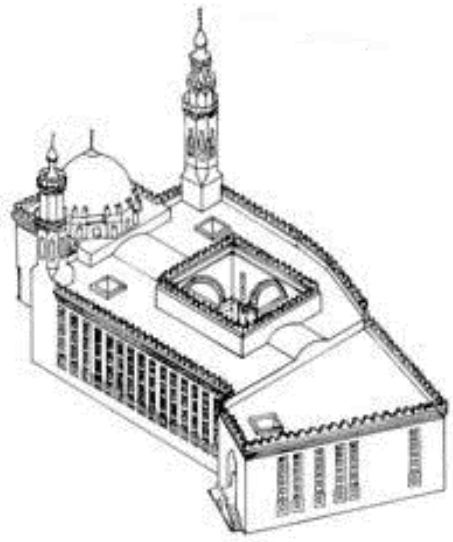


Figure: Great Mosque of Sultan Hasan, Cairo 1356-62 – Mamluk period



Sulemaniye Mosque, Istanbul – Ottoman

The Ottoman Mosque Complexes built during their time of the reign are a good example of the mosque becoming major landmarks for a set of facilities built for public use by the rulers of the time. Mosques built throughout Turkey and especially the city of Istanbul aimed to

change the architectural landscape and identity of the city from a Christian Byzantine capital to a Muslim dominated region. Prominent architect of the Ottoman Empire, Mimar Sinan was instructed to construct mosques as and more monumental than the Hagia Sophia, the Byzantine Cathedral monument of Constantinople. The architect took inspiration from this monument, analyzed it and constructed mosques with many similar features like dome and arches with aisles in a centralized, unifying monumental structure of a large heighted singular domed interior space, brighter, well lit, displaying structural, aesthetic and geometric proportion of an architectural feat in a series of monumental mosques in the ruling cities of the Ottoman period. With the mosque as a central monument, other building structures were planned and built around it, to highlight its centrality, along with absorbing the various subsidiary functions around it. These ranged from bazaar, schools for Quranic and Hadith studies, primary school, health facility, soup kitchen, hospital and accommodation for travelers, sick to royal mausoleums. The various facilities were all state sponsored and run through the taxes collected by the administration.

While catering to many social issues was much appreciated by the citizens, the downside of an autocratic system was degeneration of indigenous building construction and ornamentation practices, crafts. A centralized bureaucratic system supported specific state sponsored standardization of building craft and construction. The identity of the rulers as 'Muslim' Empire was legitimated through the mosque complexes, creating an essential association between rulers and the masses.

Challenges for Contemporary mosques and the roles they play

The selected case examples of historic mosques highlight their significant role in socio-political milieu. Nationalization of Muslim dominated regions, despite many affirming their claim as a Muslim country or autonomy of religious practice, have created several challenges for the Muslim ummah as a collective entity. Representation of nation states as Muslim nations have led to making of series of beautiful, monumental state mosques, managed and controlled by the government, but less 'inclusive' and flexible in nature. Examples include Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and others.

Nations are an imagined community according to Anderson. Their forms of representation, regional boundaries are defined artificially. Regional movements in the contemporary age are now aiming to reduce divisions, recognizing the significance of regional history, shared heritage and community across boundaries, loss of important cultural values due to emerging dominance of global city values.

Funded by a committee appointed by the government, the state mosque carried important symbolic significance and expressed identity manifested in architecture through a vocabulary of regional, modern and Islamic references. Many state mosques were a result of international design competitions. Often these projects are also building complexes with the mosque as a large prayer area of capacity of thousands of people and an open space flexible to accommodate greater number of worshippers. Other functions within complex have included Islamic university, library and public gathering.

The Jami Masjid is a larger congregational mosque of public role attached with symbolism and carrying political representation and sometimes propaganda (Khan 1990). He critiques on the Jami Friday mosques inserted by governments post independence for their lack of integration with the local communities, leading to their isolation and underutilization. These mosques remain disconnected from their surrounding neighbourhoods, failing to play any role in bringing the Muslim community together, in a context of increasing social and physical fragmentation in growing cities.

Modernization of states as independent nations have led to an incorporation of forms and symbols that are representational but devoid of spirit. Nationalization of waqf properties has removed an important attachment, that of a *mutawalli* and *conditions* of use of waqf property for perpetuity, essential parts of their management that carried the spirit forward [12]. The bureaucratic involvement of the state in management of public facilities has made them loose their spirit, or sense of place.

State representation in the iconic mosque

A good example of a national iconic, modern mosque from Pakistan is the Shah Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, the capital city of the country, built after independence. Its construction like several others in the country was a declaration of the modern Muslim identity of the newly independent Pakistan. Funded by the Saudi government (Shah Faisal) as a gift, it was designed by Vedat Dalokay as a modern structure of its time using modern construction materials, like reinforced concrete and glass, accommodating a large span structure with folding plates, it accommodates 10,000 worshippers inside. A tourist attraction, the Shah Faisal Mosque is more of a landmark and is owned by the state and its main activities programmed through the International Islamic University of Islamabad. Its location is exclusive, creating visibility from far in the hilly terrain of the capital city. The area around

[12] Jamal Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Manohar Publishers, 1996); Jamal Malik, "Dynamics among Traditional Religious Scholars and Their Institutions in Contemporary South Asia," *The Muslim World* 87, nos. 3–4 (1997): 199–220.

the mosque is a park, with little residing community. A modern translation of traditional elements considered Islamic, the building demonstrates modern aesthetics and technology [13]. Spread over 33 acres, the built and open spaces of and around the mosque can accommodate upto 40,000 worshippers. Other functions spread over the large area within the complex include a library, museum, lecture hall and café. With major emphasis on its form and image, the building is used to its full extent on limited occasions. The Islamic University organizes workshops and events for educational purpose. Informal classes for hifz also take place within the masjid on a daily basis, in which a small number of students participate. According to qualitative interviews of caretakers at the mosque, the university plays a major role in ensuring control in religiosity practiced within the premises, with an intent to balance knowledgeable scholarly education.



Shah Faisal Mosque, Islamabad

Neighbourhood mosques of different sects

Sectoral divisions separate mosques and muslim ummah, an example of which is the presence of more than ten mosques in many high density neighbourhoods in Karachi within walking distance of one another catering to different groups. Welfare and education direct identity politics of sects and individuals. The list of masjids from Karachi city, highlight the various types and their limitations in failing to play a role in creating an active and dynamic role in society, uplifting education. The different categories of mosques do provide for additional services for the benefit of society, including welfare, zakat collection etc, community representation, emerging political and religious leadership and various aspects are also documented in local mosques. They usually however are not inclusive by nature, and often a clear, sectoral division is present. People may visit them for namaz and customary use of facilities. Mosques are present at walkable distances in all areas, however, conservatism and

[13] Alnajjar and Dinçel, "Changing Forms and Functions."

identity politics dominate. With limited learned ulama attached to mosques, they are less receptive to questions and new ideas for young minds to connect with broader mind sets, nurturing growth and societal development. Patriarchal traditions dominate and the role of women is also fairly limited.



Figure: Delhi Colony, Karachi 2025

In a high density neighbourhood of about 10,000 houses, there were 12 mosques counted belonging to multiple sects.

Source: Comprehensive Environmental Design Studio, Department of Architecture and Planning, NED University of Engineering and Technology

The neighbourhood area local mosques have represented and received patronage from different communities, and groups, castes, tribes, guilds in big and small cities and settlements. Local traditions are passed down through generations in such cases. The local/ master mason would undertake and organize the construction of the mosque with the support of community members.

Individual patrons sponsor the construction of mosques as a gesture of their religious commitment and that to their community. These mosques reflect their acquired tastes and an understanding of the sacred, an example of which is Bhong Masjid in Rahimyar Khan built by Sardar Rais Ghazi Muhammad, a recipient of the Aga Khan Award.



Bhong Masjid, Rahimyarkhan, Pakistan

Recipient of Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Regional or popularly known architectural elements associated with mosques are usually used in many local neighbourhood mosques. These local mosques bring the communities together at the neighbourhood level and attached functions emerge with demand and space availability.

Conclusion

The experience of a mosque is more than that of an iconic landmark. A study of historic mosques and the roles that these buildings have played at political turning points can direct the potential way for creating openness, tolerance and inclusiveness in attitude for mosques. Scholarly learning backed by scientific knowledge may be considered imperative for this.

In the contemporary times, there are some mosques that can be said to be role models for the development of this building type to act as important community nodes addressing various contemporary societal issues. "…whether the mosque lies within a complex of buildings, whether it is an isolated monument or just a space in the home, the place of prayer does not stand alone - it is an integrated whole in which the act of ritual prayer is complemented by other activities that relate to the community. It is a sense of public space which is a reflector to all Muslims and the world at large that reconfirms the humanistic and holistic values of Islam" [14]. In an insightful article by [15], they look at the mosque as a public space, capable of creating the potential 'pause' or relief space in dense urban settings.

[14] Khan, "The Architecture of the Mosque, an Overview and Design Directions."

[15] Mohammed M. Alnaim and Emad Noaime, "Mosque as a Multi-Functional Public Space Destination: Potential Breathing Space in Dense Urban Fabrics of Hail City, Saudi Arabia," *Open House International* 48, no. 3 (2022): 450–71, world, https://doi.org/10.1108/OHI-08-2022-0214.

Currently in general, mosques act as only prayer spaces and are not active addressing various societal issues. Imams of mosques are not fully aware and fail to address significant issues to have a positive influence (Abdel Hady 2010).

The role of women within the institution of the mosque has recessed and become minimal in most cases. Their active participation and awareness can be of substantial positive contribution to society. The same goes for participation of young people in the institution. All together, there is a major need to envision the mosque as a unique institution [16] as in the past to play a fundamental role in providing a worldview and addressing various social and cultural issues, creating inclusivity and social justice in society, flexibility and adaptability to address problems. The individual and the collective play an important role in this structuring process where the mosque can play a key role.

The evolution of the mosque as a building typology points toward the changing values of patrons and society apparent in the experience, function, management and architectural vocabulary employed.


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[16] Zakaryya Abdel-Hady, *The Masjid, Yesterday and Today*, 2010, https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/559277/CIRSBrief2AbdelHady2010.pdf;sequence=5.