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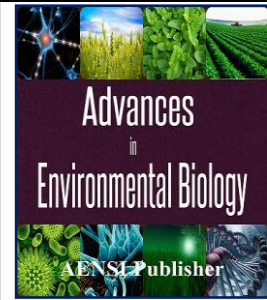
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## Issues and Problems of Modern Mosques Design in Malaysia: A Critical Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This paper will try to unfold issues and problem in mosques design in Malaysia. The research uses content analysis and field observation to the some modern mosques especially Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Mosques to discuss specific issues and problems surrounding the design and space planning of Modern mosques in modern urban fabric. The discussion is divided into two main sections. The first section discuss general scenario concerning mosques design and Islamic Architecture in general while the second part elaborate issues of the design of modern mosques in Malaysia. It is expected that through this research in this paper we can understand issues and problems of modern mosques design in Malaysia as an alternative approaches and reference frameworks in reconstructing its space for the present and the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the paper entitled *Islam, Architecture and Globalization: Problematic and Prospects for Research in Indonesia* Darwis Kudori [2] divided various thoughts, discussions and writings on Islamic Architecture and Mosque Architecture into two main perceptions. The first perception is termed as the Critical Perception. This is defined as a critical perception based on thinking founded on an academic approach which is rational, and academic discussions, as is found in his following observation:

*"We call this perception as 'critical' because it is based on scientific methods, accumulation of knowledge and intellectual reflection (developed constantly and developed progressively in the West)"*

Further he categorizes the institution as the Agha Khan Award for Architecture or thinkers on Islamic Architecture and architects like Oleg Grabar and Mohammed Arkoun into this category [16]. In connection with the Agha Khan movement he divides this into three characteristics. The first characteristic of this movement is its openness towards experts and thinkers (among Muslims) and those outside Islam, like Kenzo Tange, Charles Jencks, Robert Venturi, apart from Muslim scholars like Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muhammad Fazlurrahman. The second characteristic of this group is that its thoughts are based on an intellectual elaboration. This has happened through research in various disciplines of knowledge. The third characteristic mentioned by him is what he termed as 'modesty'. The Agha Khan movement does not make efforts to become a school of thought, however, it can be loosely termed as a forum for conducting reflections, making discussions, exchanging of ideas and experiences as well as sharing research for seeking solutions in various issues faced by Muslims.

As for the second perception [16], namely the ideological perception or in other words Darwis term this as Arabo-Islamist trend, is defined as an ideological perception based on three counts. The first count is that this perception acknowledges and is convinced of the existence of architecture which is Islamic in nature, which needs to be disseminated and developed, to come face to face with Western [cultural] domination. On the second count this perception is so based on the certainty that that Islamic Architecture originated from values and principles in the foundations of Islam from the Qur'an and Sunnah, whereas the third consideration is from the reality that this group is formed in political framework and patronage of the Saudi authorities. Even though in his various elaborations Darwis is seen as taking more the side of the first perception while at the same time

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criticizing the second approach, even then, the classification done by him is important for the understanding of a foundation or identification of thinking and philosophical outlook which is spreading in Islamic Architecture.

Ismail Serageldin [5] while discussing the planning of mosques as one of the major elements in Islamic Architecture, has classified the approaches taken into five categories, namely popular approach (vernacular), traditional, populist, adaptive-modern, and the last one being the modern one. Concerning the space covering for services, he divides the planning of mosques into four sections namely Major Landmark Structure, Community Centre-Complex, Small Local Mosques, and Zawiyas. Through such notion of division and classification [of functions] the work is being facilitated smoothly in identifying the characteristics and grasp of a mosque.

As for Mohammad Al-Asad (1999), his observations are summarized in such classification [of functions] making them into two only, as explained by him in the following:

*"I suggest placing these categories within an even simpler system by dividing approaches to contemporary mosque into two groups: one that accept historical precedents as main source of inspiration for generation of form and one that does not".*

Kemas Madani [7] in another writing of his on mosques re-classifies again the functions of mosques into two, namely mosque an environment and next mosque as a centre of activities and spiritual devotions.

Hasan-Uddin Khan [4] in his writing on mosques makes five classifications therein as constituting major elements in Islamic Architecture. This classification is based on the categories of mosque users who express their needs for such development in mosques. The said classification is done based on the categories of the clients who express need for such mosques. The classification divides the mosque into The State Client, The Local Administrator, Institution, the Rural Society and the wider Society as the mosque users (clients). Since this involves much documentation for so many mosques, in various countries, this classification is very important for our literary treasury concerning mosque designs.

#### *The Issue of Modern Mosque Designs in Malaysia:*

This writing discusses the issue of mosque designs found in Malaysia. The discussion is done in six parts namely the issue of identity, form and structure, the issue of the position and location of mosques, the issue of specialization [of functions] and the planning in the use of space, the issue of the members of the congregation and mosque use, especially in relation to women, children, the younger generation, the disabled, the issue of security of the inner area and the mosque space, the issue of the administration of mosques, and the economy of mosques. This research, hopefully, can identify the issues which are found in most mosques in Malaysia.

#### *The Issue of Identity Design of Mosques in Malaysia:*

If we observe closely we can find that most mosques in Malaysia have forms and structures which are similar in nature; most of them have the outer form and structure with the big domes with minarets, the inner decorations and other similar features. Such forms and structures are built based on the forms and structures of mosques in Islamic history of the past, which have enjoyed its periods of glory. For example we can observe that the design of the Federal Mosque (Masjid Wilayah), the Masjid Putra in Putrajaya, Masjid Sultan Salahuddin Shah Alam and the UTM Mosque of (Skudai) Johor (See Picture 1)

The work of making mosque designs based on previous mosque designs can be seen as an indication of identity crisis which emanates from a feeling of inferiority vis-à-vis the awesome designs of the past which was more glorious than the present. The products of designs of such mosques are being used and regarded as representing an official language of Islamic architecture, chosen and selected as bench mark for articulating the language of art in Islam for discussions on Islamic architecture. This issue is seen by Muhammad Tajuddin (2003:2) as an error emanating from an inward awareness of a nation which can be said as having a 'Middle Eastern Inferiority Complex'. Such notion regards that the design of mosques should follow the examples of mosques in that region built by that civilization in the Middle East, the area where Islam originated. This error is being elucidated by Muhammad Tajuddin (2003:2) in the following observation:

*The attitude thus prevailing seems to indicate that Muslims in Malaysia have an inferiority complex against the Middle East, the birthplace of Islam. I have no reservation for saying so because neither the Qur'an nor hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) make any mention as to the required expression of the mosque to be from its birth place.*

Malaysian Society –on the other hand- should be proud with its identity and the display of its architecture which has been inherited from its past generations as what can be observed in the Traditional Mosque of Kampong Laut which has been built hundreds of years ago with the technology available then, which is displayed together with the local building sporting the pyramid like roof, with the elevated floor above the ground and other features. The same goes with the design of the Masjid Negara which has local architectural features which can be seen in the structure of the open verandah ('serambi'), the arrangement in the utilization of space facilitating pleasant air flow, aided again by the use of the technology available then. The impact of imitating [the design of mosques from other areas] has made our country become seriously confused as to its identity creating an impact on the local architectural designs, being hampered by the entry of this external and

foreign architectural language in this country [17]. So in relation to this the use of local architectural language needs to be emphasized in the building of mosques.

#### *The Issue of Position and Location of Mosques in Malaysia:*

The primary issue which has to be considered by mosque users when they are going to the mosque is the distance between the position of the mosque in relation to the easiest location for people to go to. Most of the mosques to-day are especially placed in towns which are far from places where people are gathered together or they are far from residential areas. For mosques which are built far from residential areas transport is needed so that people can get transport for them to go to such mosques. This situation can be observed in relation to Sultan Abdul Samad Mosque or more popularly known as KLIA Mosque which is built far from locations frequented by people and the inhabitants of the surrounding area; it is built rather close to the highway (see picture 2)

For mosques which are situated in university campuses, for example the University Kebangsaan Mosque, it is strategically close to the faculties and the main road of the campus hence giving its extra merits of always being a focal point for gathering of students for them to revise their studies apart from going there for their spiritual devotions. Apart from being visited by students and staff of the university, the mosque is also visited by the general public and the inhabitants of the surrounding area especially on Fridays and days when celebrations are held. The position of the mosque which is so suitably located gives it a special extra point from the point of view of the participation of the public in its use in any activities organized by the mosque management (picture 3).

#### *The Issue of Specialization in the Planning for Space Utilization:*

Careful and well organized planning in the use of space must be emphasized in the building of mosques especially in relation to the separation of areas for the use of men and women in all activities, whether in times for prayer, taking ablution, or the use of the rest-rooms. Muhammad Tajuddin asserts that [8] special space should be given to women with special design for their needs, especially for the disabled with small children and so on. Similarly the same is the case with the need for special space for taking ablution for women which should be placed together with the special space of prayer for them so as to facilitate them in their movements and activities when they are not putting on their hijab in that area.

Concerning the Universiti Kebangsaan Mosque the situation is causing difficulties for women with children, especially those with babies, when the space for making ablution is separate from the toilet and also far from the space for prayer. Women have to pass through a corridor and the room for bathing funerals on their way to the room for making ablution (wudhu'). In the same way in relation to them going to the toilet, they have to go through the corridor which is also used by men on their way to the toilet (see picture 4)

The issue of having space for the toilet is also discussed by Tajuddin [15] when there is a view stating that toilets cannot be under the same roof with the prayer hall. The issue is seen in relation to the possibility of avoiding unpleasant smells involved. In relation to this, the location for toilets has to be planned in the best possible way in accordance with the correct airflow so as to avoid unpleasant smells spreading into the prayer hall.

#### *The Issue of the Congregation and Mosque Users:*

This section deals with various issues related to the congregation and mosque users in Malaysia. This research is focused on three categories of mosque users who are usually not taken into consideration in planning the utilization of space in mosques in Malaysia, namely the disabled, the younger generation, and children. It is hoped that this research can furnish understanding concerning the importance of providing the needs of these three categories of users in a convenient way. This is by reason of the fact that the design of a mosque should be looked at from the point of view of providing the needs and convenience for all classes of the society mentioned, without any form of discrimination whatsoever as long as they are designated as Muslims men and women.

Those who are disabled also have a right to participate in making the activities of the mosque successful and effective with all the facilities for them being made, helped by the public. There is a tradition of the Prophet which narrates that those who are disabled also are not excluded from performing the prayers in congregation in mosques as long as such persons can listen to the call to prayer in the house, as stated in the Prophetic hadith in Sahih Muslim (321:194).

*It is narrated by Abu Hurayrah rd : A blind man came to the Messenger of Allah –peace and blessings be upon him- asking “O messenger of Allah, I do not have someone To direct and aid me to go the mosque”. The man requested the Messenger –peace and blessings be upon him- to permit him to pray in his house. He obtained it. After he has gone home, the person was called back and he was asked: ‘Can you listen to the call to prayer (adhan)’? The man answered “Yes”. The Messenger then said “You should respond to the call (so you should go to the mosque”).*

The above tradition clearly states that it is obligatory upon the blind person to come to the mosque and perform the congregational prayer. In relation to this Abu Saif (2009) is of the view that facilities in mosques should be made ready in such a way so that the disabled can easily make their movements easy and convenient. For mosques having two or three levels, then certainly there is the issue of providing for lifts, the passage ways for wheelchairs to pass through, and such facilities which must be given priority in the early stages of making plans for the building.

The Universiti Kebangsaan Mosque also has no specialized areas for those who are disabled in the parking lot. Apart from that it is found that the space for entry into the mosque from the parking area is not disabled friendly, and handholds are not available in places where there are steps in the staircases. The young generation are those who are in the middle category between children and adults, a category in between the two, who are always active, being inquisitive, and (sometimes) rather aggressive in character. Hence attention should be paid to them, and proper education should be provided for them, so as to encourage them so that they are attracted to mosques. This generation is also the succeeding generation which will be the ones playing their role later in society which should be coloured by Islamic ambience, making mosques, therefore the means for achieving this mission (see picture 5)

For the sake of making this young generation come close to mosques, there should be various facilities to cater for their favorite activities so that they are attracted to mosques as suggested by Abu Saif (2009) in his web page, as follows:

*...Further, for the sake of balancing up with the lectures which are close to the interest of adults, there should be speeches which attractive to young hearts. There should be facilities available so that the young generation 'have interest' in the 'baits' so that they can be provided with what they are really in need of. There can be tuition classes, courts for martial art, as well as counseling services which should be considered.*

The availability of facilities needed by the younger generation for their favourite activities like sports and the like will open their hearts towards going to mosques. In an indirect way this generation will be interested to participate in various other activities which are academic in nature by reason of the fact that they love towards mosques has blossomed in their young hearts. Mosques should also exude an atmosphere which is positive caring and compassionate in relation to the younger generation. Such atmosphere and attribute can be seen as an extraordinary power of attraction which is capable of drawing the interest of such generation to mosques as observed by Abu Saif (2009) as follows:

*A beginning for such a step lies in the formation of a positive attitude of the older generation who are in the mosques to draw the young into friendly conversation, asking about them, and those who happen to go to the mosque. The attitude of caring attitude and compassion has never yet been able to be surpassed by other attractions. The feeling of empathy felt by the young from initial conversations of the elderly person in the position of an elder brother, father and grandfather unto them is something which is found in churches but rarely found in mosques; this is a slap in our faces.*

*In church you find the priest standing at the door giving out words of appreciation to the members of the congregation present one after another. In our mosques it is usual that we see people entering and going out of mosques without those who are the regular members of the mosque being aware of such people, from the Imam to the members in the congregation in the rows of those [doing their prayers].*

Mosques which are young generation friendly should begin not only by having facilities but also by having that ambience of friendly atmosphere and easy and intimate ambience, with people showing care for others while they are in the mosque.

In the Universiti Kebangsaan Mosque there are no special facilities for activities of the younger generation with the exception of the wide parking space and possibility this is suitable for having games like 'bola keranjang' and badminton for exercise in the evening. Towards the north of the Mosque there are built small huts for providing shade, suitable for relaxing with one's family under shades of shady trees with green surroundings with ground green carpeted by grass.

Children are going to be the future generations in society, who will determine the nature of life and society of the future. In relation to this, society has to change its view concerning children, from regarding them as those who do not understand anything to a person who should be given the necessary attention and providing them with exposure to the issue of religion and especially the function of mosques at the earliest opportunity. For giving encouragement to them and for giving them the necessary exposure concerning mosques, there are a number of suggestions presented by Abu Saif (2009), as the following:

*"Parents should be reminded about the practice of the Companions who, when bringing their children to mosques, also brought along with them toys so that they would be busy with the toys when prayer is being performed or when there are lectures going on."*

*"It is incomprehensible that the parents and the members of mosque committee would expect children to sit quietly and listen to the lectures just like their parents. Hence parents should take the initiative to help their children sit down in the ambience of the mosque accompanied by their toys which are appropriate with the*

atmosphere (trumpet of course is not in the list) or books for colouring, depending on the inclination and the interest of the children themselves.

*“As for the mosque authorities themselves, in case they have the capability, then they can make efforts so that there are rooms for toys and games which are appropriate and safe for children which may have loudspeakers for mothers to accompany their children in the rooms, so that they can still follow lectures which are being presented. Mini playing fields may not necessarily be excessive alternative to have for taking this into consideration.*

The suggestions and views made by Abu Saif above are not matters which are impossible to be realized for encouraging the participation of children in mosque activities; only that some changes has to be made with a certain degree of sacrifice in some matters which are necessary to be made for the sake of the future.

#### *The Issue of Security and the Area of the Mosque:*

A successful mosque in its social and economic activities certainly will encourage attendance of the public without considering the time, and this needs the cooperation of the mosque management at all times, namely twenty-four hours. The issue which will come up from such an application is the security and safety of the mosque itself. There may be the possibility of theft of the equipment's in the mosque, the money given in charity by the public and others.

In relation to this issue, the mosque needs supervision for twenty four hours from the mosque management which has to take care to supervise it to maintain its security, apart from the usual function of receiving guests coming to the mosque, for instance in case travelers coming for shelter or to rent rooms for spending the night and so on. Such steps can help in taking care of the property of the mosque as well encouraging the coming of guests to the mosque as well as bringing income to it. There are situations in which mosques are being enclosed in fences and they are locked except during times for prayer. This is observed happening to many mosques in Malaysia by reason of the fact that there is no serious attention given to mosques by the mosque committees and the people founding such mosques. Hence there comes the necessity for having fence around the mosques.

This issue can be addressed by looking back at the functions of mosques themselves which should operate for the sake of developing the society without considering the age of their users and also the time for their uses, as has happened during the time of the Messenger of Allah –peace and blessings be upon him; in relation to this it can be seen that there was no necessity for having fences for mosques, because there might be the uneasy feeling or feeling of concern about the differences in the use of space therein. In relation to this, then, the fence can be substituted with other designs which are more user friendly for instance by planting trees in a very well arranged and neat manner for making the mosque area distinctive.

As for the expensive equipment's of the mosque, these should be kept in a special place after they are used. Hence there is the necessity for having special rooms for keeping expensive things therein, so that this comes to a certain degree of standard requirement of guaranteed security. In relation to this, the rights of mosques are preserved in the best way for the sake of the society, especially Muslims.

#### *The Economy of the Mosque and its Management:*

A mosque needs proper management and maintenance so as to maintain the effectiveness of its operation, make it clean, to manage its property and so on. Such management and maintenance need financial commitments and financial standing which are on par with the performance of the relevant duties. Source of income of a mosque usually is on a weekly basis from the charity given by mosque users on Fridays. However such income is insufficient for maintaining the cost of keeping the mosque and its maintenance. In relation to this according to Faizal Ridzuan [3] Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak has suggested one very meaningful idea while taking the responsibility as Vice Prime Minister by proposing that mosque should generate income of Muslims by having various programmes which have commercial orientations and not merely becoming as centres of congregational prayers and listening to speeches. Among the suggestions are that mosques can have restaurants, tuition classes, barber shops, Ar-Rahnu financial institutions and micro-credit facilities.

According to Faizal Ridzuan [3] the idea thrown by Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak at one time in the past was well accepted by some of those in mosque management in Malaysia by having various mosque activities which are commercial in nature for making mosques financially strong. Among such mosques can be mentioned Masjid Ghufuran situated in Taman Tun Dr. Ismail in Kuala Lumpur. Source of income for the mosque is obtained from programmes which are commercially orientated, since it was upgraded in 2004. Among its sources of income are: Rooms for Travellers, Conference Rooms, Meeting Rooms, Hall for Dinner, Hall for Having Marriage Ceremonies, Al-Ghufuran Café, land for rent, for communication antennae, Fardhu Ain classes, and Religious Classes (see picture 6)

Faizal Ridzuan also [3] found that for achieving that status, the management of the mosque must consist of persons who have experience in management and administration. This formula is a secret of the success of The Ghufuran Mosque in managing sources of income as observed by the chairperson of the mosque Haji Hassanuddin Ali.

Apart from commercial activities carried in the mosque, there are also suggestions that the Friday sermons are documented and made into books in a number of volumes. This book can be sold to the public so that the message in the book can be disseminated widely in the Muslim society and this can be another source of income for the mosque.

According to Salaswati Haris [12], there are six strategic steps which can be made use of by the mosque management to get sources of income for the mosque. Among these is by having shares in the Waqf endowment for the mosque. This strategy can be done by renting the wealth of the mosque to the public, for certain activities like premises for doing businesses, and others. For mosques which do not have wealth, such waqf endowment can be done by presenting requests for donations from the members of the public indicating the objectives clearly, as is shown in the following example by Salaswati Haris [12].

*The source from the Waqf endowment which is clear in its objective means that the that the management explains the proposed income would be used for what objective. For example, in Bandar Baru Bangi, the mosque management targets to get RM 10,000 million as income from rent of two lots of shop houses needing the sum of RM 1 million. With this the project was launched the Waqf endowment fund with shares with the object of buying building so that the rent from that building will generate a continuous income for the mosque.*

Still according to Salawati Haris [12] the method of enhancing income for the mosque can also be practiced by having another financial source from money collected from all mosques in Malaysia then one financial entity is created which is not tied to any entity like The Foundation for The Development of Islamic Economy (Yayasan Ekonomi Islam-Yapeim). Money from that source can be invested and the profits from this can be given to the mosques concerned.

Salawati Haris also suggests [12] that mosques can also build business premises at strategic locations in mosque compounds which has ample space. Further building of mosques require careful planning in new urban locations so as to make planning for being in strategic positions for initiating economic moves. The members of mosque committees should be given exposure concerning this issue by making visits to mosques which are successful whether in the country or abroad.

#### Conclusion:

Based on the discussion above, it can be understood that issues and problems in Modern Mosques design in Malaysia touch multiple dimension of Moslem Community. In order to understand it comprehensively we need to unfold multiple layers of problems and issues. Different understanding and perspective is also needed to provide a holistic solution and complete outcome. It is expected that this paper can start a deeper and more critical discourse regarding this topic in the future of Modern Malaysian Mosques.

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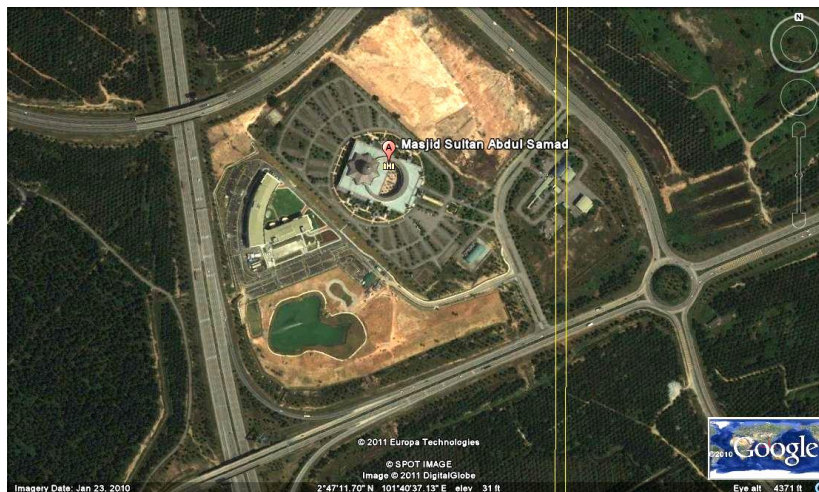


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Appendix:



**Picture 1:** UTM Mosque(Skudai) Johor, and the Mosque Wilayah Persekutuan in Kuala Lumpur  
Source: field work



**Picture 2:** Sultan Abdul Samad Mosque source: [www.earth.google.com](http://www.earth.google.com)



**Picture 3:** UKM Mosque, Source: Field work





**Picture 4:** The Main corridor joining the prayer space for women, with the toilet, the room for making ablution, and the room for bathing funerals in the University Kebangsaan Mosque. Source: Field work



**Picture 5:** The corridor in the UKIM Mosque which is not disabled friendly. Source: Field work.



**Picture 6:** Al-Ghufran Mosque in Taman Tun Dr. Ismail  
Source: Jamaluddin Yeop, 2009