

The Significance of Islamic Architecture; The Case of First mosque in Madinah & Contemporary Practices

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Abstract

Every architectural era defines the techniques of the building and practices of technology in the built environment. Every building typology encompasses the Users and functions. The mosque design needed to be in line with the religious concepts and it should represent Islamic teachings about the perception of Allah, man, life and death, and the eternal life after death. The first recorded structure being built in Islamic Architecture in Madinah is the city's central mosque i.e. The Prophet's Mosque¹. Functionality and simple Geometry is the basis and strength of Islamic architecture to formalize the required spaces through use of basic shapes and forms. Rectangles, circles & cubes are used to compose with each other and standardize the spaces. Taking the Prophet Mosque of Madinah as a source, this paper is focused on Architectural design issues and its impact on the built environment in Islamic architecture. The issues highlighted include the function-form relationship while the character of sustainability in general. Which are the basic themes and permanent Islamic architecture features. The other important things discussed here is to how these principles can be adopted in contemporary practice of architecture. Which are still valid in the field of architecture and indeed it would be tragic if these are forgotten by societies that invented, developed and practiced. A close analogy is terms of Islamic Architecture and Prophet is drawn in this paper.

Keywords: *Islamic Architecture, Hazrat Muhammad (SAW), built environment, mosque of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Sustainable design*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic architecture is more concerned with the Islamic content that in turn established the building character having a distinct identity. As there is present variety of solutions but the distinguishing character of Islamic architecture is that it had maintained the original feature and the surrounding context, use of construction material and weather conditions ².

Islamic architecture is created by combining the spiritual character of

Islam with the various needs of this physical world. It includes the permanency and temporal setting of this world. Which is the basis of the Islamic architecture. Which in turns made the total identity of the Islamic architecture throughout the whole history. Islamic architecture can be called as the functional architecture, having its basics more emphasized on the function rather than form.

It is basically the framework for the incorporation of the Islam in terms of facilitating the Muslims 'Ibadah'. Islamic architecture technically is the combination of the facilities along with the place of actualization of the Islamic message. Which is the exhibition of the Islamic culture and civilization at the same time. As quoted by Omar³ architecture is the representation of the heaven for the man's spirit, his soul and body by providing shelter. Architecture is the container for the lively matters.

A Muslim scholar Ibn Qutaybah, stated that just like the shirt should fit its owner, the house should also be in conjunction with the needs of the users. The users must fit the house in terms of both needs and aesthetics. In Islamic Architecture we considered the value of Privacy, Environment, Standard of living and Style, energy efficiency, use of materials, techniques, and adaptation with nature, way of life, function and simplicity as per standard of Muslims which is called principle of Islamic Architecture.

PROPHET MOSQUE IN MADINA

Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) was the last Prophet in Islam. He was sent for the preaching of the just message of Islamic Doctrine of monotheistic teachings. Muhammad (SAW) united the whole Arabs into a single unit of Muslim faith, Quranic Teachings and practices that form the basis of Islamic Religious beliefs. In the Year 622, prophet Muhammad (SAW) migrated along with his followers to Madinah (Yathirb) invited by a delegation comprising of twelve clan from Madinah and ask Him to act as an arbitrator for the entire community. There was a fighting between Arabs and Jewish inhabitants for centuries.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) after His arrival in Madina (Hijrah), constructed the mosque later called Prophet's mosque (Figure 1 & 2) which is the first of the intervention in the built environment of the Madinah. It was very simple in form having enclosure marked with mud bricks and an arcade for direction towards qiblah. The roofs were made of the palm leaves while supported by the palm- trunks. There were constructed three entrances in east, west and south directions. The north side was pointed towards qiblah awal (for one year and few months). There was no decoration at all. The

southern side was later bricked up and that of the northern side was pierced after the change of qiblah. Which is followed by the erection of arcade on the south side wall.

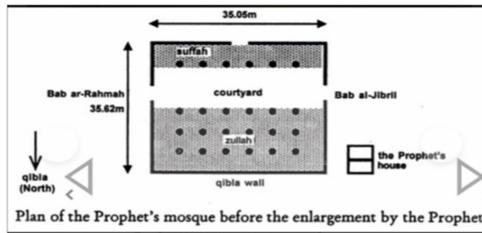


Figure 1: First Plan Madina



Figure 2: Model Madina Masque

As stated by most scholars; the Prophet Mosque can be described as below “Stone foundation having a depth of about 1.50 meter, followed by adobe, walls 75 cm wide were built. For shading the palms leaves were used as roofing materials supported by palm trunks and wooden cross beams”⁴. On the rear, a shade for the homeless was provided. The roof was 1.75 m height equal to a man’s height. The prophet mosque was used from its very first day as a community center.

As the notion of mosque were firstly used in the overall human history, its roles and the institution of mosques were also formalized with the construction of the Prophet’s mosque of Madinah. In Makki life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) the conceptual framework for the Muslim community and civilization is established. Whereas in the Madani life of Prophet (SAW) there was exhibited the physical manifestation of Islamic civilization and culture. As described by Allah (SWT) the mosque of QubÉ as below: “There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of thy standing forth (for prayer) therein. In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure”⁵.

At the beginning, the Prophet’s Mosque was very simple because its initial roles were simple, because the Muslim community in Madinah was in its infancy.

As the prophet mosque of Madinah was having a very simple and basic structure in the beginning but it was soon transformed in to a multifaceted and multifunctional complex. Its role to be used as a space to offer congregational prayer was not sustained and soon it begun to be used for various other social, political and religious functions as well. Now the mosque has been used to witness the functions of a madrassah, seat of Government, welfare center, and rehabilitation center for the prisoners, a treatment place for the patients and other leisure activities⁶.

The Prophet's mosque of Madinah was not only the central in position in religious aspirations and activities but also in physical location of the overall community as well. It was surrounded by the developments in terms of physical settlement. The overall city of Madinah has established the ring shaped (almost) having mosque complex in the center. So, it also hints us the role of the mosques in the Muslim community and its spatial position in the development of the future cities planning.

As the functions and events of the daily life were becoming most often and the users were not be accommodated in the present physical limits of the Prophet's mosque, especially in Friday Prayers. There comes the first expansion of the mosque after the conquest of Khaybar in 7th year after Hijrah. At first the mosque measured about 35 m by 35 m. After the enlargement, it measured about 50 m by 50 m. (Figure 3 & 4)

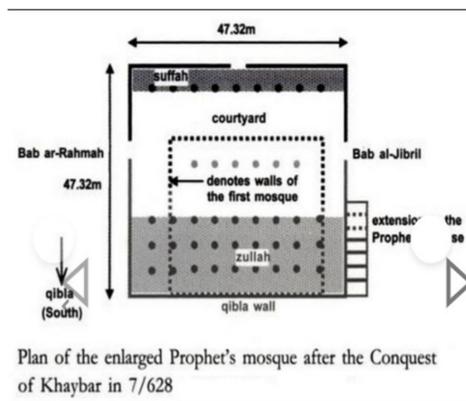


Figure 4: First Expansion by the Prophet

As the user's requirements, function and form makes the three inseparable components of the Islamic architecture. They support each other and one can't complete the overall image without the others presence and support. With the passage of the time the people's engagements and requirements increased which in turn call for the noteworthy improvements in the mosque's original proposed simple form. So, in the Prophet's time the mosque underwent transformation from the simple roofless and plain enclosed space to a complex multifunctional institution having a roofed area, paved surface outside one of its entrance, a minbar and a dukkah (seat) for clear communication. The lamps were used to lighting up the mosques in nights, several other compartmental spaces for the facilitation of the social interactions, and a person/ or person dedicated to the cleaning of the mosque. As the Prophet's Mosque was the center of gravity in the wide-ranging affairs of the ever-expanding Muslim community in Madinah. It acted as a container

The Significance of Islamic Architecture; The Case of First mosque in Madinah & Contemporary Practices for various communal activities such as education, politics, economy, security besides the Ibadah. It provided the plate-form to act as a headway to Islamic civilization.

If we study in detail the overall time period and construction stages of the Prophet's mosque, we will come to know that it is the microcosm of the Muslim society in Madinah clearly depicting the struggle and development throughout history. Thus, it would be appropriate to say that talking about the Prophet's Mosque during the time of the Prophet (SAW) is to talk about the people who instituted and then made the most of it. In the same way, to talk about the stages which the mosque institution went through during the Madinah period of the Prophet's mission is to talk about the stages which the Muslim community, and with it the Muslim mentality and spirituality, went through⁷.

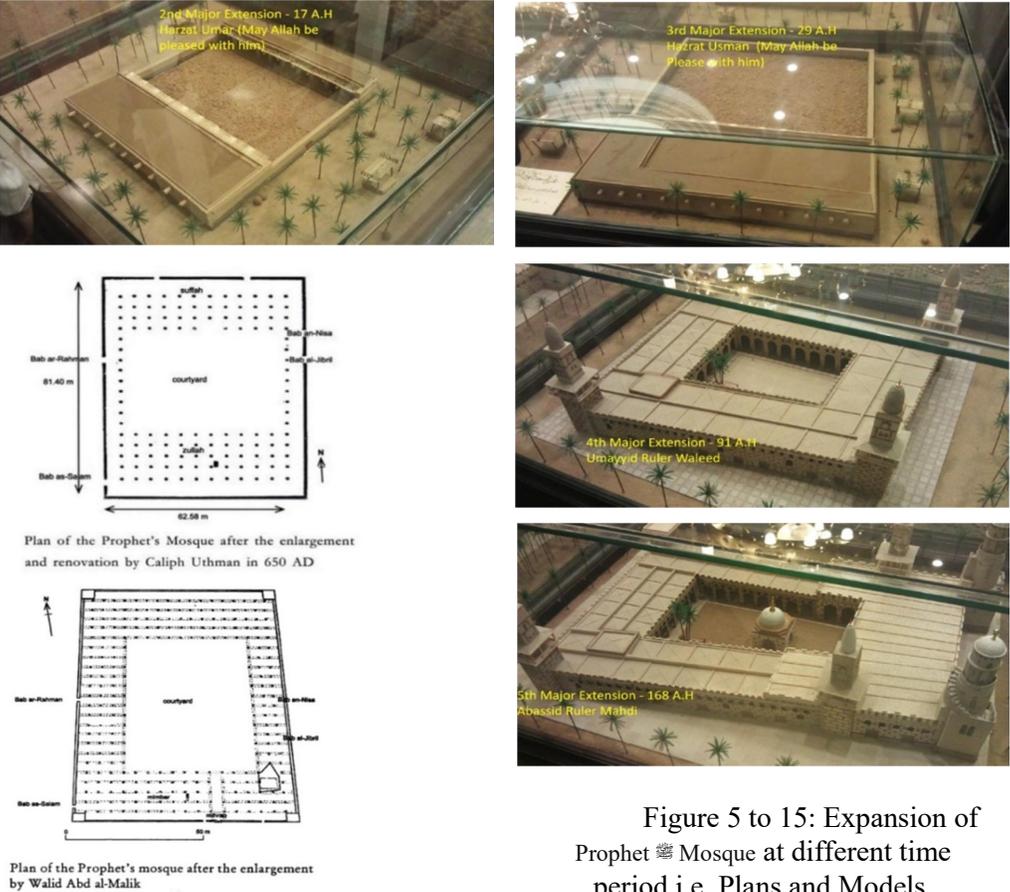


Figure 5 to 15: Expansion of Prophet ﷺ Mosque at different time period i.e. Plans and Models.

civilization of the world and co-existence with them was the need of that time. But in all this process the pure essence of Islam and its practicum was preserved symbolically by the Islamic Architecture. During this all time the deviation from its basic principles both at conceptual and technical plane, confronted at the hands of its stakeholders i.e. architects, master masons, patron or user was successfully weeded out. It was treated as most important matter for safeguarding of Islam and Muslims in general by getting safeguard the meaning, importance, and role of candid Islamic Architecture.

Conclusions:

Islamic Architecture is based on the sustainability i.e. how to follow the basic principle of Islamic development. It includes the social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability as demonstrated by the construction, development and expansion of the Prophet's (SAW) mosque of Madinah. It teaches us the basic structure of the Sustainability in terms of spaces, land-use pattern, wise use of available resources relevant to the nature and environmental conditions of the region with a close look on the economy of the users. Basis of sustainable Islamic architecture is Prophet's (SAW) mosque of Madinah at that time while the transformation has occurred later as per need and requirements of society discussed in this paper through various graphic representation of the expansions at various times. But as the urbanization has started the use of various materials are used due to rapid need of construction.

Recommendations:

1. It is still valid in Islamic architecture that to follow the principles laid out in the construction of Prophet's (SAW) mosque of Madinah.
2. Secondly, the principle of sustainability is advised in the construction of Prophet 's (SAW) mosque of Madinah that it should be followed in order to avoid the issues of social, economic and environmental degradation in future development.
3. Emerging technology can be incorporated in the Islamic architecture, but it should not be used on the price of sustainability.
4. If we review the overall process of evolution of the Islamic Architecture, we can make up to the point that it can accommodate the various contemporary challenges regarding the user needs, technological advancements and other needs. But the very serious working is needed to formulate the basic principles for design from detailed study, analysis of traditional approaches rather than just replicating it in present day scenarios (Hakim 1991).
5. The man-environmental studies and present-day requirements needed to be incorporated while getting the lessons from the

past and not just fulfilling the design brief.

6. The design in Islamic architecture needed to incorporate the user needs along-with the ideological framework of Islamic society in the light of the concepts from the evolution of Prophet's Mosque of Madina.

The concept of sustainability, functionality and respect for the nature as followed in earlier Construction of Prophet's Mosque should be followed.



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