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Decoration in Praying Hall of Mosque: A review of current literature

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Abstract

The most intention of decorating the interior of the mosque is to create of feeling remembering Allah. The challenge is to avoid the wasteful as well the negative impact to users. Among of Islamic scholars agreed the decoration in the interior of mosque shall be done in a moderate way since is has not been prohibited in Islam. This paper intended to search the literature on the function of decoration of the interior of the mosque as well its effects towards people either negative or positive way. The significance of this paper is to identify the best way in decorating of the interior of the mosque.

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1. Introduction

The mosque is a place where Muslim people can perform their Solat and doing other activities of ibadah such as learning Quran, religious talk, perform Friday prayer and etc. relating to religious activities. Praying hall is the most important space in mosque also known as sacred space. Decoration on a mosque being disputed by some Islamic scholars, especially to those highly decorated mosques. Many of Islamic scholars protesting the decoration in mosque especially highly decorated is a symbol of luxury

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and wastefulness. As stated by Othman, R. (2011) in his paper, proper positioning of motifs and ornamentation, more believers will be called to come enlighten the mosques. She also mentioned, if without the small niché as mihrab on the kiblah wall and dome on top, praying hall could be misinterpreted by people as a multipurpose or library without furniture. Therefore, she declared that the place pray is important to be studied in great detail, as this will lead to the concentration and sincerity of the prayers by the mosque users. Ornamentation should be taken as part of mosque components and not as mere decorations done afterthought or filling in the gap. (Othman, Z. J. Zainal-Abidin, 2011).

1.1. Definitions of terms

1.1.1. Decoration

Decoration as described Mitrache. A (2012) is highlighted and enhanced the spatial attributes of any architectural composition.

1.1.2. Praying hall

A prayer hall is sometimes assumed as the sacred area. Most of the time the praying area is large and open where the devotees will perform their congregational prayers either during daily five time prayers, festivity prayers or Friday prayers. (R. Othman, N.Inangda, & Y. Ahmad, 2008).

1.1.3. Mosque

In Malaysia mosque is literally given a different meaning from another place in the world. Meaning of mosque in Malaysia as described by Abdul Halim.N, (1984), the mosque is the place where people perform their Friday prayer while, the place has not been used for Friday prayer called Surau. Many scholars described the meaning of the mosque but in different word. As described by Rahman, (1998), a word of the masjid in Arabic gives a meaning of “place of worship”. While, Seyyed Hossein (1987) and Hillenbrand, (1994) mentioned the word ‘mosque’ derives from the Arabic ‘masjid’ mean literally the place of ‘sujud’ or prostration, in which forehead of the worshipper touches the ground in the supreme act of submission and surrender to God. Prostrate is one of action in praying, the action of put the head on the praying mat as a symbol to show that Allah is the Greatest one.. Also, as mentioned by Afridi, (2011) mosque is a Holy place for worshipping. The word “mosque” in English refers to all types of buildings dedicated for Islamic worshipping. Notwithstanding call or pronunciation was found, but the use of this building remains the same.

2. Decoration in mosque

Decoration as described Mitrache. A (2012) is highlighted and enhanced the spatial attributes of any architectural composition. The early construction of the mosque, the form was very simple as long as it can serve the function to the Muslim people at that time. Under the reign of the prophet, peace be upon him, the decoration is not allowed. The first mosque was built by our Prophet in Medina. This mosque built with a simple form, without any declaration within it. It was extremely simple in its form. It consisted of an enclosure with a wall made of mud bricks and orchard on his Qiblah side made of palm trunks used as columns to support a roof of palm-leaves mud. There was no ornamentation either within or without it. The most important is the congregation can perform their prayers and take protection from rain and heat. They are not thinking about decorating as long they can pray together with the prophet.

The decoration in mosque normally concentrated in the main prayer space, especially on Khiblah wall. Common elements of decoration found in the interior of the mosque are the ornamentation motifs represent by floral, geometric and Calligraphy. According to Utaberta, Sojak, Surat, & Tahir, (2012)

decorations found in most of the walls of the building mosques in Malaysia are also copied from mosques built there in the golden age of Islam. For example, decoration of the dome inside of the Putrajaya Mosque is taken from the Mosque Lutfullah (1600M) and the Mosque of Imam Shah (1611M) at the time of the Safavid empire in Iran. An engineer who manages the construction of the Putrajaya Mosque also applies the use of geometric star-shaped decorations on the walls of the gate of the mosque. This decoration is in the construction Qal'ah-i Bust in Afghanistan in the 12th century.

However, in Malaysia mosque or house adorned with local motif inspired from local plants and flower. Woodcarving is deeply entrenched with Malay people has a tangible beauty where it is derived from a person's imagination and manifested into a piece of timber, (Said, I. 2001). Flora motifs can be seen, dominated the scene of Malay wood carving may because of the abundance of plant species and forest surrounding has inspired the craftsmen to manifest them into the craft. The parts of plants that are manifested include the fruit, stem, tendril, leaf and more conspicuously the flower. Fruit of pomegranate, flower of lotus, sunflower, ketumbit, ketola and bakawali, leaf of getamguri and stem and tendril of Ipomoea is depicted in a variety of abstract forms on the house components. Pomegranate is chosen as a motif due to the interesting shapes of and the bright fruit orange flowers . Apart from palaces, carving motif can be found in patronage houses, a mosque and wakaf where it shows the symbols of status. (Sabrizaa B Abd Rashid, Amat, n.d.). The complexity of carving motif differentiates the status of the house owner; noble house and the sultan's palace are adorned with intricate carvings whereas the commoner house are attached with simple perforated carvings. . (Ismail, 2002, *Jurnal Teknologi* 37(B), pg 46).

Forsgren (2002) addressed that the most ornate decoration in a mosque is generally found around the prayer niche, or also known as mihrab, which literally translates to a "place of struggle" where the individual fights to overcome attachments to earthly things through prayer. The mihrab is situated on the Qibla, or wall facing Mecca, as an indication of the direction Muslims should face during prayer. Therefore, this area should be decorated appropriately lest not to disturb the prayer's. Even though the distraction to the users are subjective and different effects to each person, but it more or less can help in creating a good feeling to them. As mentioned by Omer (2009), there are some guidelines that regulate mosque decoration. Among of them is decoration must not interfere with people's concentration in prayers and in other worship activities. Besides, decoration must not be extravagant so that wastefulness is committed so that the declaration will not surpass in importance the primary functions of the mosques.

3. Function of decoration in mosque

According to Ismail R. al Faruqi (1986), the beautiful and intricate design one finds on art objects of every region, and in every century of Islamic history, fulfill four specific and important functions which is the reminder of Tawhid, transfiguration of materials, transfiguration of structures and beautification. The roles of Islamic decoration are manifold. They can be spiritual, educational, social and psychological.

3.1. Tawhid

Since the praying hall is a sacred space for Muslim, the space should be a space that can create the feeling of remembering the Creator. In other word having ornamentation, especially in mosques is to feel the existence of Allah the Almighty. The feelings are derived in striving to be closer to Allah. (Norzalifa,2003). From a theological standpoint masjid decoration seeks to create a sense of divine omnipresence and simplicity by focusing on harmony and balance without regard for excess or grandeur. (C. Longhurst 2012).Othman,R.(2011) in his paper studied the importance of the motif in mosque architecture did mention that the interior of the mosque should portray the quality of something very

sacred and serene. Aesthetical quality gives the welcoming ambience that invites the believers of Islam into its space. Achieving beauty through motifs and ornamentation of Islamic art can draw the attention of the believers with faith and total submission to Allah the Almighty. As mentioned by Norzalifa, (2003) in her master's thesis, in the Malay arts, the decoration is formed to fit the spiritual demand such as to symbolize individual status, aesthetic appreciation and in commemoration to any person, events and occasions.

3.2. *Aesthetic*

One of the functions of the application of ornamentation motif in the interior of the mosque is aesthetic. As mentioned by R.Othman,(2011), the interior of mosque should portray the quality of something very sacred and serene. Aesthetical quality gives the welcoming ambience that invites the believers of Islam into its space. The aesthetical values of ornamentation help in attracting people to the mosque. Aesthetical quality gives the welcoming ambience that invites the believers of Islam into its space. (R. Othman,2011, Omer, S. ,2002).Majestic physical look of buildings is without denial an attraction for people to come and enjoy the beauty.(Othman & Zainal-Abidin, 2011). Another function of the ornamentation as mentioned by Ismail R. al Faruqi (1986) to beauty and embellish. This function can be done successfully by the ornamentation since it creates patterns on the decorated object are themselves essentially attractive to the eye. Whereas geometric pattern may strike the modern eye as an emotionally neutral artistic medium which communicates with the viewer in an intellectual manner, it is impossible to ascertain retrospectively the extent to which this would have been true of pre-modern period, for according to the principles of Jungian psychology, certain traditional geometric pattern such as mandalas can have strong emotional and symbolic significances. (Mohammad Al-Asad, 2002). According to Teh,(2008) a tranquility of interior decoration is one of the things that will attract the people in mosque.

3.3. *Structural*

Islamic ornamentation is the very element that sews architecture and religion resulting serene, intelligible, structured and highly spiritual of Islamic art and architecture. (Norzalifa, 2003). Not only are structural elements such as the arch and column transformed on one plane as motifs for surface decoration or design exchanged with the minor arts, but certain techniques and materials used to simulate others are applied, confusing the eye. (Jones, 1995). Ismail R. al Faruqi (1986) stated that function of ornamentation is transfiguration of structures by hiding the basic form or minimizing their impact on the viewer. It also to disguise the construction details with overlays of transfigurations materials. Whether the ornament is architectural or applied, its purpose is the same; to dissolve the matter , to deny substantial masses and substitute for them a less palpable reality , whose forms change even as they are examined. This is done by repeating individual units indefinitely-columns, arches, the cells of honeycomb vault(muqarnas) and especially the various forms of applied decoration: floral, geometric and epigraphic.(Hillenbrand, 1994).

3.4. *Structure*

In Islamic architecture, decorations are a constitutive element, not an accident, and adjunct of structure, a help in the additional but not necessary art of beautification. (Omer, S.,2005). Decoration in Islamic architecture serves several functions. Among the functions, they are appearing to be creation of non-tectonic values, the dissolution of all those elements that in other architectural traditions emphasize the structure, the balance and counter balance of loads and stresses- the actual mechanics of building. The various means by which the effect of weightlessness is created, the effect of unlimited space, of non-

substantiality of walls, pillars and vaults are well known.(Ernst J. Grube, 1995). They perfected a type of decoration whose purpose was first and foremost that of providing buildings and objects with an intricate and complex overlay, covering their structural cores (often of a different material) as with an outer skin or ‘mantle’(Jones, 1995) .In Islamic architecture decorated surfaces have a physical reality as well as a visual impact-an independence of their own, which gives them an importance at least equal to their architectural forms. (Jones, 1995).The concept of decoration in Islamic art is flexible in nature, independent of form, material and scale, transforming the whole space ambience. According(Othman & Zainal-Abidin, 2011)

3.5. *Transform*

Decoration in Islamic architecture is not limited to the covering of surfaces, it also helps to transform the space. The tendency is for surface of the fluid: a decoration helps to make the transition, imperceptibly, from one plane to another. The lines in a primary grid of façade, as in certain arabesque or in Abbasid woodcarving, transform a decorative element into the contour of a form. The multiplication of a given pattern or architectural element on a different scale in one plane also helps to avoid sharp contrast and clear definition of scale and surface (Jones, 1995).The concept of decoration in Islamic art is flexible in nature, independent of form, material and scale, transforming the whole space ambience. (Norzalifa, 2003). Decoration in Islamic Art is not limited to covering of surfaces, it also helps to transform space.(Hillenbrand, 1994)

Ismail R. al Faruqi (1986) stated that the function of ornamentation is to transform the object or surface in its appearance but not in substance. The transformation is not just changing, but an exalting, glorifying or spiritualizing one. The infinite patterns which embellished the art work certainly will heighten the status of the Muslim mind, especially so if it includes Quranic or other pious calligraphic elements. He mentioned three techniques in the transfiguration of materials which is by overlay technique, disguise of inherent qualities of the materials and lack of concern for the preciousness of the materials. Omer (2002)

4. **Effect of decoration**

Ornamentation as mentioned by those Islamic Art scholars has served several functions. Those function ornamentation gives certain impact to the users of the mosque. Positive impact such as create the feeling of Tawhid be a good reason of applied ornamentation in praying hall. However, negative effect also cannot be denied will exist due to some extravagant decoration in the mosque. Some of negatives effects as mentioned by Omer, (2002) in his book are wasteful, injustice, wealth misappropriation, haughtiness and flashiness. For some scholars, moderate decoration is lawful, yet the mihrab (imam’s praying niche) should be left undecorated lest the worshippers might be disturbed by its ornamentation motif, as the mihrab area is the central point of congregational prayers. (Omer, 2005). Norzalifa (2003) mentioned in her thesis that excessive strong color composition of decoration within the main prayer possibility will distract the user’s whilst they perform their acts of worshipping. In the construction of a mosque, an important issue that will be discussed is the high construction cost can sometimes surpass that can be categorized as a waste. Afford such wastage avoided if additional elements as decoration alone and do not work on the mosque removed and instead practiced simplicity. (N.Utaberta,H.Othman,M.Surat, 2010).

5. Conclusion

The decoration in the interior of mosque gives both negatives and positive impact. Positive impact should be a guide to future mosque decoration. While the negative impact should be studied properly and as far as mosque function is concerned it should be avoided. Decoration cannot be separated inbuilt of mosque since it was started in the history of Islamic architecture. It became a trademark in the mosque architecture has a decoration in the interior, especially ornamented with carving and motifs. Decoration are not prohibited in Islam, however, it should be properly done lest not create the negative impact such as wasteful, arrogant and so on so forth.

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