

# Emerging Mosque Architecture (New Architectural vocabulary in Secular Nepal)

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Received 01.16.2014; Accepted 03.17.2014

**ABSTRACT:** Though Muslims have been living in Nepal from the 15th century, they have started practicing their religious activities freely only after enactment of new civil code in 1963. This paper aims to explore the potentials and problems on the existing mosques, perception of the religious structures by Muslim community and analysing of existing legal and institutional framework before drawing a conclusion. The research methodology consists of combination of field visit and collection of detailed information, structured questionnaire survey and consultation with local leaders and municipal staffs. Detailed analysis of 'Jame Masjid' in Kathmandu and another 'Masjid' at Trishuli Bazaar in Bidur reveals that these mosques have become the centre of practising Islamic culture, promoting brotherhood among Muslim communities, learning place of Islamic education, besides their sentimental attachment. Social harmony between Muslims and other religious communities together with coexistence of mosques and 'madrasa' with Hindu religious structures in the same vicinity has presented a unique situation. However, inadequate information, low level of awareness among the mosque visitors and above all lack of government's specific plans and policies have hampered the conservation and development of mosque architectural and Islamic culture. To reverse this trend, development of mosques as Islamic cultural and community development centre, incorporation of salient features of Islamic culture into local planning and building codes as well as in school syllabus and networking with domestic and international organisations working for local development is suggested.

**Keywords:** Mosque architecture, Islamic culture, Muslim community, Secular Nepal.

## INTRODUCTION

A mosque, derived from the Arabic term 'masjid,' is defined literally as 'a place of prostration.' Any neat and clean place oriented towards Mecca can be used for praying and can be considered as a mosque. Koranic inscriptions can be an added bonus. It is the 'visible symbol of Islamic civilisation's essential unity (Grabar, 1973; Graber, 1976). Due to differences in a community's size, its cultural origin and ethnic homogeneity, its status in the dominant culture, financial recourses, functional necessities, and many other parameters (Serageldin, 1994), a mosque has become architecturally unique and contextual and has imbued with cosmic power (Wiryomartono, 2009). The art and technique of mosque architecture provides a way of understanding the relationship between Islam and culture (Kahera, 2002; Freek, 2004). The Prophet Muhammad's house in Medina from 622 to 632, characterized by a large courtyard leading to a palm front shaded prayer areas, which was lean, cool and had geometric order and above all was oriented towards the 'Kaaba<sup>1</sup>' with a 'qibla<sup>2</sup>' wall perpendicular to axis to Mecca and or 'mihrab<sup>3</sup>' niche, was the first community mosque (Lane-Poole, 1886). In fact, this simple scheme with

three main elements – the courtyard, the 'qibla' wall and the roofed prayer hall – became the basic plan for all later mosque design.

Within a century of the death of Muhammad, the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid had built monumental mosques in Jerusalem, Damascus, and on the site of the Prophet's house in Medina. These retained the basic elements of the building; however, political factors became linked to religious factors so that mosque architecture often refers to the monumental state-sponsored Jami congregational mosques for Friday prayer. However, Muslims were content to adopt each local style that they found, modifying it in distinctive ornamental details, and introducing several important new features of plan and structures (Fletcher, 1961). Mosque constructed in non-Muslim communities such as US and Britain can be grouped into three types: Internationalist - inclusive, internationalist - exclusive, and regional - exclusive (Biondo III, 2006). Others see Muslim structures into two groups: religious (mosques, tombs and mausoleums) and secular (forts, palaces, gateways and gardens).

In mosques, water represents purification during the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the real world to

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the transcendent world. The rainbow as a symbol of spring and rebirth represents the union of human and cosmological dualism: masculine-feminine, earth-sky, fire-water, hot-cold, matter-light (Rodrigues, 2008). Geometric figures and calligraphy taken from Islamic sacred texts have become mainstays of Islamic art (Ardalan, 1980). Typical of Islamic ornament is the juxtaposition of opposite colours in large areas with analogous colours interwoven in minute areas creating 'distinct colour sensation' (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973).

Muslims' adherence to Islam and their ethno-cultural affiliation makes them unique in a predominantly Hindu-Buddhist set up of Nepal. Muslim community comprising 4.4% (1,162,370) of total population of Nepal is the second largest religious minority group, next only to the Buddhists (CBS, 2012). The ancestors of the various groups of Muslims presently living in Nepal migrated from different parts of South Asia and Tibet during three different periods. According to 'Gopalaraja Vamshavali', Kashmiri traders were the first Muslims to arrive in Kathmandu during the King Ratna Malla's<sup>5</sup> reign (1484-1520), followed by migrated from northern India at the time of Pratap Malla (1641-74) (Sharma, 2004). They were engaged in business of carpets, shawls and woollen garments between Kashmir, Ladakh and Lhasa (Parmu, 1969). Malla Kings also invited Indian Muslims to work as courtiers, counsellors, musicians and specialists on perfumes and ornaments whereas small states of western Nepal employed Afghan and Indian Muslims to train their soldiers to use firearms and ammunition during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, these Muslim and Arab traders introduced Islam in Nepal. The second lot of migrated Muslims arrived in Tarai (southern belt of Nepal) from India fleeing persecution by the British army during the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. These refugees were engaged in selling leather goods and working as agricultural labourers. Migration of Tibetan Muslims following the 1959 Chinese takeover of Tibet, latest arrival of Bihari Muslims from India as well as refugees from Bangladesh in the post 1971 period have also added Muslim population in Nepal (Bista, 1985; Sharma, 1994).

Though the 'Muluki Ain 1854' (Civil Code) of Nepal categorized the migrated Muslims as 'impure and untouchable,' (Hofer, 1979; Madan, 1995), the new legal code of 1963 provided equal rights for all regardless of ethnic origins and faith. As a result, Muslims also felt as an integral part of societies and started freely practicing their customs and religious activities including construction of many new mosques in different parts of Nepal. The recent political transformation thereby changing Nepal from official Hindu state to secular one has further widen opportunities for development, conservation and prosperity of Muslim cultural heritages. Among many religious and secular structures of Muslim communities, mosque has been considered unique in many ways. Against such background, this paper aims to explore the mosque architecture in Nepal and how Muslim

community perceive this architecture in the local context, taking case studies of two mosques in Kathmandu and Bidur municipalities. It also identifies numerous potentials and problems including the analysis of the legal and institutional framework for mosque architecture before drawing a conclusion and proposing some key recommendations.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mosque architecture can be better understood by Henri Lefebvre's 'trialectic' framework – planned, perceive and lived, corresponding to 'form, meaning and function' (Lefebvre, 1991). According to Lefebvre, the goal of a mosque's designers is to shape or reflect the perceptions of the practitioner, but how a space is actually used or 'lived' cannot be controlled or predicted. Planning a new mosque project involves choices about historical and regional references and the use of symbolically powerful domes and minarets. The shape of the dome, in referring to a particular time and place, can reveal a regionally specific or internationalist Islam practiced within. A tall minaret can signal a wealthy donor, past victories of Muslim empires, or a contemporary clout in local politics. Hence, for the analysis of mosque in Nepal, three interrelated aspects – form, meaning and functions are important.

As the available data and information on mosque architecture is limited and scattered among various agencies, this study combines three different methods of data collection: detail field survey, structured interviews and consultations with local religious leaders and municipal staffs. It adapted a case study approach by taking two cases- mosque in Kathmandu and Bidur municipalities – in detail.

### Detail Survey

The Jame Mosque in Kathmandu and Mosque in Trishuli Bazaar, Bidur (79 km from Kathmandu) were visited. The filed survey comprised of detail observations, examination and documentation of physical items, use of spaces and their spatial linkages in order to understand the architectural arrangement of the buildings, monuments and their constituent parts and meaning. The prayer hall in both cases was measured in detail. Various spaces and their linkages were also observed. With permission from Mosque management committees, photographs were also taken.

### Questionnaire Survey

A structured questionnaire survey sheet comprising of all together twelve questions divided into three subheading was prepared and then carried out the survey to about 40 Muslim people in each case. The respondent comprised of both mosque visitors on Friday (20 persons) and other Muslim community living and working in the towns (20 persons). The questions asked comprised of both specific and open questions. As women generally do not visit mosque in both cases, their views were also incorporated by questioning them separately while

visiting their settlements in both cases.

### Consultation with Mosque Management Committee and Municipal Staffs

Formal and informal discussions were also carried out with staffs of local municipality, mosque management committees including local religious leaders and social organizations to generate qualitative data. The discussion focused on the problems faced by them as well as their perception in future particularly in the present changed context of Nepal.

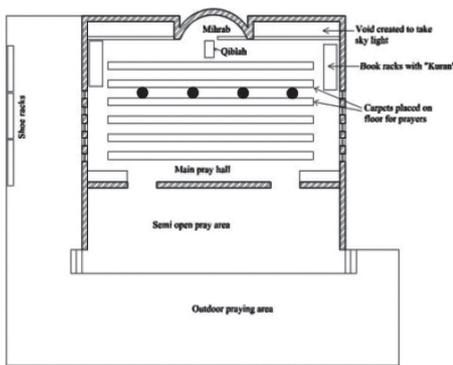
### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Built by the Muslims migrated from the northern India during the reign of Pratap Malla (1641-74), the Jame Masjid of Kathmandu was originally a Shia mosque, which was converted into a Sunni Masjid by Maulana Sargaraz Ali Shah, a mufti of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. He came to Nepal with the entourage of Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow when she took shelter in Kathmandu after the suppression of the Indian Mutiny by the British in 1857. The present mosque was reconstructed in the old site in 1995. Another ‘Masjid’ located at Trishuli Bazzar, Bidur municipality is also meaningful. Having linkage with the Jame Masjid of Kathmandu, it is the only mosque within the whole Nuwakot

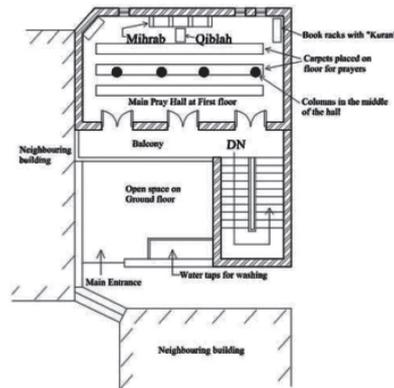
district. Both these Masjids advocate the thought of ‘Deobandi School<sup>6</sup>,’ which calls for a literal adherence to the Kuran and its adoption in the daily lives of the community members. Their doctrinaire is close to Al Hadith or the Wahabi School of Saudi Arabia. Muslim community in the Kathmandu Valley comprise of mix of migrated people from various regions: Kashmiri, India, Afghanistan, Iraq and even from Bangladesh at different periods. In the case of Bidur, they are mainly migrated from India who went to Bidur from different parts of Nepal after unification of Nepal by the then King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1825.

### Form of the Mosques

Both the mosques comprised of rectangular prayer hall (zulla) characterised by a ‘qibla’ wall perpendicular to axis to Mecca (west of Nepal) and a recess concave niche in the wall (mihrab) denoting the direction of prayer, front central space for the leader of prayers (imam), a pulpit (minbar) from which sermon (khutba) is delivered at congregational prayer on Fridays, all interpreting the Islam (Fig.1). Islamic sacred texts in different forms were kept at the corner book shelf in both sides of the halls. The existence of ‘mihrab’ commemorates the present of Mohammad as the first ‘iman.’ All the three floors together with open terraces at two levels have been dedicated for praying at the Jame Masjid whereas the first floor and the



Prayer hall of Jame Masjid, Kathmandu



Prayer hall at Trishuli Bazzar, Bidur



Fig.1: Comparative study of mosques in Kathmandu and Bidur

top terrace are being used for praying at Masjid of Bidur. To facilitate the prayers, ablutions fountains (fauwara) are located on the ground floor near the main entrance.

### Meaning of the Mosques

Islam believes in justice and fairness and has five bases: faith, prayer, pilgrimage, fasting and donation. Such religious belief is significant in strengthening social bond among Muslim community, treating equality to all human, caring poor people and sustaining cultural activities through personal donation. Nothing like modernisation has ever affected the people's zeal to remain hungry for a month and celebrate the end of it as a great festival. Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of Roja fasting. On this day, they invite guests, eat various dishes together and buy new clothes and give money to hermits and beggars.

Muslim's obligation to perform prayer collectively expresses their strong sense of belonging to the whole community and of sharing certain distinct, common rituals and beliefs. In mosques, water represents purification during the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the real world to the transcendent world. The rainbow as a symbol of spring and rebirth represents the union of human and cosmological dualism: masculine-feminine, earth-sky, fire-water, hot-cold, matter-light. Geometric figures and calligraphy taken from Islamic sacred texts have become mainstays of Islamic art.

Muslims always prefer to live in their own community and keep contact with other Muslim communities from different parts of Nepal. In the case of Jame Masjid, Kathmandu, about 15% of the respondents were in touch with Muslims of Tarai and 5% mentioned of their linkage with Muslims of mountain. However, about 35% of Muslim in Bidur case has somehow connection with Muslims of Kathmandu and 20% of interviewees having linkages with Tarai Muslim community.

The minaret (manarah) in both mosques has expressed the presence of Islam in the city. In addition to a symbol of social, imperial or personal prestige, they have also added the aesthetic value of mosques. The three storey minaret of Jame Masjid is located at the corner of the mosque whereas it is just erected from the terrace at Bidur. A separate low height tower has been

used by the muezzin for calling the faithful to prayer five times a day. Such calling has been found unnecessary for the mosque at Bidur due to presence of small number of Muslim community. The other element of the mosque, i.e., dome (qubbah) is not apparent here, whereas it is covered by first floor slab at Jame Masjid. As it is the roof of the tomb and has nothing to do with prayer, this feature is not essential for a mosque.

In the case of Jame Masjid, more than half of the respondent mentioned 'minaret' as the most important element in mosque design with preference for dome by 20%, prayer hall by 10%, colour and decoration by 5% (Fig. 2). However, 75% of the Muslims in Bidur mentioned 'other' such as orientation to Mecca, symbol of Moon, were the most important in Islamic architecture with only 25% preferring for the minaret. On the issue of building their own house, more than half of the mosque visitors at Jame Masjid mentioned of 'nothing special,' and just required 'neat and clean' spaces (Fig.2). However, about one fifth of the respondents are in favour of having a well defined praying room so that female members can also pray at their home in peaceful environment. Others emphasised on the durable building materials (15%), layout plan avoiding the location of toilets towards the west (Mecca) (7.5%) and green and soothing colour (sufiyana) (5%). Similarly, the case of Bidur too, majority of the respondent (40%) felt 'no special' measures to be taken for construction of new house, except the issue of neat, clean and durable. About one fourth of the mosque visitors would like to built their new houses with a separate 'praying room' and 'orienting' the layout plan of building towards Mecca. Most of the interviewees who preferred to have a separate pray room in the future new house were of female members.

Green colour has been extensively used both inside the prayer hall and outside at Jame Masjid whereas it is applied at least for the minaret in the case of Bidur. There is a light pink colour inside the prayer hall and yellow cream colour outside the building. From the Islamic perspective, green has always been considered the superior of the four cardinal colours. Symbolically it is the sign of hope, fertility and eternity. Arabs refer to the sky as 'the green dome'.

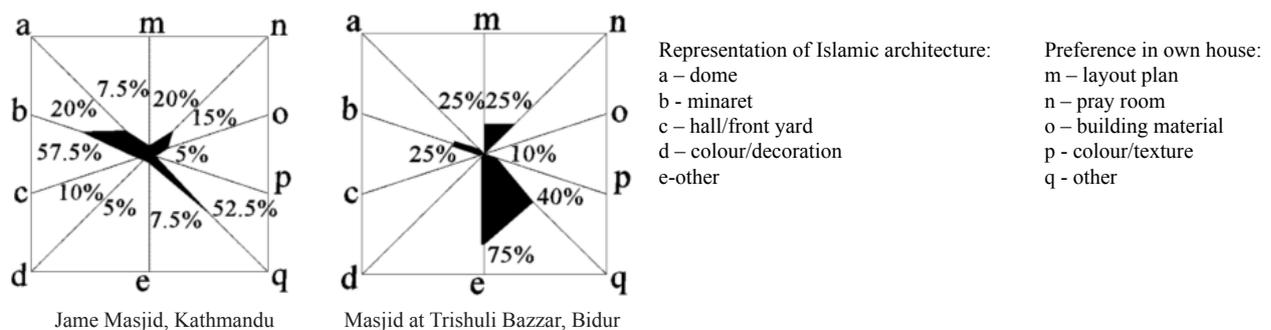


Fig. 2: Comparative study of elements of Islamic architecture and preference in own house .



Fig. 3: Comparison of praying hall and madrasa at Jame Masjid and Masjid in Bidur

### Functions of the Mosque

Both the mosques have been used for praying as well as for propagating Islamic knowledge through ‘madrasa’ (Fig. 3). In the case of Jame Masjid, it has also rented its three and half storey structures for commercial uses in order to support the running costs of mosque and ‘madrasa.’ The Masjid and ‘madrasa’ are separately located at Bidur. On the ground floor of Masjid, there are three rooms – office, store and guest spaces along with provision of toilets and urinals. Many Muslims children from different parts of Nepal together with local students are studying at ‘madrasa,’ which is also responsible for increasing literacy rate among Muslim community. The education, accommodation and other living expenses in these schools are free of cost, as the economic background of most of those students is weak.

In the case of Kathmandu, about 60% of the mosque visitors got the Islamic education from the ‘madrasa’, followed by 22.5% from their parents. Only 17.5% of the respondent learned the language from private tuition (Fig. 4). The case of Bidur is slightly different. Here, they got Islamic education

either from the ‘madrasa’ (70%) or from their parents (30%). While asking for the educating their children, about 90% of the interviewee were in the opinion of continuing both Islamic and modern education to make their children competitive in the 21st century. Only 10% of the visitors preferred to impart pure Islamic education for their children. Similarly, majority of the Muslims (70%) in Bidur also liked to have combination of Islamic and modern educations for their children (Fig.4). However, about 10% of the respondents preferred only Islamic education and the remaining 15% for only modern education. The remaining 5% are undecided in this issue.

### Representing Islamic Culture and Coexistence With Local Community

In fact, Mosque has played prestigious role by providing shelter and refuge for the believer. The faithful people gather there five times a day and every Friday on a weekly basis. The articulation of elements such as arches, domes and columns, calligraphic illustrations and geometrical decorating patterns create a continuous sense of peace. While looking the mosque

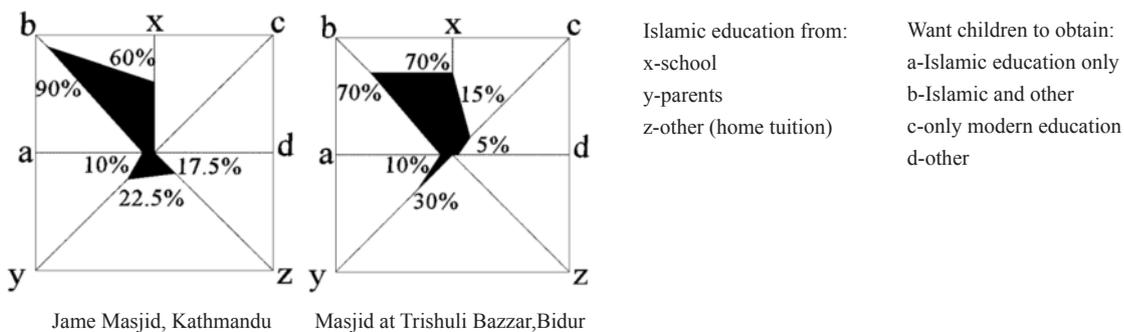


Fig.4: Comparative study of views on Islamic education

from Islamic cultural point of view, analysis of characters of spaces (interior space and the orientation of the qiblah), shapes (the dome and minaret) and symbolic meaning of colours (green, gold, blue) is significant. As no Muslim empire ruled in the history of Nepal, Islamic architecture in general and mosque in particular is not visually expressive and in monumental character. However, both mosques in Kathmandu and Bidur have not only expressed the Islamic culture but they are also best examples of how such religious edifice has coexisted with the community and settlement of other religion. Both the Masjids are located in the centre of the town and have been coexisting with the local Newari community in many ways. Many mosque visitors can even speak Newari language fluently. There exist Rana period monument – Clock Tower and Malla period heritage – Rani Pokhari and Statue of Pratap Mall on the north and west sides in close proximity of Jama Masjid. Both mosque and ‘madrasa’ in Bidur are located on the way to Shiva and Ram temple (Hindus). According to the legend, the Pratap Malla, the then King of Kathmandu provided the present land of Jama Masjid and ordered the construction of Mosque over there. The community bond between Muslims and neighbours of other religion is more prominent at Bidur. The locals greet them on Friday and other festivals and remind them of timing to visit mosque for ‘nawaz.’ The local non-Muslim businessman has also donated cloths and cash for children studying at ‘madrasa.’ The Bidur Municipality has also constructed the boundary wall from ‘kabristhan’ (burial ground for Muslim) from its own budget. Another local cooperated by selling part of his land for opening access to the mosque. Such feature of mutual self-help between Muslims and other local communities can be taken as an opportunity for further expansion of mosque activities. Second, Muslims people in Kathmandu and Bidur are very much faithful in the Islamic culture and religious practice. Huge gathering on Friday praying and continuous donation has further demonstrated their strong commitment in this religion.

### Majority of Muslim Communities Are Satisfied with the Present Management

More than two third of the respondent (70%) were satisfied with the existing amenities and facilities at Jame Masjid (Fig. 5) and reasons cited were smooth running of praying, education inside the mosque and central location. The remaining 30% showed dissatisfaction due to lack of extra facilities such as library and information desk for non-Muslim communities. They were also critical for lack of master plan for linking various blocks within the mosque complex. In the case of Bidur too, though majority of the mosque visitors (87.5%) were satisfied with the present state of the mosque and its activities, the rest were critical of narrow entry point, poor lighting and ventilation on the ground floor room and slippery lobby on the ground floor (Fig. 5). They also emphasised for need of neat and clean toilets and non-slippery entry lobby.

In the issue of new mosque construction in future, the respondents were divided. In the case of Jame Masjid, Kathmandu, more than one third (37.5%) of the interviewees did not specify any particular style but emphasised for neat and clean praying spaces looking towards Mecca (Fig. 3). However, 30% of the interviewees were in favour of building new mosque based on local culture, followed by 15% for architectural style of their origin destination. Similarly, about 72.5% of mosque visitors in Bidur also mentioned ‘no need’ of any particular style in new construction except involvement of engineers and technical persons (Fig. 5). The remaining respondents (27.5%) were in favour of new modern construction for future mosque. On the issue of future role of mosque, majority of respondents were satisfied with the present state in both case. More than two third (67.5%) of the visitors at Jame Masjid were happy to have both mosque and ‘madrasa’ running smoothly at present. Another 25% of the visitors were in favour of adding more facilities so that it could act as a learning centre with praying activity. In the case of Bidur, 70% mosque visitors were satisfied with the present state of mosque and found nothing

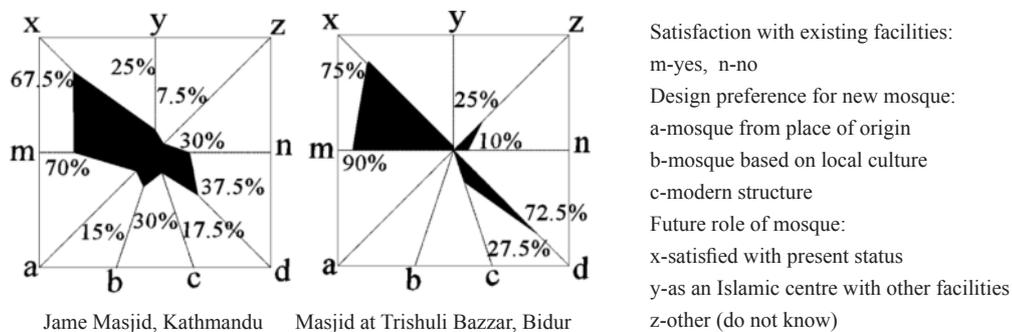


Fig.5: Satisfaction with the existing facilities, new mosque design and its future role .

to be added. Instead, they were proud of the mosque being only one in the whole Nuwakot district. The rest, i.e., 25% of the respondents did not present any concrete idea for future development of mosque in Bidur.

Also, more than 90% of the visitors were satisfied with the Mosque Management Committee at Jame Masjid for effectively managing various activities within the mosque complex and maintaining neat and clear environment within the mosque premises. They appreciated the Committee's good job despite constrain in land and finance. Only 7.5% of the respondents found some minor problems: praying in the outdoor terraces during rainy season; late arriving in the mosque due to absence of announcement system through loudspeakers and so on. In the case of Bidur, the same percentage of visitor was satisfied with the Management Committee for smooth running of mosque, 'madrasha' and 'Idgaha.' The dissatisfaction of the remaining 10% was mainly due to slippery staircase and entrance lobby during rain and poor maintenance of toilets and urinals.

However, few areas need serious consideration and improvements, as identified during the survey and mentioned by respondents. First, as both Masjids are newly construed some 10-15 years back only, they could be more functional in terms of symbolically expressing the Islamic culture and providing comfort and convenient for the prayers. The opportunity to make these mosques as a symbol of Islam based on historical models and regional styles to reflect the ethnic and social aspirations of the local community was not fully realised. When an immigrant Muslim community builds a mosque, the goal shall be more than a suitable prayer space. There is also an artistic dimension by which the building itself must speak to the local community, providing both spiritual uplift and an anchor for the community's identity.

Lack of master plan and piecemeal construction has created confusion for the mosque visitors at Jame Masjid of Kathmandu (Fig.6). Water facility for cleaning hands and foots are located on the ground floor, whereas one can directly

approach to the praying areas of the first floor from 'madrasa. While constructing the Masjid at Bidur, the emphasis was on the prayer's hall with little consideration on other design issues. The layout plan and division of spaces in the 'madrasa' also needs improvements. All the children used to sleep in a single elongated room without provision of cupboards and cloth hanging facilities (Fig. 6). Their beddings and cloths were simply lying on the room corners. The trend of keeping the iron rods of the Reinforced Cement Concrete unexposed is highly vulnerable to earthquake.

Second, both these Masjids are basically used for praying only. The opportunity of providing both secular and non-secular amenities for synthesizing learning and interaction among different Islamic and non-Islamic societies was not realised in new construction. Third, the level of awareness on future course of mosque development and architectural vocabulary of Islamic culture is low among different groups: mosque visitors, Mosque Management Committee and Muslim senior citizen. Fourth, information available about the mosque and 'madrasa' of Nepal is limited and scattered among Muslim community only. Mostly written in Arabic, non-Muslims find them difficult in reading and understanding.

### Inadequate Legal and Institutional Framework

Numerous potentials and problems associated with conservation and development of Masjids can not be addressed with the existing legal and institutional framework. Despite having historical significance and cultural attachment of Muslims, both Jame Masjid and Masjid at Bidur are neither listed as national monuments nor demarcated in the municipal maps. As a result, the conservation of these monuments has become the task of Muslim people only without any involvement from the government side. The potential of social harmony between Muslim and local communities and Muslims' commitment on Islam is not realised. The existing building bylaws of Ancient Monument Act 1976 of Nepal do not speak anything on



Confusing linkages at Jame Masjid



outdoor praying at Jame Masjid



Congested bedroom at madrassa at Bidur



Unmanaged shoe storage at Bidur

Fig.6: Numerous problems at Jame Masjid and Masjid at Bidur.

mosques whereas the local municipality and Department of Archaeology does not have any concrete plans and proposals for the promotion of such unique heritage. No architectural design guidelines exist at present in the building bylaws for conservation of mosque design. Instead of acknowledging the mosque as heritage of Muslim community, the local government delayed the issuing building permit while constructing the Jame Masjid in the mid-1990s. There was a debate whether new mosque construction should be allowed in the vicinity where Malla and Rana period heritages exist. In the case of Bidur, no permission was taken from the local municipality while constructing the mosque. The local government also did not make any intervention assuming the importance of mosque on Muslim community.

Numerous Muslims welfare organisations such as Ittehadul Muslimean Committee, Iqra Modal Academy, Islamic Yuwa Sangh, Nepal Muslim Sangh, Bajme Adab and the Muslim Seva Samiti, established after restoration of multiple democracy system in 1991 and end of Monarchy system in the past three years are more concerned towards safeguarding the Muslim identity, right and access to decision making process at various level of nation's development system. Such views are supported by Nepal Muslim Journalists Association, Al-hera Educational Society, Nepal, and Amir Islamic Association, Nepal. Although they make up 10% of the population, Nepal's Muslims are under-represented at the decision-making level (Nepali Times, 2009). On the other hand, local Mosque Management Committees have been engaged in running daily activities through managing the funds from various sources. As a result, the agenda on conservation and promotion of mosque as cultural heritage of Muslim community has got little attention even from the concerned organisations. The level of awareness towards this goal is also low among the concerned agencies.

## CONCLUSION

Detailed analysis of Jame Masjid in Kathmandu and another Masjid at Trishuli Bazaar in Bidur reveals that these mosques have become the centre of practising Islamic culture, promoting brotherhood among Muslim communities, learning place of Islamic education. Moreover, social harmony between Muslims and other religious communities together with coexistence of mosques and 'madrasa' with other religious structures of Hindus in the same vicinity has presented the unique situation. Architecturally they are not prominent with elaborative detailing yet they are representative of community with high sentimental value and attachment. Majority of the mosque visitors are satisfied with the existing amenities but they are not clear on the future role of mosque. However, conservation and promotion of mosques as architectural heritage of Muslim communities in secular Nepal is lacking behind not only due to lack of information and poor level of awareness among the mosque visitors but also because of

lack of government's specific plans and policies. To address the present situation, the following strategic solutions are recommended:

**Development of Mosques as Islamic Cultural and Community Development Centre:** Numerous aspects of Koran and philosophy of Islamic culture have a lot of relevancy in the modern society of 21st century. Mosque architecture in Nepal should be adaptive and assimilative rather than stubbornly conservative. Moreover, it should encourage dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims by providing an interactive infrastructure to accommodate both secular and sacral programs within the same space. Mosque design should continue with the past, while allowing them to execute spatial transformations in response to the social, political, economic and technological changes that take place over time. In addition to praying, the mosque spaces should also be used for secular activities, such as reading, learning, lecturing, discussing, playing, and even sleeping. In fact, such 'elasticity' of spatial use also represents the most important aspect of Islamic practice.

**Identification of salient features of Islamic culture and mosque design and incorporation of them into local planning and building codes as well as in school syllabus:** Mosques and 'madrasas' are now an established feature of the built environment of the city, developed progressively by the Muslim communities to service their religious and social needs. Despite having a long history of Muslim migrants and existence of mosques in Nepal, hardly any concrete study has been carried out from architectural and cultural heritage perspectives. Same is true in the government's plans and policies. Syllabus of architectural schools in Nepal also lack of it. In such context, research, development and dissemination of information of salient features of Islamic architecture of Nepal is meaningful not only to raise public awareness and community education but also to add a new vocabulary in the history of Nepalese architecture. Such findings shall be incorporated in local building codes and public policy.

**Cooperation, coordination and networking with domestic and international organisations:** Despite social harmony with other religious groups, the promotion of mosque and Islamic culture at present in Nepal is limited to Muslim communities. Sharing information and data with government and other organisation working in the similar field at local, national and international levels will not only help to exchange problems and potentials related to mosque but also assist to learn from the best international practise.

Last but not the least, the commitment of Muslim in practising on Islam and transformation of mosque design/ construction- new and addition of facilities to continue religious activities can be a source of inspiration for communities of other religions

and culture to continue their religious practices.

## ENDNOTES

1. The holiest place in Islam, a large cube-shaped building inside the al-Masjid al-Haram mosque in Mecca
2. The Qibla, also known as Qiblah, Qibleh, Kiblah, Kible or Kibla, is the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays during salat. It is fixed as the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca. Most mosques contain a wall niche, known as 'mihrab' that indicates the Qibla. Most multi-faith prayer rooms will also contain a Qibla, although usually less standardised in appearance than one would find within a mosque. Muslims all praying towards the same point is traditionally considered to symbolise the unity of all Muslims worldwide under Law of God. The Qibla has importance beyond salaah and plays a part in various ceremonies. The head of an animal that is slaughtered using 'halal' methods is aligned with the Qiblah. After death, Muslims are buried with their heads turned right towards the direction of the Qibla.
3. Mihrab is a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla, that is, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying. The wall in which a mihrab appears is thus the 'qibla wall.' Mihrabs should not be confused with the 'minibar,' which is the raised platform from which an Imam (leader of prayer) addresses the congregation.
4. Vamshavalis or chronicles have been the most important sources of data for the reconstruction of Nepal's long history. The most basic of them vamshavalis are simple lists of kings, but others provide details such as regnal dates and the ruler's actions to honour his gods, such as donations to temples or the founding of shrines. The Gopalaraja Vamshavali is supposed to be the oldest and was compiled during the reign of Sthiti Malla (1382-'95). The Gopalraja Vamshavali, the 'Chronicle of the Gopala Kings,' was so named because it begins with a list of the obscure Gopal rulers. But it is from the Licchavi period that Nepal's oldest examples of solid documentation survive. Vamshavalis were based on orally transmitted genealogies. Although there is confusion about dates and chronology in each vamshavali, and a fair amount of 'myth and fantasy,' yet careful cross referencing between chronicles, inscriptions and other evidence has produced a fairly clear picture of portions of Nepali history.
5. The name 'malla' is not normally an ethnic designation or a dynastic name. It means 'wrestler' or 'victor' and the name was actually adopted by the writers themselves. The Malla king ruled in Nepal from 1200 till 1769.
6. Deobandia is a term used for a revivalist movement in Sunni Islam (Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah). It is centered primarily in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh and has recently spread to the United Kingdom and has a presence in South Africa. The name derives from Deoband, India, where the school Darul Uloom Deoband is situated. The movement was inspired by the spirit of scholar Shah Waliullah (1703–1762), while the foundation of Darul Uloom Deoband was laid on 30 May 1866.

7. The term madrasa is the Arabic word for any type of educational institution, whether secular or religious (of any religion). It literally means 'a place where learning and studying take place.' In the West, the word usually refers to a specific type of religious school or college for the study of the Islamic religion, though this may not be the only subject studied.

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