

# THE ROLE OF MOSQUE IN ISLAM

By  
*Prof. Muhammad Rafi*

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In 1970 a seminar was held in Jeddah under the auspices of a cultural organization Nadi Al-Bahr-ul-Ahmar. It was presided by Prince Ahmed Bin Abdul Aziz. In the seminar an important paper was presented by the well known religious scholar Shaikh Muhammad Al-Muntasir Al-Kitani on the role of mosques in Islamic society. It makes interesting and thought provoking reading. The Shaikh traced the importance of mosques through well documented research work, and lamented the present day restriction of mosques to only rituals of Namaz, Aitkaaf and Tilawat. He pointed out that the important role played by mosques had been forgotten, rather deliberately ignored when Islamic governance changed to monarchy. The paper highlighted the following functions of the mosque in the early period of Islam.

1. Apart from the Jumma congregation, the Muslims used to assemble in the mosque in difficult times and sorted out the issues confronting them.
2. The mosque was like a university to the grown ups who acquired and imparted education and knowledge.
3. For the children, it provided elementary education where they were taught to read and write.
4. Literary gatherings and discussions were held in it.
5. Seminars were held to promote intellectual activities.
6. The Qaziz set up their courts to impart justice.
7. Sometimes the criminals and convicts were placed in custody.
8. It provided accommodation to the poor, needy, homeless and travelers.
9. Food was distributed among the poor and hungry.
10. At times it was also used as the state guest house.
11. it was also used as hospital for the sick.
12. Marriages were held in the mosque.
13. It was also the state armory where weapons were made and stored.
14. The "Baitul Mall" was also in it from where salaries were disbursed.
15. Any other matter of importance was discussed and resolved in it.

(Details of the paper are available in "Akhbar Al Alam Al Islami" dated 17 Ramazan 1395 Hijri  
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Prince Ahmed Bin Abdul Aziz was so impressed with the outcome of the seminar that he decided to hold an international conference on the subject. On his insistence the Rabita Al Alam Al Islami organized an International Islamic Conference on "Motamar Risaalat-ul-Masjid" from 15 to 20 Ramazan 1395 in Makkah. Delegates from all Muslim countries and many non Muslim countries participated. The conference was inaugurated by King Khalid. The conference re-emphasized the importance of the views expressed by Shaikh Al Kitani and appreciated the authentic references and suggestions given by him.

The Motamar must have published the deliberations of the conference which must be publicized in Pakistan and abroad for the benefit of Muslims who are in the habit of hurrying up and down the mosque stairs without having a faint idea and understanding of its true social and national importance.

our mosques are usually restricted to sects which propagate their views against other sects. The Imam considers the mosque his personal property and exploits the illiterate "Namazis" to his benefit. He forbids any kind of meeting or discussion in the mosque although you will find him in the company of his friends planning the next move against the other sects. The Quran tells the Nabi "As for those who divide their Deen and break up into sects, thou hast no part with them" (6:159).

The house of Allah has been relegated to the position of the house of rituals and worship only. Despite the fact that mosques are equipped with loud speakers, the imams are usually found shouting at their peak. The ignorant masses are given to understand that they have performed their obligations as Muslims by only "reading the namaz" and not establishing the "Salat". We have forgotten that "Ibadat" is not worship; it is much more. It is the endeavour to establish the total authority of Allah as directed in the Quran "The Divine laws given to mankind as well as to the physical world are immutable" (6:34). Ibadat is around the clock system which can be rightly propagated through the mosques.

One wonders why the real objective of the social importance of mosques has been relegated to its present stagnant position. The answer lies in the nefarious designs of our "high priests" who, in league with the ruling clique, have always exploited religion for personal benefits.

Let us examine the points realized by Shaikh Al-Kitani:

1-2 Today we are ignorant of the problems and sufferings of our neighbors because of lack of social inter-action and careless attitude. The mosque is the only place in the neighborhood or "Mohalla" where people of the locality assemble in small numbers daily and in big numbers on Fridays. The "Namazis" are in the habit of leaving the mosque as soon as possible after the rituals, little bothering to inquire about each other's welfare which is a basic Islamic value.



When the people deliberately keep themselves ignorant of social problems; how can they strive to solve them or at least be a part of the system which would resolve these problems. Most of the copies of the Quran available in mosques have no translation. It is read by people without comprehension. We are given to believe that more recitation of Quran will bring rewards (Sawab). It is not taken seriously as a book of knowledge and guidance. When we go to the market and buy a television, VCR, computer or juicer, we are unable to operate them unless we read the accompanying book of instructions. A mere reading of the book without understanding it will result in wrong handling of equipment and the eventual result will definitely be disastrous. Similarly the Book of Allah has to be understood and only then it can be effectively applied in our lives. The Quran is a "do it yourself kit" which instructs and guides us on the various aspects of our lives. If we follow them in the right spirit the results would be positive, beneficial and rewarding, otherwise not.

"Those people who do good and beautiful deeds then their world (present life) becomes good and beautiful. And together with the present their future also becomes luminous (30:10)

In this context the mosque can play a very important role. There are two important persons in each mosque. The imam who is chosen for moral excellence and knowledge of the Quran and leads the prayers and usually teaches Quran to the children of the locality; and the 'Muazzin' who calls the faithful to prayers. They can help in achieving the above goals. Islam has provided a golden opportunity to Muslims to remain united, sort out their problems, extend the social bond of cooperation and brotherhood through mosques. We do not need community and welfare centers and homes for the destitute if the institution of mosque is properly utilized. This should be for all members of the society irrespective of their religion.

'Allah created mankind as one community, but then they created differences (2:213, 10:19, 49:13)

Today no one is allowed to ponder over the laws of Allah. The Maulvi forbids the illiterate masses and even the educated ones to understand Islam through him. This is a total negation of human capabilities and intelligence and is like putting a seal on man's thirst for knowledge and the initiative to be a better human being. In such circumstances how can the mosque be a house of knowledge and education. The Quran emphasizes:

'Through knowledge man reaches the right conclusion' (28:80)

'Quran explains in detail in Arabic for people with knowledge and understanding' (6:105)

'Matters are made clear to those who have knowledge' (6:105)



Prof. Ziauddin Ahmed in 'Islam Universal Religion' has referred to the lectures which were delivered in mosques by eminent scholars. Nicholas Berdyaev in 'destiny of man' asserts that no society can call itself free unless it provides conditions conducive to the development of human personality. Muslims are required to think and contemplate about the universe, human beings and the laws of Allah. Eventually these laws have to be applied in our lives for a better present and future.

'In this way Allah shows His signs openly and clearly so that you think and contemplate on present & the future' (2:219-220).

The people who do not seek knowledge and ponder are called 'Blind' by the Quran and cannot be equal to the knowledge seekers (6:50).

3. Children are no doubt taught elementary Arabic and Quran in the mosques, but that is all. Their immature minds are programmed to detest all sources of modern knowledge like television, VCR, radio etc. Consequently they grow up hating modern knowledge and stick to the old and medieval values which are of no significance in the evolution of mankind towards a better tomorrow.

'An individual (or a people) who looks forward towards the future and puts in the necessary effort and is convinced of the permanent values as enjoined by Allah; then this effort will bear full fruit' (17:19)

4-5. Literary gatherings, discussions and seminars are never held in mosques. In fact the religious bigots with a vast following have permanently impeded exposition of knowledge to serve their ulterior motive. In a country like Pakistan where the literacy rate is so low the religious leaders have found it easy to negate all channels of knowledge, foresightedness and progress as per laws of Allah so vehemently emphasized in the Quran. Consequently we have masses who 'Have minds wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not. They are like cattle, nay more confused, for they are neglectful' (7:179).

Seminars and discussions involve educated & knowledgeable people who are the best source of enlightenment. Such gatherings not only guide us, but also arouse our curiosity to study, understand and apply the laws of Allah in our lives. The Muslim is at least united on the fact that Quran is the book of Allah. A changed atmosphere in the mosque would be totally unacceptable to these at the helm of religious affairs as they would have to take the back seat. Moreover, if the masses are enlightened directly, their authority and exploitation would be curtailed.

6-7. With the rapid population explosion and complexity of law it will not be possible to hold all litigations in mosques.

However matters involving neighborhood problems can still be disposed off in mosques. But the Qazis or judges deliberating such issues should be of good character



and known for their honesty, integrity and sense of justice. Community based courts do function in the counties of Europe and America. It makes justice accessible to the common man.

'Do justice because by doing so you act according to the Divine laws' (5:8)

Today the concept of justice in small matters is almost non-existent in our society. The common man does not know whom to approach and how to secure his social rights. Thus he prefers to forego so many of his rights which makes it more convenient for violators of law to thrive in society and continue their un-Islamic practices unabated.

8-9-10. The biggest test of a society is its treatment of the poor, needy, hungry and shelterless. Although all human beings are equal, yet some enjoy the bounties of nature and life more than the others. Islam is against concentration of wealth in a few hands. It directs such people to ensure an equitable distribution of Allah's gifts.

'And in their wealth & possession is the right of those who possess less than what they need and those who are unable to earn' (51:19)

The mosque can be the center for helping the poor & needy. Such a use of the mosque would make the welfare centers redundant and enhance the importance of mosque in society. This was the practice in the early era of Islam and must now be revived.

The way-farers or travelers usually have to face many problems in a new city and environment. The administrators of mosques should see to it that their difficulties are removed and if need be they should be provided accommodation in the mosque till such time they can make better arrangements.

'And do good to parents... and the way-farers (who are needy) (4:36)

'And render to the kindred their due rights as also those in want and to the way-farer' (17:26).

Nowadays we do not see such social practices. The way-farer's religion is of no importance, but the non-Muslims are not even allowed to enter mosques as the imams consider mosques as their personal property & rightful domain.

11. The mosque can help in guiding patients and minor ailments can be treated by dedicated doctors during a specified time of the week or day. Vaccinations can also be provided in mosques.

12. Marriages are still held in some mosques; but it is a practice in vogue. People would have to come out of the influence of Hindu customs & traditions and make it a point to assemble in mosques for marriages. We do not consider social customs to have any connection with Islam; we make such things dependent on our personal



convenience and liking or on prevalent cultural standards or on the exigencies of the day. Nowadays marriages are remembered for their pomp and show and the money spent extravagantly on them. This is in violation of Allah's directives: 'Eat & drink but waste not by excess' (2:31).

When marriages can be held in mosques why not other social functions; but then the mosques would have to be opened up to the people not as place of worship but a center of fulfilling and understanding the social needs. It would eventually be a place where the sole authority of the imam will disappear (as it exists today) instead the people would join each other in their efforts to share social responsibilities, duties and obligations.

13-14. In the present day circumstances it would be difficult to use the mosque as armory or for production of arms & ammunition. For this purpose ordnance factories have been built. Similarly the disbursement of salaries and management of state accounts require vast paper work and administrative set up for which provincial and federal offices have been built.

15. All matters of economic, social and political importance should be discussed threadbare in mosques and a proper resolution be adopted in light of Allah's directives. These directives are available to everyone in the Quran.

Mosques can regain their rightful place in society, but for that they would have to be taken out of the steel grip of the Mullahs & Imams. The so called guardians and judges of what is right and what is wrong are respected in our society as Aalim-e-Deen and have completely monopolized mosques and our religious and social customs. In the Quranic sense the Aalim is similar to a scientist. A true Aalim understands the laws of nature as evident in the universe and submits in fear to the authority of Allah (35:27-28) and he is the one who understands the parables set forth for the mankind (29:43).

Throughout history the so called Ulema have had the upper hand in society and state. They have collaborated with rulers to serve their selfish motives and have been largely responsible for disintegration of human relationships and retardation of social values. In the present century we find only two leaders standing up to them. Mustafa Kamal of Turkey and Gamal Nasser of Egypt understood the destructive nature of the Ulema's undue, selfish and un-Islamic interference in state and religious affairs. They were completely banished from authority. These Ulema were responsible for the dismemberment of the mighty ottoman Empire and supporting Shah Farooq in Egypt. But the secular nature of these two countries does not reflect Islamic values. Even then these two countries have become developing ones with their emphasis on knowledge and education. Mosques in these countries are under state control and cannot be exploited by the so called Ulema.



The role of the mosque needs a thorough study and redefinition. It can definitely play an important role in the welfare of Islami society. Perhaps a conference similar to the one held in Makkah a long time ago can bring out more details about the true nature of mosques in an Islamic society.

The article was inspired by an earlier article on the subject in the 'Tolu-e-Islam' of Feb., 1976.

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Our mosques are usually restricted to acts which propagate their views against other sects. The Imam considers the mosque his personal property and exploits the illiterate 'Nawazis' to his benefit. He forbids any kind of mocking or speculation in the mosque although you will find him in the company of his friends planning the next move against the other sects. The Quran tells the Nabi "As for those who divide their Deen and break up their sects, they have no part with them" (4:159).

The house of Allah has been relegated to the position of the house of rituals and worship only. Despite the fact that our mosques are equipped with loud speakers, the sermons are usually found monotonous at the peak. The ignorant masses are given to understand that they have performed their obligations as Muslims by only "reading the Quran" and not establishing the "Faat" (Faith). We have forgotten that "Islam" is not something, it is a way of life. It is the endeavor to establish the total authority of Allah as decreed in the Quran. The Deen has laws given to mankind as well as to the physical world are mentioned (6:34). Forget it around the clock system which can be rightly propagated through the mosques.

One wonders why the true objective of the social importance of mosques has been relegated to its present stagnant position. The answer lies in the nefarious designs of our 'high priests' who, in league with the ruling class, have always exploited religion for personal greed.

Let us compare the points realized by Sheikh Al-Khali:

1-2 Today we are ignorant of the problems and sufferings of our neighbors because of lack of social interaction and tolerant attitude. The mosque is the only place in the neighborhood or "Madrassa" where people of the locality assemble in small numbers daily and in big numbers on Fridays. The "Nawazis" are in the habit of leaving the mosque as soon as possible after the rituals. This gathering to inquire about each other's welfare which is a basic Islamic value.