

Do not turn Masjid's into Museums

I happened to visit the capital city a couple of days ago. I found an opportunity to go to the Shah Faisal Masjid. This Mosque is indeed a masterpiece of art and architecture. Before I come to the main point of this column, I would like to narrate a little bit about the structure and history of this Mosque for your reading pleasure.

The Mosque is rightly named after Shah Faisal (late), the ex-ruler of Saudi Arabia and a well-wisher of the Islamic World. In 1966 when he visited Islamabad, Islamabad was a newborn city. During the visit he was informed that a historical and exquisite Mosque was to be constructed in the new city. He not only supported the idea but also promised to bear all the expenditures on its construction. In 1969 a contest at the international level was arranged inviting the architects from all over the world with uncompromising reputation. The model made presented by Vedit Dolki, a Turk architect was approved as the best.

The design is unique from all other Pakistani Mosques. The design seems to have been derived from a large tent. Four minarets have been constructed on each of its four corners with a height of 285ft with another 14ft including the length of the golden crests made of gilded copper. The fifth and the largest crest has been installed over the top of the main hall with a height more than 20ft. Although the Mosque has no boundary wall or any arch-shaped roof, yet its main hall is without pillars and has the largest covered area compared to all the Mosques in the world. The dimension of this equal-sided hall is 280ft with a height of 140ft. Almost 10,000 people can pray in its lounge at a time. A very beautiful chandelier has been fixed to the ceiling of the main hall. The chandelier, gifted by the Muslims artisans of China, is fitted with 1,100 electric bulbs that not only illuminate the hall but also embellish the inside view. The Mosque is surrounded by two yards having verandahs on the outer sides. Almost one hundred thousand people can offer prayers in the hall, yards and verandas.

The spacious hall, tall minarets crowned with golden crests, illuminating chandeliers, serene ponds and waterspouts with the crystal clear water have a glamorous power to astound a human eye.

I experienced the same exotic elation yet I had a feeling of sudden and deep shock to see the people's conduct against the sanctity of the Mosque. By chance the moment we reached there, people were coming in for the Zuhr (noon-prayer). The visitors including women and children were entering the Mosque in groups but most of them with conduct as if it was not a Mosque but a museum or garden. Hullabaloo, photographs, unveiling women, playing children, whispering young couples and old men and women lying about... at a time when prayer was being performed. Although there were many instructions about the due reverence of a Mosque, the visitors neglected instructions criminally and there was no one to stop them. There was a contradiction between the words and actions of the administration. One of the instructions prohibited photography in the Mosque, but the bookstalls near the yard were selling the books and magazines full of pictures.

A book authored by William Shakespeare with his picture on the title page was on display in a facing showcase and could be seen when standing in the courtyard. That stall was also a good place to purchase pants and shirts with pictures printed on them. Stone and bricks construct only the structure of a Mosque. The purpose of its construction cannot be achieved without due maintaining Mosques sanctity. People not giving reverence to Mosques do not make any spiritual gains by coming to there.

Those who love Allah are identified with a love for Mosques. One who does not revere a Mosque actually shows no respect to Allah Almighty. The people who are acquainted with the etiquettes and their hearts are filled with Allah's love. When they enter a Mosque, they are overwhelmed by the Majesty and Sovereignty of Allah, walking humbly either silent or busy glorifying Allah's name. They know that making a noise, talking about the worldly affairs, chuckling and strolling, and bringing women and very small children there, all are the activities against the etiquettes. Women have been advised to perform Salaah at their homes and that too at a covered portion.

Once the wife of Abu Hammed Sa'adi (radhiallahu 'anhu) expressed her desire to offer prayers led by the Holy Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) in the Mosque. The Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) replied: I know your desire but for you performing the Salaah in a room is better than performing in a veranda and performing in a veranda is better than performing in a courtyard.

Along the eastern wall of the hall of the Shah Faisal Masjid, there is a gallery specified for women. Since we had to perform the Zuhr prayer in the Jami'ah Faridiay due to some reason, we left the Mosque while the prayer had just started. These scenes of disrespect, photography, mix gathering and negligence to the obligation of prayer are not specific to the Shah Faisal Masjid as these scenes can also be seen in many beautiful and historical Mosques including the Gol Masjid in the Karachi and the Badshahi Masjid Lahore.

When I see the sanctity of Mosques being violated in such a way, I fear if our Mosques are being converted into museums. You must have heard about the beauty and attractiveness of the Qurtuba Masjid in Andalusia. Today that historical and beautiful Mosque has been converted into a museum where no one is allowed to perform the Salaah. No doubt the Jami'ah Masjid Qurtuba is under the custody of the non-Muslims but the custodians of the Jami'ah Aaya Sofia in Istanbul is under Muslim custody, but praying was declared unlawful by Kamal Atatürk. Some people in Pakistan seek

their ideal in Kamal Ataturk. God forbid! Attempts are being made to repeat the history of Turkey by converting the Mosques into museums.

Source: Zafar Hansrot