

Character-Building Pillars in Society: Role of Mosque in Muslim Society

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ABSTRACT

The mosque stands as a foundational pillar within Muslim society, offering far more than a mere place of worship. Serving as a multifaceted institution, it plays a vital role in educating and mentoring individuals across various aspects of life. Beyond its primary function of facilitating religious rituals, the mosque serves as a communal hub, providing essential services to travelers, offering educational opportunities, assuming media roles, and delivering various community services. This paper delves into the pivotal role of the mosque as a character-building unit within Muslim society. Employing a qualitative research methodology, it explores this role by drawing upon Islamic history and exemplifying its significance through relevant role models. Through a comprehensive exploration of the mosque's multifaceted contributions, this study sheds light on its profound impact on the moral and ethical development of individuals within the Muslim community.

Introduction

Mosques hold immense significance in Islam, evident from their association with Allah Almighty Himself. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, prioritized the construction of a mosque immediately after his migration, highlighting their paramount importance. Mosques serve as vital centers for both individual and communal aspects of Muslim life. Various activities conducted within mosques, including Friday sermons, public lectures, congregational prayers, and educational programs, play a pivotal role in rectifying beliefs, enhancing acts of worship, refining conduct, and providing guidance and enlightenment to the community. Thus, mosques serve as crucial hubs for spiritual and social development within the Muslim community. (Islami, 2023)

The Quran mentions the term "mosque" 28 times, emphasizing its importance in Islamic

faith (Al-Tawbah 9:18). It highlights that believers who maintain Allah's mosques are those who establish prayer, give alms, and fear only Allah (Al-Tawbah 9:18). Similarly, another verse in Surah Al-Tawbah underscores the significance of those who frequent mosques as devout followers of the righteous path (Al-Tawbah 9:18). It advises adherents to adorn themselves for prayer while facing the mosque, cautioning against excess (Al-A'raf 7:31). Additionally, the Quran refers to the first house of worship in Makkah as blessed and universally guiding, symbolizing its sacredness for believers worldwide (Al-Imran 3:96).

Islam, the second-largest religion globally, boasts approximately 1.9 billion adherents who are commonly referred to as Muslims. Their place of worship, known as a mosque, derives its name from the Arabic word "masjid," signifying a location for prostration. Mosques are distinguished by their architectural

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intricacy and adorned with Islamic artistic elements like calligraphy, geometric motifs, and arabesque designs. Functionally, a mosque serves as the primary site for Islamic worship. The central area within a mosque, where worshippers congregate, is designated as the prayer hall. Adorned with ornate geometric patterns and floral motifs, the walls and windows create an aesthetically pleasing environment, while the floor is typically covered with intricately patterned carpets. A significant feature within the prayer hall is the mihrab, a niche set into one of the walls, indicating the qibla or direction towards Mecca for prayer. Additionally, each mosque is equipped with a minaret, a slender tower from which the call to prayer, or adhan, is made, summoning worshippers to prayer (Juliao, 2014).

The Quran has acknowledged the mosque and its position, and it rewards those who are engaged in building it. As stated in the Quran: "In houses which Allah has allowed to be raised, and His Name to be remembered therein. In the morning and evening, are men who exalt Him there, whom neither trade nor sale can divert from the remembrance of Allah, and establish the prayers, and pay the obligatory charity; fearing a Day when hearts and eyes shall be turned about." (An-Nur, 36-37). And Allah further says: 'The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day' (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:18). Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'The most beloved places to Allah are the mosques, and the most disliked places to Allah are the markets' (Sahih Muslim, Book 2, Hadith 671, p. 464).

Mosques serve as paramount centers for educating Muslims, as they foster values of brotherhood and equality. Within the mosque, Muslims gather in rows, standing shoulder to shoulder and praying behind a single Imam. Here, distinctions of servant and master, king and slave, rich and poor, scholar and common man fade away, as all individuals are considered equal before Allah, distinguished solely by their piety. Functioning as eminent Islamic institutions, mosques surpass all other societal organizations

and committees. They play a pivotal role in reforming human societies, offering a comprehensive platform for societal transformation. Through the activation of this venerable institution, mosques facilitate holistic Islamic education, cultivating individuals with exemplary character reflective of the attributes of Allah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the establishment of mosques and their crucial role in educating Islamic societies. Over time, it has become evident that mosques serve purposes beyond prayer; they unite the Muslim community, foster love and respect among Muslims, and create an environment of harmony, cooperation, and compassion.

Historical Perspectives

The mosque holds a paramount position within Islamic society, serving as its cornerstone. Upon reaching Medina, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, prioritized the construction of the inaugural mosque. However, its significance transcended mere worship; it emerged as a pivotal center for religious propagation, discourse, education, and societal guidance. From this sacred space, the Prophet conducted diplomatic negotiations with tribes and dispatched invitations to embrace Islam to rulers of neighboring kingdoms, addressing myriad social, political, economic, and communal affairs. Additionally, the mosque facilitated hospitality for guests, managed state finances, and organized military recruitment efforts. Notably, the Prophet himself led prayers within its walls (Ghazali, 2023). In subsequent epochs, the Rashidun Caliphs assumed multifaceted roles as heads of state, regional governors, and custodians of the mosque. However, with the evolution of governance from caliphate to monarchy, a new era unfolded marked by the emergence of the Court of Scholars. Despite the nominal retention of the caliphate title, this period witnessed a divergence from religious reformism and scholarly pursuits among courtiers.

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Nevertheless, the mosque persisted as a focal point of societal life and religious practice (Qasmi, 2022).

Muslims traditionally looked to the mosque for solutions to their social issues. Kings upheld the sanctity of mosques by constructing new ones, establishing guest houses, and appointing imams to oversee religious duties. They allocated properties to fund mosque expenses and ensured the appointment of qualified muezzins and imams. Educational systems were established within mosques, while the task of religious preaching and dissemination was predominantly carried out by Sufis, monks, reformers, and intellectuals of the community. Some schools were affiliated with mosques during this period. (Ghazali, 2023).

However, the status of mosques evolved over time, no longer retaining the prominence seen during the eras of the Prophet Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Mosques became primarily associated with worship and religious affairs. In Friday Eid sermons, the names of kings were recited along with prayers for their well-being, but this did not necessarily encourage a broader understanding of the mosque's role. Kings remained wary of potential conspiracies against their rule and closely monitored the activities of Sufis and monks, as their focus on spirituality and dhikr sometimes overshadowed broader religious teachings.

The strongest resistance against British colonial rule in India came from scholars like Ahmed Shaheed Barilwi, Rasheed Ahmad Dehlawi, and Rashid Ahmad Ganguhi, who engaged in armed conflict with the British forces in regions like Punjab and Shamli. Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan, Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, and numerous Deobandi scholars also protested vehemently against British oppression. Consequently, many scholars were executed by the British. Even revered scholars faced the risk of persecution if they continued to teach prayers, propagate religion, or discuss religious matters. In response, religious schools and institutions were established across the country, often funded by Muslim contributions, including blood money.

This emphasis on religious education led to a dichotomy where religious education was separated from worldly knowledge. Meanwhile, mosque imams transitioned into salaried positions, with the traditional criteria of piety, knowledge, and moral integrity giving way to political and administrative considerations.

Mosque committees typically comprised government officials and dignitaries, often lacking in religious education. Consequently, mosques were adorned with modern amenities but lacked spiritual depth. Imams were hired on a salary basis and provided with accommodation within the mosque, often insufficient for their needs. It was disheartening to witness imams relying on charity from households for sustenance. Attendance at mosques outside of Ramadan or Friday prayers was predominantly by the elderly, with children often relegated to the back rows. Some mosques operated Quranic teaching systems for children. Friday prayers at the Jama Masjid and Eid prayers at the Eidgah were significant communal gatherings, fostering social cohesion and camaraderie among worshippers. The mosque served as a hub for fostering brotherhood, equality, unity, sacrifice, and compassion, with practical arrangements for etiquette and social interaction. Non-Muslims also showed respect for those attending mosques or leading prayers, with some non-Muslim women even standing at mosque doors to care for children. Additionally, non-Muslims would respectfully pass by mosques or dargahs with folded hands.

Potential Role in Muslim-Majority Jurisdictions

The mosque serves as the focal point of the Muslim community, addressing various social, moral, and cultural dimensions:

Unity and Brotherhood: In mosques, Muslims of all backgrounds unite in worship, transcending distinctions of caste, color, and wealth, fostering a sense of shared brotherhood.

Social Awareness: Mosques facilitate discussions on societal issues, allowing

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congregants to address challenges such as poverty, injustice, and terrorism, fostering a collective awareness of community needs.

Character Development: Regular attendance at mosques cultivates moral virtues and character traits, instilling values of honesty, modesty, and sobriety, leading to societal upliftment.

Cultural Enrichment: Mosques embody Islamic culture through practices such as charity, modest attire, respectful greetings, and educational activities, preserving and promoting Islamic heritage.

Economic Hub: Historically, mosques have served as centers for collecting and distributing funds for charitable purposes like Jihad, Zakat, and Sadaqah, contributing to the economic welfare of the community.

Challenges and Potential Solutions

Ambitions that distort the role of the mosque often hide behind colorful veils, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes. These causes, which undermine or diminish the mosque's significance, can be categorized into two types: internal and external. Internal factors pertain to issues within the Muslim community that have compromised the essence, purpose, and primary message of the mosque. Sectarianism and religious factionalism have fractured the unity of the Muslim Ummah, leading to ideological conflicts and divisive narratives disseminated from pulpits and mihrabs. The negative influence of inadequately educated imams and preachers further exacerbates these tensions, as non-standard sermons and provocative rhetoric sow seeds of animosity and discord. Additionally, the commercialization of mosques, transforming them into revenue-generating assets, detracts from their spiritual sanctity and historical significance. Furthermore, a disconnect from the Arabic language, essential for understanding Islamic literature, undermines the mosque's role in promoting linguistic proficiency and cultural heritage. The amalgamation of mosques with

tombs dilutes their spiritual essence, replacing devotion to God with reverence for graves and superstitions. Moreover, materialism and worldly pursuits have permeated Muslim society, overshadowing spiritual values and diminishing the mosque's moral influence. Externally, adversaries of the mosque, such as certain Christian groups, have historically sought to undermine its prominence and centrality. The example of Masjid-e-Zarar, erected by hypocrites and renegade Christians to sow discord and dissent among believers, illustrates external threats to the mosque's integrity. This nefarious agenda aimed to foster disbelief, incite sectarian strife, and provide refuge for religious agitators disguised as devout worshippers. Such instances underscore the perpetual struggle to safeguard the sanctity and significance of the mosque against both internal and external challenges (Al-Tawbah 9:108).

After prayer times, mosques often remain empty, presenting an opportunity for utilizing these spaces for public welfare. They can be repurposed as schools, dispensaries, free medical centers, coaching centers, libraries, accommodations for travelers, and venues for weddings. In some countries, mosques are referred to as Islamic centers, serving as hubs for religious awareness, unity, brotherhood, and communication among Muslims. However, in India, women have been prohibited from visiting mosques since the 19th century, leading to their alienation from religious environments and a decline in religious consciousness among them. To address these issues and activate the social role of worship and mosques, imams should receive specialized training to guide Muslims collectively in social affairs.

In every society, the responsibility of fostering moral values and societal progress is shared by both individuals and leaders. Within Islamic society, this duty is underscored by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who emphasized the accountability of each person for their influence on others. The term "Imam," commonly associated with mosque leaders, signifies a position of leadership and

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responsibility that extends beyond religious duties alone. Imams play central roles in Islamic community centers, where mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as hubs for social, educational, and healthcare initiatives. In addition to addressing spiritual needs, Imams are charged with promoting social welfare, facilitating moral development, and organizing community support programs. However, the effectiveness of mosque leadership can be hindered by inadequate selection processes and a lack of emphasis on leadership skills. To fully harness the potential of mosques as centers of leadership, it is imperative to prioritize the appointment of qualified individuals who possess the requisite academic, practical, and leadership capabilities. By upholding the true essence of Imamah and fostering competent leadership within mosques, Islamic communities can better address contemporary societal challenges and promote holistic development. Additionally, the role of educators cannot be overstated in societal dynamics. Western influences have sought to diminish the status and role of educators within Islamic society through various tactics such as curriculum alterations and the promotion of commercialized education. Teachers often find themselves constrained by rigid syllabi, devoid of disciplinary authority, and subjected to criticism if they deviate from prescribed norms. Furthermore, the commodification of education has led to the appointment of inadequately qualified individuals as teachers, undermining the integrity of the profession. To confront these challenges, comprehensive teacher training programs are essential to cultivate capable educators capable of imparting values and knowledge effectively. The nurturing of children and youth is pivotal for societal reform, with teachers serving as key agents in shaping future generations into conscientious citizens and devout Muslims. Restoring the esteemed status of educators is imperative for the societal resurgence envisioned by visionaries like Iqbal. Without concerted efforts to empower teachers and revitalize educational systems, societal decline is inevitable. Conversely, a society that

values its teachers, revises educational curricula, and prioritizes moral education is poised for advancement. Religious leaders and educators wield significant influence in guiding society towards progress, as their words and guidance resonate deeply within the community, shaping attitudes and setting moral standards. (Musawar, 2024)

Daudi proposes transforming mosques into comprehensive community centers, advocating for various services beyond prayer. He suggests providing food aid, counseling for mental health, and dispute resolution. Additionally, mosques can offer assistance programs, donation centers, and spaces for social interaction and marriage ceremonies. In times of crises, mosques should lead relief efforts, and affiliated schools should offer diverse education. Establishing libraries and institutions for social issues is crucial. Daudi emphasizes fostering unity among Muslims, rotating imams from different schools of thought, and celebrating Eid together. He urges utilizing community talents for public welfare, lamenting the neglect of these traditional mosque roles and the resulting societal decline (Daudi, 2024).

Friday sermons serve multiple pivotal purposes: firstly, they aim to foster spiritual connection by reminding believers of Allah's presence, the importance of the Hereafter, and the values that uplift souls towards righteousness while discouraging wrongdoing. Secondly, they function as educational platforms, elucidating core tenets of Islam sourced from the Quran and the Prophet's teachings, emphasizing creedal integrity, sincere worship, and moral rectitude. Thirdly, these sermons counter misinformation about Islam, employing a judicious and persuasive approach to dispel doubts and fallacies, presenting the true essence of the faith and addressing societal challenges within the framework of Islamic principles. Additionally, they link religious discourse to contemporary issues, offer guidance on significant Islamic occasions, advocate for unity among Muslims, kindle the spirit of jihad to safeguard Islamic values, and underscore the pure devotion to Allah

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in sermon delivery, as exemplified in Quranic injunctions.

Conclusion

In summary, mosques serve as vital cultural hubs for Muslims, functioning as schools, universities, and centers of learning. They foster both basic and advanced education, nurturing a community of knowledge seekers. Grand mosques, resembling libraries, symbolize Muslims' reverence for knowledge, with scholars enriching them with valuable manuscripts. Vibrant educational circles within mosques depict a scene of scholarly enthusiasm, shaping societies at the peak of intellectual development. Pioneers like Abu Darda leave a lasting legacy, contributing to the intellectual fabric of their communities. In essence, mosques stand as beacons of enlightenment, guiding individuals on their quest for knowledge and spiritual growth.

Future Steps

Enhancing Educational Opportunities

Friday Sermons: Deliver impactful speeches during Friday sermons to engage congregants in meaningful discourse on religious beliefs, worship practices, and ethical conduct (Al-Tawbah, 9:108).

Quran and Hadith Lessons: Conduct classes on Quran recitation, memorization, and translation, following congregational prayers, led by trained instructors to deepen attendees' understanding of Islamic teachings.

Adult Education: Provide instruction in Islamic studies for adults, including the elderly and illiterate youth, to promote lifelong learning and spiritual growth.

Special Lectures and Competitions: Organize lectures on diverse topics and competitions in elocution, writing, and quizzes to foster intellectual engagement among youth and children.

Free Coaching Classes: Offer free coaching classes to underprivileged students,

supporting their academic and moral development and promoting equal access to education.

Expanding Welfare Initiatives

Ambulance Service and Free Dispensary: Establish ambulance services and free dispensaries within mosques to provide immediate medical assistance and healthcare access to the community.

Local Courts and Guest Accommodations: Set up local courts and guest accommodations to address legal matters and provide temporary shelter to those in need, reinforcing the mosque's role as a center for community welfare.

Creating Knowledge Hubs

Library Facilities: Establish well-equipped libraries within mosques, equipped with modern amenities like computers and internet access, to facilitate research on Islam and provide a serene environment for reading and study.

Innovative Practices

Reform Schools and Centers for the Elderly: Establish specialized institutions within mosques, such as reform schools for children and centers for the elderly, to address unique societal challenges and provide tailored support to diverse community members.

Community Engagement and Tailored Activities: Organize spiritual, material, and financial programs to actively engage Muslims and non-Muslims alike, fostering community spirit and inclusivity. Additionally, provide libraries stocked with literature on Islam, host large gatherings, and offer tailored activities for women, children, and the elderly to promote holistic development and social cohesion.

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