



Contextualism of Mosque Architecture in the City: Case Study of the Abu Bakar Mosque in Bangsar

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Abstract : This research identifies the issues related to the contextualism of mosque architecture towards its urban setting as well as how it translates into inclusivism into the social structure. The main aims of the research is to evaluate the architectural contextualism from the perspective of form and design against the backdrop of the urban fabric and evaluating the contextualism of social inclusivism in the mosque architecture from the perspective of the non-Muslim society participation with the Muslim society. A case study of the Abu Bakar Mosque in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur was conducted via observation and interviews with the mosque management. The findings shows that through time the visionary management has turned the mosque in terms of its activities and design in context towards its urban setting as well as into inclusivism within the social structure

Keywords : Mosque architecture, Contextualism, Social, Urban

1. Introduction

In a multicultural and multi-religious social structure that is found in Malaysia, it is essential to establish a cohesive and strong relationship between dominantly Muslim and the minority non-Muslim community. This relationship within the local context is crucial in maintaining a balanced communal living for the people. Regardless, it remains an issue that must be addressed.

Within the field of architecture, the role of religious buildings and its related community is a fundamental aspect that can address these social issues. Specifically, the role and importance of a mosque within a community, as well as understanding the role of Islam should expand to those of other faiths to create a greater understanding.

1.1 Structure Mosques in Their Traditional Contexts

The issue of mosque contextualism barely existed in traditional times. Mosques, as with any structures were built using traditional materials like timber, masonry, adobe brick and construction material of clay, mud, straw and many others. The scale of these mosques depended entirely on traditional technology and without an authoritarian regime

such as the Pharaoh, the buildings tend to be modest in scale. The palaces of monarchs and Rajas dwarfed these buildings with their grand scale and ornamental opulence. The mosque then was more in tune with the surrounding people as there were not many religious institutions to govern certain rules and regulations. Everything went under the simple purview of respect for the rules and behavioral conduct of the religious teacher or scholar and those of his students. The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims were probably less estranged as they are today and we can see Muslims and non-Muslims living side by side and entering mosques and temples without due concern. Indeed this was the experience of many past lives before the advent of the television and the Internet that shook the foundation of social relation by news in another unrelated province being imposed on another that had no issue to begin with. Actions of self-interested leaders who seek political dominance and survival, the television and the Internet have succeeded in isolating Muslims more and more from the rest of the world.



Pic. 1 : Kampung Hulu Mosque in Melaka, 17th century



Pic. 2 : A mud mosque in Mali that contains no stereotyped elements of domes, minarets or onion arches

In modern times, architects can design buildings according to almost any language but they are pressed by clients to pursue the stereotyped ‘Middle-Eastern’ dome, arch and slender minarets. Whilst some architects do try to argue for a more modernistic and progressive language, their views are almost always vetoed by the committee. Some architects prefer to follow the client’s ‘Arabian Nights’ interpretation of mosque architecture because their fees are connected to the more expensive proposals of many domes and multiple minarets. This situation gives rise to the deepening problem

of Islam and Muslims being viewed as an exclusive society alien to whatever cultures that surround them. Politically, this set up the Muslim to be viewed suspiciously by others and allow Muslims to be used by unscrupulous leaders, religious or political, to forward their private agendas.

2. Academic Context

The main interest and focus of this work in the present time is to create a new and better framework for the idea of Islamic Architecture and the design of the mosque into an entity that would present a contextual existence in any host society.

It is our belief that the architectural work in this area is tied in with the problem Muslims are facing in the world whether in a mixed host society like Malaysia or in a non-Muslim dominated society like in the United Kingdom and in America. The central problem of co-existence within the construct of the Muslim mind set is an Islamic education system that has not moved significantly with the times in terms of its broader perspectives. Although there have been Muslim scholars who had grappled with this issue of Islam and the perspectives of other belief systems, the thinking of these past scholars have been buried by traditionalist minded religious clerics educated in a parochial setting and devoid of the education presented by a philosophical and a greater spiritual construct. The end result is the ongoing religious and racial tensions between Muslims and the host society as well as between Muslims and other citizens of different faiths as in the case of Malaysia.

It is hoped that this work can be the bridge between Muslims and non-Muslims by creating buildings like mosques and other Islamic facilities that would be an enhancement to the context of the host society as well as the urban fabric that would put non-Muslims at ease living alongside Muslims who are supposed to be the most tolerant and understanding.

3. Objectives

- Evaluating the architectural contextualism from the perspective of form against the backdrop of the urban fabric of Abu Bakr Al Siddiq mosque in Bangsar.
- Evaluating the contextualism of social inclusivism in the mosque architecture from the perspective of the non-Muslim society participation with the Muslim society.
- Evaluating the architectural contextualism of the level of the programs and activities provided by the mosque that helps encourages the interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

4. Methodology

The data that is obtained and presented in this paper are collected via a structured interview with the management of the selected mosque case study. This allows for an understanding of how the internal management and relevant activities are carried out. The list of questions below covers some of the scope within the structured interview with the mosque management to understand the integration with non-Muslim society.

In order to obtain a balanced perspective of the integration of the mosque community towards the society, a survey was carried out with a targeted group of respondents made up of non-Muslim community. The respondents in this research will all be coming from one single location – the surrounding housing area next to the Saidina Abu Bakar AsSiddiq Mosque. This sample is relevant due to the proximity of the housing area whereby the residents daily activities will have a direct or indirect relation to the mosque. The selected respondents should also be a permanent resident for a prolonged period to affirm the perception built. The randomly sampled respondents will be asked by the researcher for consent and approval to answer the survey. The survey contains a list of questions as pertaining to whether the residents have ever visited the mosque for some occasion or whether they have ever used the facilities at the mosque.



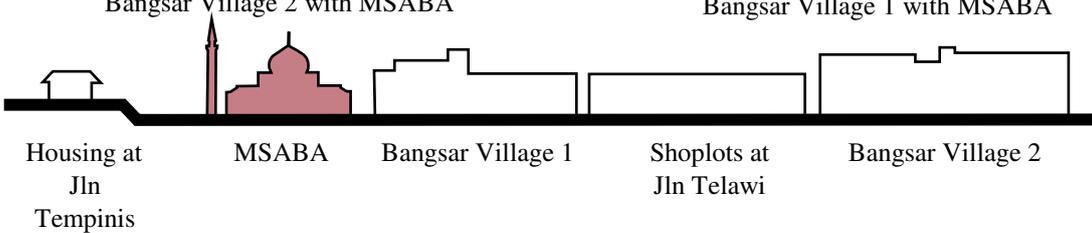
Pic. 3 : Masjid Abu Bakar As-Siddiq during the early years upon construction.

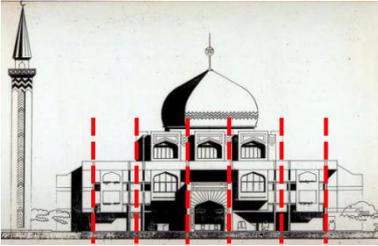
5. Findings

5.1 Physical Contextualism

This section is about the finding concerning the physical contextualism of the mosque.

Table 1 - Physical contextualism of the mosque.

Mass	
Mosque	Urban Context
	
	
Remarks	
The massing of MSABA seems to be at the same height as the surrounding building ranging from 3 to 5 storeys	

Scale	
Mosque	Urban Context
	
Elevation of MSABA	Residential Housing Shop Lots At Jalan Telawi
Remarks	
The façade of the mosque depicts the idea of breaking down the scale by having the contrast between solid and void, along with the positioning of the column system. Hence, it relates similarly to the neighboring retail shop lots. The height of the mosque is found to be in context to the surrounding buildings ranging from 3-5 storeys whereas the adjacent housing area appear to be at the same height as the houses are on a higher ground level.	

Form	
Mosque	Urban Context
	
<p>Remarks Although the mosque has some elements of a modernistic character, the dome appears to be of an anomalous element from the mosque. This in comparison to the surrounding buildings makes the mosque partially contextual.</p>	

Color	
Mosque	Urban Context
	
<p>Remarks Although the mosque has some elements of a modernistic character, the dome appears to be of an anomalous element from the mosque. This in comparison to the surrounding buildings makes the mosque partially contextual.</p>	

Material	
Mosque	Urban Context
	
<p>Remarks The material used are typical in modern construction similar to the material found in the surrounding buildings which makes it in context.</p>	

Urban Space		Urban Context
<p>Mosque</p>  <p>Entrance of MSABA</p>  <p>Site Plan</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;"> <p> PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY</p> <p> FENCING</p> </div>	<p>Urban Context</p>  <p>Bangsar Village 1 and the housing area</p>  <p>Shop lots, Bangsar Village 1 and 2</p>  <p>The area adjacent to MSABA</p>	
<p>Remarks</p> <p>As shown on the diagram above, the surrounding buildings around MSABA are not fenced up, whereas MSABA has fencing around the compound. This prohibits movement and creates a discontinuity of pedestrian flow, where the fencing creates a sense of isolation from its bustling surrounding. With this, it is not contextual to the site. However, in regards to the pedestrian five foot walkway, it proves to be contextual to the surrounding site as the pathway connects to all neighboring spaces and residential area.</p>		

5.2 Social Contextualism

This section is about the finding concerning the social contextualism of the mosque.

Table 2 - Social contextualism of the mosque.

Facilities	Photo	Remarks
Bookshop		<p>Physical space that allows for community integration.</p> <p>Location of the bookshop proves to be effective as it is located next to its exterior perimeter.</p> <p>Provides physical and social contextualism.</p>

<p>Hall</p>		<p>The hall is a space opened to all for events and talks that concern the surrounding community.</p> <p>Provides social contextualism.</p>
<p>Disabled Rehabilitation Centre</p>		<p>The centre is opened as a rehabilitation centre for the disabled.</p> <p>Provides social contextualism.</p>
<p>Library</p>		<p>Contains mostly religious books, but not utilized by many.</p> <p>Location of the library is within the mosque compound.</p> <p>Does not provide social contextualism.</p>
<p>Tuition Centre</p>		<p>Opened to all students (up to SPM level) for free.</p> <p>Provides physical and social contextualism.</p>
<p>Cafeteria</p>		<p>Opened to all Muslims and non-Muslims. The cafeteria that was built later is a magnet to the people around Bangsar where the location is situated at the corner of the compound, close to the commercial area.</p> <p>Provides physical and social contextualism.</p>
<p>Porches</p>		<p>Space used for social events that are occasionally opened to the public.</p> <p>Provides social contextualism</p>

<p>Public Toilet & Car Park</p>		<p>Public Toilet- Opened to the public and with easy accessibility. Located after the entrance of the compound. Carpark- Opened to the public and accessible at times, especially for Sunday night market. The accessibility provides physical contextualism</p>
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5.2.1 Interview with Mosque Management

The purpose of the interview with the mosque management was to inquire into the social role the mosque plays to the society, especially towards the non-Muslims. The questions were primarily to gather further information in relation to the activities or programs organized for the non-Muslim society. We have conducted a structured interview with the head of the management, Ustaz Mohd Bukhari Bin Haliah. The interview was conversed in Bahasa Malaysia, it is translated into English as follows :-

- Are there any activities planned to invite non-Muslims to visit the mosque?
 - a. A Chinese New Year (CNY) open house was previously organized by the mosque. An estimate figure of 400 people showed up for the event held last February 2017
 - b. Invitation for buka puasa dinner to the neighboring housing association every Ramadhan period
 - c. More activities plan for the future extending to the non-Muslims are being organized to encourage racial harmony and social bond
- If yes, where do these activities occur in the mosque?
 - a. The CNY dinner was held in the anjung 2 (porch 2)
 - b. The porches are the designated gathering space for small events with a provided stage.
- Are there any facilities like shops or cafeteria or libraries that are opened to Muslims and non-Muslims?

Cafeteria	Attracts many working class community around Bangsar during lunch hour. No restriction except for it being a non smoking area
Bookshop	Within the mosque compound, easily accessible, sells not only religious articles but also acts as a mini mart
Library	Located inside the office space, open to all but rarely used
Rehabilitation Centre	Open for all who have cerebral palsy, a space for them to learn the basic needs in life, fully equipped with the necessary equipment
Tuition Centre	Provides free tuition for all students ranging from UPSR to SPM level
Public Toilet and Car Park	Both spaces are open for al during the Sunday night market. The public toilet was specially built detached from the mosque building to cater for the public to utilize as they found that many are shy to come into the mosque to use it.

- Are there any spaces for rental for all to utilize?
 - a. The multipurpose hall (Dewan Kuliah) is opened to all. Mainly for weddings (nikah kahwin), dining feast and buka puasa feast
- Do non-Muslims come during Eid celebration after Ramadhan?
 - a. Only mainly during buka puasa dinner
- Are there free food like a soup kitchen offered to those in need?
 - a. Currently no spaces are allocated for a soup kitchen. However, the management always arrange for food drive donation to those in need.
- Does the mosque sometimes invite other non-Muslim community leaders to their community planning?
 - a. None so far.
- Have non-Muslims been invited to give general lectures like health and well-being?
 - a. Various health talks were organized by the mosque management throughout the years, opened for all nonMuslims and Muslims. In October 2016, a cancer awareness campaign was organized in collaboration with Kan Work Organization in the multipurpose hall.² Blood donation drive was also organized previously. □ Have scholars of other faith been invited to give talks at the mosque?
 - a. None so far.
- Are there any social welfare spaces for those in need?

- a. A space on the right side of the anjung 2 is provided for those in need of a place to sleep. However, the management only allows for 1 night stay as the people sometimes tend to abuse it. The management will give a donation to help the person.

5.2.2 Survey with non-Muslim

The section is to document the response of the non-Muslims living in the residential housing area adjacent to Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque, in regards to their awareness towards the programs carried out by the said mosque. The survey was conducted along Jalan Tempinis in Bangsar on a Saturday evening due to their location and proximity to the mosque.

Table 3 – Survey with non-Muslim

Respondent Survey Questions	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age Group	35-44	> 55	45 - 54	35 - 44	45 - 54
Religion	Christian	Hindu	Buddhist	Hindu	Buddhist
How long have you lived in this area? (years)	5 - 10	> 20	10 – 20	5 – 10	10 – 20
How often do you pass by the mosque in your daily work or social rituals?	Daily	Weekly	Daily	Daily	Daily
Have you ever been invited to go to the mosque for some activity?	No	No	No	No	Yes
Have you ever used some of the facilities in the mosque, for example, the toilet, cafeteria, shops or library?	No	No	No	No	Yes
Have you ever attended any celebration or events at the mosque, for instance, a marriage ceremony or Eid celebration after the Ramadhan?	No	No	No	No	Yes
Have you ever been in a mosque in your lifetime?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

6. Discussion and Implications

After analyzing the data collected in the research findings we have concluded that Abu Bakar As Siddiq mosque in terms of its physical contextualism of the mass, scale, color, form and materials were found in context with the surroundings which shows awareness to the idea of architectural contextualism and respect to the surrounding context. The scale of the mosque fits well in its context surrounded by 5 storey high shopping center, 2 storey shop lots and a 3 storey housing neighborhood which are mostly either on the same level of the mosque or higher, while the scale of the mosque was broken down by dividing the façade to follow the shop house scale and design which shows respect to the surrounding context. The minaret assimilate with the surrounding and are not visually prominent however the dome form is out of the modernistic form for the surrounding buildings. The materials of the mosque were found appropriately chosen and acceptable with the materials of the surrounding buildings, while in terms of the urban form the mosque has a 5 feet walkway around it that makes it corresponds with its surrounding shop lots and even though the fencing segregates the mosque from the surrounding context the open and welcoming gates appeared to solve the issue.

On the other hands after analyzing the data collected from the social contextualism study and the interview that was conducted with the mosque management we found that eight out of nine architectural characteristics and spaces that we have studied provided either physical or social contextualism while the mosque has the facilities, activities and programs

that encourages the interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim societies such as (Chinese new year's ceremony) which shows participation, awareness and respect from the mosque towards the non-Muslim society, the mosque also has a cafeteria which is directly located on the walkway that serves Muslims and non-Muslims and invites everyone to come in and that gives a welcoming impression and a positive reflection from the Muslim society towards the non-Muslim one encouraging them to have more interaction.

While in terms of the survey for non-Muslim that was conducted in the residential area beside the mosque to know whether the programs and activities organized by the mosque are effective and reaching out to the people that lives around the mosque, the majority of the respondent's answers were no, however one of them appeared to have participation in the mosque activities such as attending a Muslim wedding and participating in the Chinese new year's ceremony that was mentioned earlier which proves that those programs and activities are effective and influencing the community and reflecting the importance of the idea of social interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

7. Conclusion

The mosque was mostly physically in context with its surroundings in terms of its mass, form, material, color and urban scale. The mosque management do have the proper and effective programs and facilities that can influence and encourage the non-Muslims to interact with the Muslim society. The non-Muslim community do not seem to be treating the mosque as a hostile entity. This research is important for future mosque designers and committee to consider the mosque as a generator of community harmony.

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