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## 6. REINVENTING THE MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

According to the traditional definition, a mosque is just a place of prayer for Muslims, but that is not the intention. It should have served as a complex, social, and cultural structure for Muslim people. Though the contemporary facts will go against this argument, it should be kept in mind that the definition of a mosque shows that it should be an organization that contributes actively to the growth of the Muslim groups in the city. This paper intends to discuss the functional approach of mosque elements and their role in contemporary time and discuss the significance of Architectural symbolism in mosque design in the Indian context.

### KEYWORDS

*Mosque; Islamic Architecture; Ideology; Domes; Arches; Aesthetics.*

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporarily a mosque is a place or open area of prayer in Islam Arabic word "masjid" means a place of "prostration to god." This word is used the same in Persian, Urdu, and Turkish languages in the early days. Mosques can be classified into two main types: "masjid Jami" or "collective mosque," which is a sizeable area-controlled mosque with central community worship. And then smaller mosques operated by various private groups within society. Historically the first mosque existed at the place of worship of prophet Mohammed in the courtyard of his house in Medina. This was not the contemporary mosque that we see today with domes, arches, and prominent facades; instead, this was just a simple plot of ground marked out as sacred.

The main elements of a mosque contemporarily are a minaret, also called as tower, which is one of the most visible aspects of mosque architecture from where the call to prayer is announced, not much of a functional part now, but it still serves as a powerful visual reminder of the presence of Islam. The second main element is "Qubba" or "Dome" in English. Now, this element in a mosque is not a ritualistic requirement like "mihrab," but a dome serves as a symbolic representation of the "vaults of heaven" it mainly consists of "stealer motifs" or "geometric motifs ." The third main element of the mosque is mosque patronage. These are patronage spaces made as a remembrance for kings and famous noble people.

The grandness and technological advancement in architectural technique in the present context have changed mosque elements' basic functionality like the primary functions of minarets were for calling Azaan. However, technology has changed, and now the use of loudspeakers is common in all mosques.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

For Muslims, a mosque is a place rather than a decorated and organized space where they prostrate before Almighty Allah. Although salat is being offered in mosques, ultimately, that does not mean it is limited to that purpose only. It also plays an essential role in community meetings, religious cum social functions, and in needs in an emergency. It also signifies the identity of the Muslim community. Overall, the mosque serves us with salat, meeting our religious and social needs and displaying Muslim identity (Najamul imam,2000).

From the first mosque built by the honorable prophet Hazrat Muhammad, masjid-e-al Nabawi in Madina, to the mosques built in contemporary times, its structure has undergone many changes. The mosque built in the time of Hazrat Muhammad and in the times of four pious caliphs subsequently was not this much decorative and ornamental instead, it was simple functioning and free from all the extravagance that we see in today's time. The mosque now was not nearly meant for offering salat. It actively gave space to different rituals, offering shelter to the poor or those in need, religious education, community unity, service of humankind, a center for Muslim brotherhood, and a place where master plans to tackle enemies were made during the medieval period. Although, there are differences in the mosques built in these two different times. Despite the differences, something common exists even today: the orientation toward qibla and the presence of minbar (Najamul imam,2000).

In Islam, the basic concept for building a mosque is to focus on simplicity and space utmost functional. According to Michell, 1978; If said in layman's language, a mosque is about a single horizontal axis orientation towards qibla. If quoted in simple words mosque is nothing more than a wall oriented towards qibla. Delving deep into the saying of Hazrat Muhammad, we find him saying, " wherever you pray, that place is a mosque" (Robert Hillenbrand,1994). "This Islamic building at par excellence is key to Islamic architecture" (Robert Hillenbrand, 1994).

A mosque is a place of worship consisting of a space that believers consider to have a sanctified status. The virtue of the actions increases and is enhanced when a believer is present there. If the traditional concept of the mosque and its sacred character get altered, the primary function of the building will lose its meaning (M. Arkoun, 2002). When it comes to the mosque design, believers' traditional well-established attitudes towards sacredness are still there. Even in the present scenario, mosques' sacredness is seen by the parameters of length and height of minarets and domes. This attitude of the Muslim community is unquestionable (Nasr, 1981). The mosque built in early times was of a hypostyle hall with an adjacent courtyard and was considered sacred not because of the style in which these were built but because they were successful in meeting the basic needs of the believers. This simple style was not changed by Hazrat Muhammad (Mohd Zafar Ullah Mohd Taib 2009). Even Creswell comments, "Such was the house of the leader of the community at Medina. Nor did Muhammad wish to alter these conditions; he was entirely without architecture ambitions, and Ibn Sa'd record suggests: The most unprofitable thing that eaten up the wealth of Believer is building" (Creswell,1968).

For Muslims, whether something is sacred or not is decided by the words of God and the hadith of Hazrat Muhammad and his teachings. Turing the Quran and hadith pages concerning this issue, we see that the concept of ornamentation, embellishment, and height of decoration is not liked by Allah or his apostle Hazrat Muhammad. Unnecessary architectural creativity in the design of mosques finds no place in Islam (Mohd Taib,2009).

## ARCHITECTURAL AND SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS

Roles and functions of symbolic elements of the mosques

**Minaret:** The minarets are the symbolic architectural figure of the mosque, earlier used for the call to prayer.

**Arches:** Arches are used for structural and functional purposes, but structures can be built without arches as technology has changed. However, these days arches are used for decorative and symbolic purposes.

**Prayer hall:** As evident from the name, a prayer hall is a large space allotted for the comers to pray as its main function. Apart from this, the prayer hall transforms into a space where several community issues are discussed when required.

**Mihrab:** Mihrab is a place in the prayer hall where the imam stands when he offers salat. The primary function of the mihrab is the indication of qibla. It is also helpful in aligning people before the salat starts.

**Minbar:** The position of the minbar is next to the mihrab. The minbar is the place from where the imam stands and delivers his Friday khutba. A minbar consists of three steps. Even today, the minbar in the mosque holds great significance as it was very significant in the time of Hazrat Muhammad, and this is the standing place from where the prophet Muhammad said crucial things in the interest of the Muslim community and the entire humankind.

## **RELEVANCE OF THE PAPER**

For the entire Muslim world, mosques are seen as a place to offer Salah, as it also holds a place of sacredness in the hearts of Muslims. In the present scenario looking at the function of the element of the mosque is just for the aesthetic purpose. To build more and more luxury mosques, except few elements, most of the elements have no functions like domes, minarets, vaults, etc., are repetitive without any functions, and are used only for the symbolic representation.

## **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

The exploratory research methodology was used to develop a preliminary study of users' perception towards sacredness or sanctity space in the mosque. Also, Quantitative research was used for the questionnaire to gather users' perceptions on different symbolic elements in the mosque. Three mosques were chosen for the study's research model and to determine the elements of a mosque.

## **CASE STUDIES**

### **CASE STUDY 1 - JAMA MASJID, DELHI**

on assessing, Jama masjid's architectural features and symbolism. It was observed that symbolic architectural elements, i.e., dome, vaults, arches, minarets, etc., had function and significance when the mosque was constructed. However, concerning the present time when new technology and technique is developed, many of these symbolic architectural elements have no significance; those are just for identity and aesthetics.

### **CASE STUDY 2 - QADARI MASJID, DELHI**

Qadari masjid is a modern practicing mosque. In this mosque, they used symbolic architectural elements. Some of them have their functions, i.e., minbar and prayer hall, and some are just resulting

of perception people, those elements have no functions, but they have been used just because of identity and aesthetic. There are no domes and minarets in this mosque, but they use arches or represented symbolic arches for the identity and aesthetic.

### CASE STUDY 3 - ISLAH MASJID, DELHI

Islah masjid is a simple-looking and functional mosque. This mosque is free from domes and minarets, but space has been left out for future minarets, but there is no plan for dome construction per the imam's words. We see arches and symbolic arches constructed in this mosque, which helps people distinguish it from ordinary houses in the locality.

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Jama Masjid, Delhi</i>	<i>Qadari masjid, Delhi</i>	<i>Islah masjid, Delhi</i>
Minaret	No functions of the minaret in the present time, but it reveals aesthetics and identity	No minarets at present, but it is intended to be built in the future just for the sake of identity and aesthetics	No minarets in this mosque, but it is intended to be built in the near future just for the sake of identity and aesthetics
Dome	At present, Dome is of no function, but it is just for identity and aesthetics	There is no dome in this mosque, and there are no intentions to build	There is no dome in this mosque, and there are no intentions to build
Arches	There is no function of arches in the present time, but it is for identity	Arches are there but not for functionality and but add for aesthetic and identity	Arches have no function and only add to the aesthetic and identity.
Prayer hall	Present and still have proper function	Present and still have proper function	Present and still have proper function
Mihrab	Functions to a certain extent	Functions to a certain extent	Functions to a certain extent
Mimbar	It functions even today	It functions even today	It functions even today
(Source:By Author)			



Minaret

Dome

Arches

Prayer Hall

Mihrab

Mimbar

(Source:By Author)

## FINDINGS

The mosque, built in ancient times, has many architectural symbolic elements, i.e., domes, minarets, arches, prayer hall, minbar, mihrab, etc. In Jama Masjid, they use fluted domes for aesthetic as well as functional purposes. At that time, to cover a large span, they use domes for the prayer hall so that maximum people come into the prayer hall without any obstacles. Minarets were built to call people for salat as well as it makes mosques look aesthetically strong.

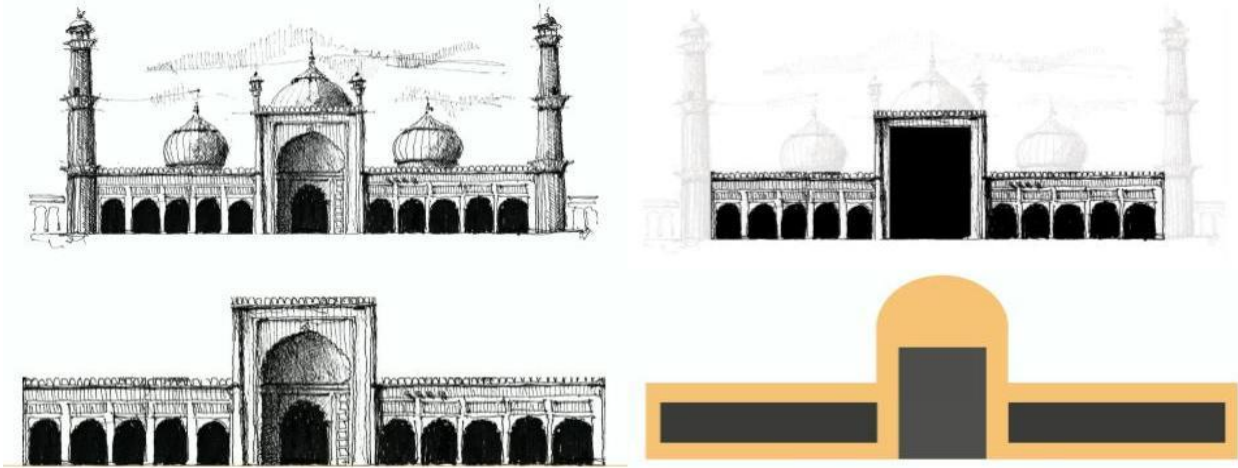
However, in the modern era, mosques have symbolic architectural elements such as minarets, domes, arches, vaults, minbar, mihrab, etc. But during the case study, both mosques have some architectural elements, i.e., arches, mihrab minbar prayer hall, etc. both have no domes no minarets as symbolic elements. However, they will construct minarets as symbolic elements. It was also found that these mosques have symbolic elements, but many of them have no functions; they were used just for aesthetic identity purposes. Both mosques from the modern era constructed arches to represent symbolic arches and jaali for the identity to be easily recognizable as a mosque.

## ANALYSIS

A mosque mainly consists of a prayer hall and a courtyard; this is a holy place in believers' eyes ever since the prophet Muhammad started propagating Islam and moved to Madina for specific reasons and built a mosque there. Even today, the mosque holds such great significance among the believers that when a mosque is made. It is built with so much conviction and piety that the believers spend vast amounts of money on it. In the contemporary Muslim world, when the thought of building a mosque crosses the mind of believers, clear pictures of massive domes, sky-high minarets, and a building highly decorative in nature with arches, beautiful calligraphy, and vibrant lightings comes into the mind. However, after looking at common people's perceptions, it was found that architectural symbolism and its significance are so rooted in their minds that the image of a mosque is incomplete without this symbolism. This perception and such strong belief for the symbolic architectural elements is due to specific reasons among the Muslim community. First and foremost is that it reflects our identity to the fullest. Wherever one sees a mosque, people think that a Muslim community is prevailing there. Moreover, domes and minarets and such symbolic elements self signify that this building is a mosque.

Out of people, most of them perceive that these symbolic architectural elements make the mosque aesthetically strong. One of the reasons these symbolisms have come even to this modern and technological world is that they give Islam's historical and cultural touch in the mosque. A section of

the Muslim community has this very belief deeply inculcated in their minds that grandeur, power, royalty of the Muslim community is directly proportional to the symbolic architectural beauty of the mosque. The aesthetically strong the mosque is, the powerful the Muslim community is. While some people believe that not all the symbolic elements should be made, yet at least one or two symbolic elements be made in the mosque as they reflect their identity.



(Source:By Author)

## INFERENCES

A mosque has an essential role in the Muslim community. Mosques are used as congregational spaces and have many functions, i.e., teachings, salat, hospitality, etc. The symbolism used in mosque design had functions in ancient times for multipurpose functions such as structural and aesthetical. Architectural symbolic elements were also used to identify a mosque and give historical and cultural touch. However, most of those symbolic architectural elements with function and significance do not have any significance today.

Presently, construction mosque people use symbolic architectural elements with no functions, but they are still in practice for their aesthetic and identity. They accept that there are no roles of symbolism in salat, but they want at least some symbolism for identity. The mosques built in the present time with minarets, domes, and other symbolic elements; have no significance but are still in practice due to human perception. Perception of people about mosque construction and design that they have strong perception towards symbolism in mosque architecture so that we can not ignore the people's perception, we should consider it and try to do minimum use of architectural symbolism in a mosque and try to aware people about the significance of symbolism.

## CONCLUSION

A mosque is a place where Muslims pray, i.e., prostrate before the divine authority. A mosque is also meant for serving the Muslim community in all of their religious, social, and cultural gatherings.

In India, mosques do have symbolic architectural elements like domes, minarets, arches. When they were built, they had their function, but they have no function in the present scenario but are still built for identity and aesthetics due to people's perception.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is observed that architectural symbolism in a mosque built in ancient times had its significance and functions, but in the present scenario, they have no significance. They are just for identity and aesthetics. Modern mosques also have symbolic architectural elements with no functions. A mosque can be constructed without most of the repetitive symbolic elements that have no significance in the present time, i.e., domes, minarets, arches jaali, etc

The public perception of architectural symbolism has become so intense that these symbols have become symbols of mosques rather than Islam. So these aspects have to be considered for the construction of the future mosque. During the public survey, most of the people said that they would accept changes in the mosque design, but they have a strong perception that about the symbolic element of mosque architecture, so they want to see at least a few symbolic elements in mosque design just because of identity and aesthetic. So these aspects have to be considered for the construction of the future mosque in India. Modern mosques should incorporate architectural symbolism to the extent of need as they have become an integral part of mosque architecture, and people want to see at least some architectural symbolic elements in the mosque.

It is well understood that for the mosque, people can not flatly deny the construction of symbolic elements as they have a long history and can not be changed overnight. Moreover, we have to consider the need and liking of people, so we should try to include minimum symbolic elements for the further construction of modern mosques. For further research in the construction of a mosque, the main focus could be on the interior designing of the mosque as how it should look and the guidelines for interior decoration.

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