A Critical Review On Society’s Perception On The Usage Of Mosque

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ABSTRACT

The uses or functions of mosques in the modern era has significantly evolved through the years since the very first mosque ever was built by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The spread of Islam throughout the world results in the different adaptation or representation of Islam in terms of architecture and symbolism of the religion. The result of evolution of the uses and the architectural symbolism of the mosques creates a stereotypical thinking of current local societies of what mosques are all about. Back in the days, the mosque was a place for the local society to connect to one another, held religious activities and other activities related to the local community. The mosque of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) does not emphasize on the aesthetical values but emphasize more on the function and needs of the local society. Mosques in the modern era emphasizes more on the aesthetical values and grandness rather than the function and needs of the local society. The main objective of this research is to identify what are the dominant factors that affect the stereotypical thinking of local society towards the usage of the mosque and how does the aesthetic values give impacts to the thinking of the local society.

KEY WORDS: Function of mosque, Symbolism, Perception

INTRODUCTION

The word Mosque was derived from an Arabic word ‘masjid’. In the present architectural terminology, mosque is a building used by Muslims for activities related to praying. In the other hand, Arabic literature of ‘masjid’ refers to any place of worship in any religion. Throughout Islamic history, the mosque was the center of the community and towns formed around this pivotal building. Nowadays, especially in Muslim countries mosques are found on nearly every street corner, making it a simple matter for Muslims to attend the five daily prayers (Hillenbrand, R., 2004).

There are several types of mosques that distinguish one mosque to another. Through the years the mosque has developed into numerous kinds that can be classified into five types. The types are the mussola, the memorial mosques, the sacred mosques and community mosques (Frishman, M., et al., 2002).

History And Function of Mosque:

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) migrated to Madina in the year 622 and built a place for praying in Medina. Medina Mosque is considered as the first mosque of Islam to the most significantly renowned mosques in the history Islam (Frishman, M., et al., 2003). The Medina mosque served different kinds of functions and needs. The mosque comprises of accommodation of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself and his wives. Besides that, the mosque not only serve as praying area, but also for different purposes for the local society. Below are the functions of the mosque:
A place for Socialize:
The community used to have social connection in the mosque. It is reported that the Prophet (pbuh) used to ask about any companion whom he missed from the mosque for a day or two to help him or her if they need any help (Tajuddin, M., et al., 2010).

A place for Da’wah:
Several Hadiths proved that the mosque of the Prophet (pbuh) was the normal venue for those who would like to enquire more about Islam. Non muslims were also allowed to have discussions and debate regarding religion and other issues (Rasdi, M.T.H.M., 1998).

A place for Celebration:
Since the mosque is a place for all, the Prophet (pbuh) advises them to announce wedding ceremonies to be held inside the mosque (Omer, S., 2010).

A place for Meeting:
The Prophet (pbuh) used to gather his companions in the mosque to discuss serious matters and come about with a verdict and decisions right after the mosque was also a meeting place for soldiers of the Islamic army, which they start their march for wars and to which they return after they come back (Omer, S., 2010).

A place for Medical Care:
Before the Islamic civilization developed hospitals a couple of centuries later, the mosque of the Prophet (pbuh) was a place for care for the wounded in wars and similar cases (Mortada, H., 2003).

A place for Education:
The illiterate used to learn and write in the mosque of the Prophet (pbuh). Muslims developed their whole Islamic civilization based on education they obtained form the mosque (Asif, N., et al., 2015).

Medina mosque was solely a centre for Muslim people during that period of time. It was a one stop place for the society at the time and the place was an essential part of their daily lives.

Common Architectural Expression of Mosques In Malaysia:
Minaret:
Among the most distinctive sights in any Islamic city and Malaysia are the minarets. It’s tall slender towers attached to the city’s mosques from which muezzins call the faithful to prayer five times a day. The main function of the minarets is to provide a vantage point from which the call to prayer or adhan is made. In Malaysia most of its mosque has this element to express the essential elements of ‘islamic’ architecture (Utaberta, N., et al., 2015).

Dome:
Most mosques feature one or more domes, called qubba in Arabic. A dome possess a significance within the mosque as a symbolic representation of the vault to heaven. Commonly in Malaysia, almost all mosques built consist of this architectural characteristics (Hillenbrand, R., 2004).
Mihrab:

Mihrab is an essential element of a mosque. It is a niche in the wall that indicate the direction of Mecca which is a direction of all Muslims pray. No matter where the location of the mosque, the direction is still the same. Mihrab is a relatively shallow niche. Different countries has different approach of the mihrab design [1]⁠

How Symbols of Architecture Give Impacts To Stereotypical Thinking Of Local Societies:

Architectural elements of the mosques give impacts on the mind of the society. For example, since the use of Middle Eastern architectural elements of mosques had been applied commonly in mosque architecture in Malaysia (minaret, dome, etc.), the society perceived that if those kind of architectural elements are present, it indicates that it is a praying space for Muslims. In fact, the mosque itself is a multipurpose community center like what Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did during the period of the first mosque to ever built (Rasdi, M.T.H.M. and N. Utaberta, 2010). The question is how to eradicate such thinking and nurture the society that mosque is a community center like back in the days.

On the other hand, non-architectural elements also contribute to the factors of an inclined thinking of mosques. The dominant activity of the mosque is the performance of daily prayers. The mosque also acts as a vital education center for the formal teaching of religious education, a center for administration for mosque officials, debates between Muslims and non Muslims and also for religious celebration for Muslims in particular (Omer, S., 2013) It is obviously seen that mosques mainly serve for daily prayers for Muslims. Besides that, it is a place for Muslim male to gather for weekly Friday prayers. Therefore these common factors contribute to the inclined thinking of how Malaysians in particular perceive of what mosques are all about.

With all those architectural and non-architectural factors combined, it is an essential factor that contribute to the stereotypical thinking.

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, architectural representation of a mosque give significant impact to the thinking of the local society. There are a specific relationship between the evolution of the uses of the mosque through the years and the aesthetic values of the mosque. The comparison of mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) era and the modern mosques were utterly contemplated. The mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) era does not emphasize on the aesthetic values while the modern mosque does emphasize on aesthetic values rather than the needs of the local societies and the function of the mosque itself. As a result, there is a stigma of the society of what a mosque should look like instead of what it should be like in terms of the function, accessibility and the needs in the local society. Therefore, the function of the mosque must be utilized fully like what Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did during his time and must be on par with the current focus on the aesthetics perspectives.
REFERENCES


