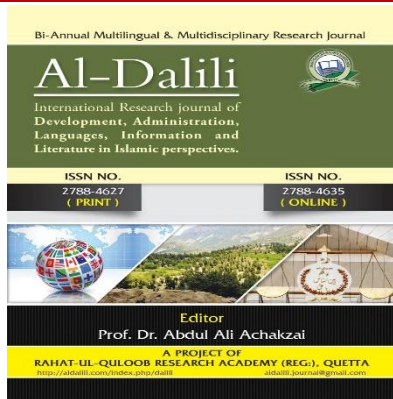




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TOPIC

Dignity of Mosques: A Review Based on Quran and Hadith

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Dignity of Mosques: A Review Based on Quran and Hadith

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ABSTRACT:

Every religion has its own rituals and symbols. Similarly, Mosque is an important ritual of Islam. There are several verses of Holy Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding the position and status of mosques. In past, it was the great contribution of mosques that apart from daily prayers these mosques groomed the personality of Muslim and created a brilliant impact on the society. But nowadays we are not gaining as much as one can gain from these institutions in the past. It is time revise the purpose of mosque in the society instead of locking the mosques after payers. Because mosques are not for prayers only but to groom the personalities. This is a review paper based on the core teachings of Islam on the position and status of mosques for Muslims.

Keywords: dignity, respect, honor, Masjid, Madrassah, Islamic center, Baitullah, society, religious seminary, Holy Kaaba

1. INTRODUCTION

The English word mosque derives from the Arabic word ‘Masjid’ by way French, Italian and Spanish.¹ Literally, ‘masjid’ means a place of prostration to Allah. Muslims prefer to perform daily prayers, Eid prayers, Friday prayers etc. in the mosque rather than other places. A mosque is not only a place for daily prayers but a place to learn and discuss Islam, the complete code of life. Unlike other religious seminaries, Mosques are much more than any religious outlet² and play an important role in the lives of Muslims. In fact, the mosque is the focal point of discourse for the political, social, cultural and ritual life.³

Since the beginning of Islam, the institution of mosque has been playing a central role in establishing, developing and flourishing Muslim communities. Scholars all over the world in a wide range of time have unanimously agreed that the significance of mosque in the life of Muslims are undeniable.⁴ Although the current scenario of mosques is not much more effective. In order to bring the Masjid to limelight of the 21st century, there is a dire need for better coordination and organized efforts from Islamic workers and professionals.⁵ There are several verses of Holy Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding the position and status of mosques. We need to revise these teachings of Islam because the honor and respect of mosques is obligatory for Muslims and by ignoring these facts, we are not getting the blessings of mosque in our society. It is the duty of every Islamic State to build mosques all over the world to shape righteous generation.⁶

Mosques are the religious centers for the Muslims and are important for them in many aspects. Such as for worship, various gatherings specially on account Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, I’tikaf in the month of Ramazan, and educational purposes, and to discuss the overall issues and matter either these are related to the individuals or society. Mosques also serve as a center for teaching and memorizing the Holy Quran. Even in

the early Muslim period. Mosques have also been used for meetings and discussions with delegations and to distribute charity or Zakat among deserving people. Such practices are rare now. The first Muslim universities have also sprung from mosques. In addition, Islamic architecture has developed mainly from the construction of mosque.

2. SOME EMINENT MOSQUES AROUND THE WORLD

2.1 Masjid-ul-Haram

The historically, the first ever mosque build was Masjid-ul-Haram, Almighty Allah in Holy Quran says: 'Surely the first House 'of worship' established for humanity is the one at Bakkah—a blessed sanctuary and a guide for 'all' people.'⁷ Similarly, following saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) states that Kaaba⁸ is the first mosque on Earth: Hazrat Abu Dharr (may Allah bless him) reported: I said: Messenger of Allah, which mosque was set up first on the earth? He said: Al-Masjid al-Haram (the sacred). I (again) said: Then which next? He said: It was the Masjid Aqsa. I (again) said: How long the space of time (between their setting up)? He (the Holy Prophet) said: It was forty years. And whenever the time comes for prayer, pray there, for that is a mosque; and in the hadith transmitted by Abu Kamil (the words are):" Whenever time comes for prayer, pray, for that is a mosque (for you)."⁹

This house (mosque) is called as Masjid-ul-Haram, is the oldest and the largest mosque in the world. Masjid-ul-Haram surrounds the Kaaba, a place where Muslims throughout the world turn while pray. Even before the advent of Islam, Holy Kaaba was honored by all the Arabians without any discrimination of religion or ethnicity. Those who were the custodians of Kaaba proudly serve the visitors of Baitullah, no matter who are and from where they belong.

Regarding the very first construction of the Kaaba that who has constructed it, there are two different opinions. One is, it was firstly constructed by Hazrat Ibrahim and his son Hazrat Ismail (may Allah bless them). Another narration is, Hazrat Adam (may Allah bless him) was the first one to construct the Kaaba. Let's consider relevant three verses of Holy Quran to clarify this matter. First one is:

إِنَّا أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِلْعَالَمِينَ¹⁰

'Surely the first House 'of worship' established for humanity is the one at Bakkah—a blessed sanctuary and a guide for 'all' people.'

The second verse says:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ¹¹

'Our Lord, I have settled some of my posterity in an uncultivable valley near unto Thy holy House.'

And the third one is:

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ¹²

'When Ibrahim and (his son) Ismail were raising the foundations of the House.'

The above-mentioned first verse has a word بَكَّةَ (Bakkah), as the firstly built house for people to worship, means the very first Qiblah for the believers. Bakkah is acknowledged

name of Makkah and is mentioned in several ancient documents and inscriptions.¹³ Many of the translators have also mentioned Bakkah as Makkah in translating the above verse of Holy Quran. Now the main point is, if Bakkah is the very first holy place for people on earth then it might be constructed before the prophecy of Hazrat Ibrahim (may Allah bless him). Because many prophets and their nations have passed away before the prophecy of Hazrat Ibrahim (may Allah bless him) and they all worshiped Allah. Hence, there is a strong possibility that the place mentioned here was built before the arrival of Hazrat Ibrahim (may Allah bless him). Similarly, the second verse is related to an event when Hazrat Ibrahim has settled his wife and son in Makkah by the command of Allah Almighty. And Hazrat Ibrahim (may Allah bless him) mentions this place as 'بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ' (means your holy house). At this time his son, named Hazrat Ismail (may Allah bless him), was a child and the saying is before the construction of Kaaba by Hazrat Ibrahim and his son. Therefore, the second shows presence of a holy house in Makkah (that is Kaaba). Finally, the third verse is very clear regarding the presence of Kaaba before it was built by Hazrat Ibrahim and Hazrat Ismail (may Allah bless them). As it says, 'Ibrahim and (his son) Ismail were raising the foundations of the House.' Raising the foundation of any house means it was present earlier. Therefore, Kaaba is the oldest worship place and Masjid-ul-Haram is the eldest mosque in the world.

2.2 Masjid-e-Aqsa

Masjid-e-Aqsa or al-Aqsa Mosque is another holiest mosque in the world. It is considered as the second oldest mosque of the world and lies in al-Qudus also known as Bait-ul-Muqaddas or Jerusalem. This area is of approximately 145000 square meters¹⁴ and to some extent a rectangular structure. The site has been used as a religious site for thousands of years. The traditions regarding its sanctity are present in Judaism, Christianity, Roman Emperor and Islam. At present, there are three Umayyad monuments at this place, one of them is al-Aqsa mosque another very famous the dome of the rock and dome of the chain.

At the advent of Islam Bait-ul-Muqaddas was the Qiblah for the Jews while the Kaaba for the polytheists in Arab. During prayers, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to face towards al-Aqsa as Qiblah then after Allah almighty revealed a verse, saying:

فَدَنَرَىٰ تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ ۚ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ¹⁵

'Indeed, We see you 'O Prophet' turning your face towards heaven. Now We will make you turn towards a direction 'of prayer' that will please you. So turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque 'in Mecca'—wherever you are, turn your faces towards it. Those who were given the Scripture certainly know this to be the truth from their Lord. And Allah is never unaware of what they do.'

It is narrated that *the Kaaba has been Qiblah for the Muslim Ummah from the very beginning. It was Qiblah when Adam (peace be upon him) built it and also when*

Ibrahim (peace be upon him) built it. But when Sulaiman (peace be upon him) built his Temple (Hekal-e-Sulaimani) the Ark of the Convent (Taboot-e-Sakina) was placed on the rock and Bani Israel started to face it during their prayers which gradually became their Qiblah.¹⁶

It is the honor of Bait-ul-Muqaddas that it is sacred to both Muslims and Jews, and also for al-Aqsa mosque that it is located in this holy premises. Similarly, the mention of its name in Quran also dignifies this mosque. The revealed words are as follows:

سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنَ الْأَيْمَنِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ

السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ¹⁷

Glory be to the One Who took His servant 'Muhammad' by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs.1 Indeed, He2 alone is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing.'

2.3 Masjid-e-Nabawi

Masjid-e-Nabawi or the mosque of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the holiest mosque for Muslims after Masjid-ul-Haram and very first mosque of a Muslim state. The construction on this mosque was started by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on the 18th of Rabi-ul-Awwal, 1 AH¹⁸ (622 AD). This mosque is the first place in the Arabian Peninsula to be lit using electric-light bulb in 1327 AH (1909).¹⁹

This mosque was constructed on the land belongs to two brothers (Sahal and Sohail), who were willing to grant the land for mosque without any payment but the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) purchased the land. The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) asked his companion, Hazrat Abu Bakar (may Allah be pleased with him), to pay the amount. After payment the construction was started and the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself participated in this construction as labor. Originally stone foundations were used for construction and mud walls were built. The trunks and branches of palm trees were used for roofing. Hazrat Bilal bin Rabah (may Allah be pleased with him) was the first Muazzin²⁰ there and he is called as Prophet's Muazzin. Muazzin is an Arabic word which is used for the person who calls people for prayer). It is narrated in Sunan Abi Dawud that there was no other Muazzin of the Messenger of Allah except Bilal.²¹

There are several virtues of Prophet's mosques. Such as, offer a prayer in Masjid-e-Nabawi is better than a thousand prayers in any other Masjid except in Kaaba (Masjid-ul-Haram).²² Further, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) forbade the Muslims to set any journey (with the intention of reward) except for three mosques. There are (i) Masjid-ul-Haram, (ii) Masjid-e-Nabawi and (iii) Masjid-e-Aqsa.²³ Once the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) told his companions that 'between my house and my pulpit (mimbar) is one of the meadows of the Garden'²⁴

Today, more than 1400-year-old mosque has expanded beyond the boundaries of the ancient city of Medina, and the entire area that bears witness to the early days of Islam has now become part of it. During the reign of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz

of Saudi Arabia, the largest expansion project was launched, which is still nearing completion. It is said that after the completion of this plan, the mosque will become a destination for millions of devotees every year and will be able to accommodate 1.8 million people at a time.²⁵

3. IMPORTANCE OF MOSQUES IN ISLAM

Mosques are the holiest constructions on earth. There are several verses in Holy Quran regarding mosques. In Holy Quran, the word Masjid is mentioned 28 times as a singular and plural noun. Similarly, there are several sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), show dignity and respect of mosques. Following are some Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to clarify the position and status of mosques for the Muslim communities.

3.1 Dignity of Mosques Expressed in Quran:

Almighty Allah reveals the dignity of Masjid-ul-Haram in following words:

فَلَنُؤَيِّدَنَّكَ قِبْلَتَكَ تَرْضَاهَا قَوْلٌ وَجْهَتَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ²⁶

Surely, We shall turn you to a Qiblah (prayer direction) that shall please you, so turn your face in the direction of Al-Masjid-al-Harâm (at Makkah).

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ قَوْلٌ وَجْهَتَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ²⁷

and from wheresoever you start forth (for prayers), turn your face in the direction of Al-Masjid-Al-Harâm (at Makkah).

Mosques have a special status due to the special relationship with Allah and being center of worship. In a verse Almighty Allah states His relationship with mosques as:

وَأَنَّ الْمَسْجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا²⁸

And the mosques are for Allah (Alone): so invoke not anyone along with Allah.

Almighty Allah pleases with those who maintain the mosques and mark them in the list of those who are rightly guided people. Holy Quran says:

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَن يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ²⁹

He only shall tend Allah's sanctuaries who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due and feareth none save Allah. For such (only) is it possible that they can be of the rightly guided.

Mosque is a public place which does not requires permission for entry.³⁰ As Almighty Allah expressed His anger towards those who prevent people from coming to the mosque by saying:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَىٰ فِي خَرَابِهَا³¹

Who is more iniquitous than he who bars Allah's places of worship, that His name be mentioned there, and seeks their destruction?

3.2 Mosques and Sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

When Allah Almighty commanded the Prophet to emigrate, before he reached Madinah, Allah's Prophet laid the foundation stone of Qaba Masjid. Considering the

importance of mosques for Muslims, after reaching Madina Munawara, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) put his efforts in building a mosque instead of planning any settlement for his family. Through this construction of Masjid-e-Nabwi the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) conveyed the message that for Muslims building a mosque is more important than houses. For the same, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) motivated his followers by saying: Narrated by Jabir bin 'Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him), "Whoever builds a mosque for the sake of Allah, like a sparrow's nest for Allah or even smaller, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise."³² Similarly, Hazrat Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) narrates, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ordered that the mosques be built in residential districts and that it be cleaned and perfumed. [Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and at-Tirmidhi. The latter considered it Mursal [missing link in the chain after the Tabi'i (student of a Companion)]].³³

Mosques are the houses of Allah and they should be looked after and kept clean. It was narrated from Hazrat Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) ordered that a mosque be built in a residential district and that it be cleaned and perfumed. (Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah transmitted it.)³⁴ Hazrat Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: 'Spitting in the Masjid is a sin, and its expiation is to bury it.'³⁵ It is necessary to keep the mosques neat and clean, however, they should not be extravagantly beautified with that which will distract those who come to pray.³⁶ Such as narrated by Hazrat Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him): I was not commanded to build high mosques. Ibn Abbas said: You will certainly adorn them as the Jews and Christians did.³⁷

Since mosques are for Almighty Allah, therefore, mosques are for prayers not for public announcements, "A man came making announcement of a lost camel in the Masjid, and the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'May you never find it!'"³⁸ Similarly, Amr bin Shu'aib narrated from his father, from his grandfather (Abdullah bin Amr Al-As), that: Allah's Messenger prohibited the recitation of poetry in the Masjid, and from selling and buying in it, and (he prohibited) the people from forming circles in it on Friday before the Salat.³⁹

There are several sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding the bounties of the mosques. Such as, Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "He who goes to the mosque in the morning or in the evening, Allah prepares for him a place in Jannah whenever he goes to the mosque in the morning and returns from it in the evening."⁴⁰ In another narration, Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) says that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "When a man goes out of his house to his Masjid, one-foot records a good deed and the other erases a bad deed."⁴¹

Sahl As-Sa'idi (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) say: 'Whoever is in the Masjid waiting for the prayer, he is in a state of prayer.'⁴²

Even Almighty Allah pleases with those who rarely visit the mosques. It was narrated from Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "A muslim does not regularly attend the mosques to perform prayer and remember Allah, but Allah feels happy with him just as the family of one who is absent feels happy when he comes back to them."⁴³ Even the disease does not affect those in the Masjid. Such as: "When disease descends from the sky, it is averted from the inhabitants of the Masjids."⁴⁴ Because 'the parts of land dearest to Allah are its mosques, and the parts most hateful to Allah are markets'.⁴⁵

The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) not only ordered his companions to construct a mosque but also stopped them from its demolition and even any destruction in mosque.

4. Precautionary measures for Mosques

The honor and dignity of mosques demands the Muslim to be very careful while built the mosque. The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when decided to built a mosque in Madina. He selects the location to build the mosque then inquires that whom does this piece of land belongs and after getting permission from the owners of the land he decided to built the mosque there. Although the owners were willing to offer this land free of cost for the construction of mosque but the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) refused and paid the amount of the land before its construction.

The earlier discussed three mosques are more important to all Muslims than any other mosque. An example of this is the construction of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. This mosque is an excellent example of Turkish-Islamic architecture and built in the early seventeenth century by the architect Muhammad Agha on the orders of the Ottoman Caliph Ahmed I.⁴⁶ This mosque is also known as the Blue Mosque because of the blue color of its exterior walls. This beautiful mosque was constructed with six minarets and when the Sultan came to know about it, he became angry. Actually, at that time there was only Masjid-ul-Haram with six minarets but since the construction of blue mosque was completed, so the Sultan ordered that a minaret be added to the Masjid-ul-Haram.⁴⁷ This event is the brilliant example for all the Muslims, the Sultan can ordered the reduction of a minaret form the Blue Mosque, but by ordering the addition of a minaret to the Masjid-ul-Haram, he maintained the sanctity of the Blue Mosque and the reverence of the Masjid al-Haram too.

5. CONCLUSION:

Participating in the construction and development of mosques, reorienting them, taking care of their hygiene and cleanliness is a reward. Indeed, it is an ongoing charity. While it is a great sin and a great punishment to demolish mosques, bother the worshipers or to prevent them from worshiping the Almighty Allah. In Islam it is not permissible create panic in the mosque or to attack a mosque. While those who serve the mosque will be rewarded by Almighty Allah. In order to create a better impact of mosques in the society, there is an urgent need for better coordination and concerted efforts by the Muslims, especially the professionals and custodians of the mosque.

Considering the position and status of mosques in Islam and our current trends, it is necessary to revise the real picture of image as it was in past, to gain Almighty Allah's pleasure and to avoid His wrath. Therefore, it is necessary to construct and develop the mosques with sincerity and devotion with halal earnings and legal ways. For this, along with common man, there must be the involvement of the rulers of the Muslim States, just like the involvement of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the construction of Masjid-e-Nabwi. Since the land for this mosque was purchased with proper payment it gives Muslims a clear message that one should not construct a mosque on any illegal or occupied space. Authorities are also responsible to take notice on such construction at the initial stage to avoid any mishap. However, if a mosque has been built and settled on any occupied land due to any negligence, then instead of demolishing the mosque the authorities should compensate one whose right has been lost. The example of Blue Mosque is also an example to counter such issues. The staff or custodian of the mosques must be well educated and meet the requirements of modern times. In order to restore the grandeur of mosques, leading scholars be assigned to serve the mosque. Those who can take care the mosques properly and maintain the neat and clean environment in the mosques where people do not come for daily prayers but to sort out several issues of their daily life.

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- ⁸ The building of Kaaba is in cubical shape, located at Masjid-al-Haram in Makkah, Saudi Arabia and is the most scared place in Islam.
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