

Establishment of Masjid-e-Nabawi and its Historical Role

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Abstract

Masjid-e-Nabawi is the most sacred mosque for Muslims after Masjid al-ḥarām, which is located in Makkah. This Mosque holds the honor of having its foundation laid by the Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W). When the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madinah, the tribal chiefs and common resident of Madinah wished that the Prophet (S.A.W) should stay at their house but the camel of the Last Messenger of Allah (S.A.W) stopped by the site of the place, where later Masjid-e-Nabawi was built and the Prophet (S.A.W) said: "This is the Home." That particular place was known as "Rawḍah min Riyāḍ al-Jannah" He (S.A.W) enquired about the owner of the land and was told that the land was owned by two young orphan brothers, Sahl and Suhayl. The paper examines the establishment of this historical mosque and its role.

Keywords: Masjid-e-Nabawi, Historical Role, al-Ṣuffah, Riyāḍ-al-Jannah

When Muḥammad (S.A.W) came to Madinah, He stayed in the area of Banū Najjār near the house of Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W) decided to establish a mosque there. The land which was chosen for the mosque belong to two brothers, Sahl and Suhayl. The two brothers were orphans and they wanted to give the land for the construction of mosque without any cost but the Last Massinger (S.A.W) of Allah did not accept it and he asked Abū Bakar to pay money to the brothers who then paid ten *ḍinārs* to them¹.

The foundation of the mosque was laid down by Holy Prophet (S.A.W) in the month of Rabi‘ al-Awwal. Stones, unbacked bricks, trunks and branches of palm tree were used in construction. There were three doors in Masjid e Nabawi².

There were palm trees and the graves of non-Muslims on that land. Graves were dug up, trees were made clear and mosque was constructed on that land. The palms were used as pillar to support the roof, bricks of stone were used to make walls and the branches were used to make the roof of the mosque. At the back side of the mosque Muḥammad (S.A.W) constructed a shaded area for the poor Ṣaḥābah, they used this place to stay for night, that place was called as al-Ṣuffah and for the accommodation of the family of Muḥammad (S.A.W) they built two huts³.

Due to consistently increasing number of worshippers, there was all the more need for extension of Masjid-e-Nabawi. Therefore, extension was undertaken after ‘Uthmān (R.A) paid for the required land and finally its size was extended from original 35x30 meters to 50x50 meters along with the increased height from 2.5 meters to 3.5 meters. The extension took place at the time of Faṭḥ-e-Khyber (opening of Khyber)⁴.

This mosque is visited by hundreds of thousands of followers of Islam annually and the number of visitors is still on the rise. The original mosque that was built after the Muḥammad (S.A.W) migrated to Madinah was very simple one with the ceiling composed of straw, walls with the branches of date trees, pillars made with trunks of trees and floor

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being made of sand. The mosque was renovated and extended multiple times in order to provide more space for Muslims to worship⁵.

Initially a separate part was allocated by Allah's messenger (S.A.W) for the travelers and poor people to stay in the place that was called *al-Şuffah*⁶. *Ahl al-Şuffah* means those Companions or Şahābah of Muḥammad (S.A.W) who were generous, kind and selfless people, who devoted their whole lives to serve the Prophet (S.A.W) and learn Qur'an and aḥādīth like Abū Hurayrah (R.A). It reveals the compassion and sympathy of Muḥammad (S.A.W) and that the basis of Islam is in kindness, help, and support of the needy and poor people. It is very ill-fated now a days that mosques are reserved only for prayers and after prayer times mosques are locked⁷.

Allah states in the Qur'an:

“Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from that which you love. And whatever you spend – indeed, Allah knows of it”. [Qur'an, 3:92].

After coming across this verse, Abū Ṭalḥah (R.A) offered his most loved garden called “Bir Ḥā” in the name of Allah which is today a beautiful part of Masjid-e-Nabawi. This gives a beautiful message to the Muslims that one should generously spend in the way of Allah; indeed Allah is the most rewarding⁸.

Role:

The masjid played the role of a religious school, community center, court and also as a confinement for prisoners.

1. As a Religious Institution:

Muslims used to perform their religious activities in masjid-e-Nabawi. There were other mosques as well in Madinah but the Jumu'ah Prayer used to be performed in Masjid-e-Nabawi. Many aḥādīth are narrated by many Şahābah in which Prophet (S.A.W) promises Muslims a lot of reward for performing religious functions in Masjid-e-Nabawi.

Once he said that a prayer offered in congregation is twenty five or twenty seven times more superior in reward to that which is offered alone⁹.

Not only prayers but the Masjid-e-Nabawi was used for many other individual and collective religious functions such as *dhikr* and *i'tikāf*.

The Holy Prophet (S.A.W) revealed that prayer (Şalāh) in Masjid-e-Nabawi holds immense reward. In his words:

“Do not prepare yourself for a journey to any mosque [with the intention to earn special reward of prayers] but the three mosques al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, al-Masjid al-Aqṣā, and my mosque.”(Bukhari: No. 1115).

He said in an other place:

“One prayer in my mosque is better than one thousand prayers in any other mosque except al-Masjid al-Ḥarām. (Bukhari: No. 1116”

This shows the degree of reward from Allah being a thousand times more upon the person for praying in Masjid-e-Nabawi with the exception of Masjid-al-Ḥarām.

Riyāḍ al-Jannah is another significance part of Masjid e Nabawi.

Abū Hurayrah (R.A) describes that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) said:

“Between my house and my pulpit lays a garden from the gardens of Paradise, and my pulpit is upon my fountain (Al-Kawthar).” [Bukhari]

As early mentioned ḥadīth shows that Riyāḍ al-Jannah is similar to the paradise in heaven so visiting this place and offering prayers here is equal to be offering prayers in heaven.

2. Learning Center:

Masjid e Nabawi was also a place where Muslims would use to learn about the core faith of Islam, i.e., Oneness of the sole creator of the universe. At the same time they would be introduced to one another and would know about the purpose of their creation, their rights and duties towards each other so that they can establish mutually good relations and can spend good time in this world. This practice still continues today. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī took this unique Islamic spirit of learning by saying that “man was created only to know (learn)”¹⁰.

In the initial time period of Islam there were no schools so masjid-e-Nabawi became the Islamic learning center for all. Holy Prophet (S.A.W) encouraged people to also make use of mosque for learning purpose, once he said:

“He who treads the path in search of knowledge, Allah will make with it the path which leads to *jannah* (Paradise) easy for him. And those persons who assemble in a house of Allah’s Houses (mosques) and recite the Qur’ān, learning and teaching it among themselves, there would descend upon them the tranquility, and mercy would cover them, and the angels would surround them, and Allah makes a mention of them in the presence of those near Him...”¹¹

There used to be meetings and discussions of Muḥammad (S.A.W) and his companions in the mosque. The logical, rational and intellectual discussions attracted people to the mosque and they could not avoid but to join the company of the Prophet (S.A.W). These discussions were not limited to the males but females and children were also part of it. The Prophet (S.A.W) allocated some time for the female to teach them and give them the knowledge of Islam and also give them opportunity so that they might be able to present their problems and get valuable advices from Holy Prophets (S.A.W)

Āyishah (R.A) the youngest wife of the Prophet (S.A.W), once commented about the native women of Madinah:

“Blessed are the women of the *Anṣār* (helpers). Shyness did not stand in their way of seeking knowledge about their religion”¹².

Masjid-e-Nabawi was not only meant to be the place of worship but also a place of teaching and learning. The companions of the Prophet (S.A.W) used to take guidance from him in learning and understanding Qur’ān, digging deep into the meaning of Qur’ān and then discuss and deliberate with one another. They used to take interest in learning and debating and would preach to others too when they would step out of the mosque. This helped a lot in spreading and promoting of Islam at that time¹³. The Prophet (S.A.W) was truly aware of the importance of learning and education in the society therefore he brought about all the resources that were available at that time to promote education¹⁴.

Muhammad (S.A.W) loved preaching and learning so much that when in the battle of Badr around 60 to 70 captives were taken by the Muslims then the Prophet (S.A.W) imposed the condition upon poor among them that each of them would teach 10 Muslim children to read and write. Only then they would be set free from captivity. 'Ubādah b. Ṣāmit (R.A) said that the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W) assigned him the duty of teaching Qur'an to people in Masjid-e-Nabawi.

3. Sacred chamber of the Prophet (S.A.W):

Just outside of Masjid-e-Nabawi the Hujrah of Holy Prophet (S.A.W) was located. His most beloved wife Āyishah (R. A) used to live in it. Holy Prophet (S.A.W) and his two companions 'Umar (R. A) and Abū Bakr (R.A) are resting in peace there now. On the eastern side of the mosque the house of the youngest daughter of Holy Prophet (S.A.W) is situated.

4. Podium (minbar) of the Last Messenger of Allah (S.A.W)

Muhammad (S.A.W) used to deliver his lectures from a special point in the mosque which later on acquired an important position in the history of Masjid-e-Nabawi. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) fixed this place for him on the special request of his companions (Ṣaḥābah). Since then, the pulpit (minbar) became a salient feature in all mosques as a place for all addressers from where they can deliver lectures comfortably¹⁵.

5. As Political Institution:

Masjid e Nabawi was the center of the first Muslim Country on the earth, al-Madinah. All the decisions of the country used to be taken from this Mosque. All the tribes and ambassadors used to meet Holy Prophet (S.A.W) in Masjid e Nabawi. Majlis-e-Shūrā the consultative body of Muslims also held its meeting in Masjid e Nabawi and they used to take decisions on all matters of the state in this mosque.

Masjid e Nabawi was the source of unity among the Muslims. It promoted vivid education and civility among the Muslims. The purpose of Masjid e Nabawi was to bring together both religion and politics. As Islam is not confined to the religious practices only but it covers all the aspects of life and it provides solution to all the problems. 'Allāma Iqbal very rightly said;

جد اہودین سیاست سے تو رہ جاتی ہے چنگیزی

Masjid-e-Nabawi also served as a place of dispensing justice under the supervision and patronage of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W). Different disputes brought in the mosque, were heard and mutually discussed and deliberated upon and final verdict was then issued keeping in consideration all requirements of the justice.

Masjid-e-Nabawi also served as a place of shelter and refuge to those who were either poor, helpless, needy or homeless. Masjid-e-Nabawi was home and a place of asylum to those migrants and tribes who were financially weak or unmarried and did not have any financial means to build home of their own. They used to live there day and night. For their sustenance, proper arrangements were done by the Ṣaḥābah on the directions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W). Moreover, some women who had newly accepted Islam and were homeless were also made to stay and live there. Indeed Masjid-e-Nabawi was such a place for the needies where their all requirements and needs were fulfilled in accordance with the instructions by the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

6. As an Administrative Institution:

Masjid e Nabawi (S.A.W) was also used as the center of the administrative tasks. The entire administration of the newly established Muslim state was managed by the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) from this mosque. The Prophet (S.A.W) would send and receive the ambassadors in Masjid e Nabawi. Collection of Zakāt, Fiṭrānah and Ṣadaqah was to be managed from here. Funds and daily use products were to be collected to help the poor and needy people. In times of war the Masjid e Nabawi performed the role of collecting and gathering people for jihād.

Diplomacy is an old phenomenon and Islam keeps this process continued. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W) also used to send ambassadors and representatives to other countries. When the representatives and ambassadors of other countries visit the State of Madinah they used to stay in Masjid-e-Nabawi and Muḥammad (S.A.W) would meet them in the Masjid.

A Christian delegation from Najrān (Yemen) once visited Madinah to discuss faith issues with the Prophet (S.A.W). They were also received by the Prophet in the Masjid.

Initially there were no offices and secretariat in Madinah to run the administration of the first Muslim country, so Masjid-e-Nabawi was used for this purpose. Apart from that all this, the correspondence with other countries also used to be done from this mosque. The chief secretary was Ḥanzal (R.A) while ‘Uthmān , ‘Ali and Zayd b. Thābit (may Allah be pleased with them all) and others were also involved in the same process. Muḥammad (S.A.W) asked Zayd b. Thābit (R.A) to learn different languages of other countries so that Muslim can correspond with other countries in their respective languages.

7. As an Educational Institution:

Masjid-e-Nabawi played important role of spreading knowledge in the world. It was the first school of Muslims. It not only disseminated religious education but worldly education as well. As in Ghazwa-e-Badr many non-Muslims were imprisoned by Muslims and the Prophet (S.A.W) said that anyone who educate ten Muslims would be free.

After migrating to Madinah the Prophet (S.A.W) paid attention to Women’s education. He not only focused on the religious education of females but also a day was fixed by him on the request of women to give them lecture and Holy Prophet promised them and on a fixed day he used to deliver lecture to the Muslim females. Some twenty Ṣahābiyyāt of holy Prophet were Mufti in Fiqh. Shifā daughter of Abdullah (R.A), who was the relative of ‘Umar Farooq (R.A) taught Ḥifṣah (R.A) to read and write.

The most loving wife of Prophet (S.A.W) ‘Āyishah (R.A) has the knowledge of not only Fiqh but she also had command over poetry, literature and Medical know how. The wives of Muḥammad (S.A.W) were also educated in Law and its different fields which they learnt in Masjid e Nabawi.

8. Military role of Masjid e Nabawi

At that time there was no concept of paid military. *Bayt al-Māl* was not established yet. So at that time Jihad was declared mandatory on all. All the goods and money that were taken in possession from the enemy used to be divided in four parts and one out of four parts had been given to the worriers. All the military arrangements and activities used to take place in Masjid-e-Nabawi.

9. Appointment of Government Officials

As there was no proper office in Madinah so the function of appointing different government officials was also used to be done in the mosque. Before appointing any person

for any job Holy Prophet (S.A.W) used to take interview of the person so that the knowledge, experience and ability of that person could be judged. After appointing any person for any function Messenger (S.A.W) used to guide him and gave him direction regarding the job. To avoid the sense of deprivation among Muhājirūn and Anṣār the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) very justly and equally divided the functions of government among them.

Holy Prophet (S.A.W) has great managerial skills. He had seen the hard time of Makkah and the peaceful and pleasant time of Madinah. Appointment of Muṣ'ab b. 'Umayr as the Commander in Chief in the fight of Badr, sending 'Umar (R.A) as ambassador to Makkah, sending 'Uthmān (R.A) for dialogue towards Quraysh, rightly shows that he had a fixed criteria for the appointment of any person for any job.

Muḥammad (S.A.W) used to prepare Muslims for the Holy War and their exercises used to be held in the Masjid, like archery, shooting and many other war related exercises. The Holy prophet (S.A.W) made war planning in the mosque and also sent army for war from the same mosque. The war flag used to be placed in Masjid-e-Nabawi and the army would leave from the mosque in a very organized manner.

The non-Muslim war prisoners were kept in Masjid e Nabawi. It has two purposes: one was to teach other people lessons from them and do not dare to fight and plot against Muslims and on the other hand non-Muslim prisoners would watch Muslims offering prayers and performing other religious functions and would get inspired by the Muslims. Many non-Muslims embraced Islam in this way. Thumāmah b. Uthāl is the best example, who converted to Islam after being imprisoned by Muslims in the mosque.

10. As Social Institution:

Masjid-e-Nabawi also performed the role of a social institution. Nikāḥ and other religious activities were performed in Masjid-e-Nabawi like the Nikah of Fatima was performed in Masjid e Nabawi. Holy Prophet (S.A.W) used to meet people in Masjid-e-Nabawi. Consultative body was established in this very mosque. Muḥammad (S.A.W) used to listen to the problems and grievances and problems of the people and try to give them solution. In the consultative body of Masjid-e-Nabawi every person was free to share and discuss his problem with Muḥammad (S.A.W). Muslims used to meet with one another five times a day and would help each other in time of need but today people seldom follow these noble practices.

Muslims fought many wars with non-Muslims for the promotion and preaching of Islam. Many Muslims sacrificed their lives for Islam and many others were injured in wars. Masjid-e-Nabawi also played the role of Hospital in times of war by providing all medical facilities to the wounded Muslims.

11. Literary Gatherings:

Poetry was also part of the activities of Masjid e Nabawi which was used for the promotion of Islam. A companion named Ḥassān b. Thābit was a great poet. He used to write poetry in praise of Holy Prophet (S.A.W) and recite that poetry in masjid-e-Nabawi in front of the Prophet (S.A.W). The Prophet once said: "O Hassan! Reply on behalf of Allah's Messenger. O Allah! Support him with the Holy Spirit"¹⁶.

Conclusion:

Masjid-e-Nabawi played a very important role in the establishment of first Muslim state in the world. The sacred environment of mosque was chosen to perform various functions of

the state. These activities were related to the structure of the state, performance of the religious activities, consultation, taking oath from the people who accepted Islam as their religion, conducting Jihad, providing shelter to the poor, as foreign office to meet and have discussions with foreigners, deciding cases and disputes of public, initiating social welfare and a financial center where funds were distributed and collected from the people. Briefly we can say that at the initial time of Islam Masjid-e-Nabawi played the role of a law making, law implementing and law adjudicating body as well as a social welfare institution for Muslims and a reformist center.

Endnotes

¹<https://islamcalling.wordpress.com/2010/05/22/history-of-masjid-un-nabwi-construction-and-extension/>

²Baran-e-Rahmat - The Rain of Mercy Part 1, Khawaja Shamsuddin, p. 248

³<https://islamcalling.wordpress.com/2010/05/22/history-of-masjid-un-nabwi-construction-and-extension/>

⁴ (<http://www.islamiclandmarks.com/madinah-masjid-e-nabwi/masjid-e-nabwi>)

⁵ (<http://www.quranreading.com/blog/facts-about-the-masjid-e-nabvi/>)

⁶ Year Book of the Muslim World, Mohammed Nasir Jawed, Media line, 1996 -Islam, P. 63

⁷ (<http://www.quranreading.com/blog/facts-about-the-masjid-e-nabvi/>)

⁸ (<http://www.quranreading.com/blog/facts-about-the-masjid-e-nabvi/>)

⁹ al-Bukhari, 1981, *Hadith* No. 466

¹⁰ (Wan Daud, Wan Mohd Nor. (1989). *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam*. London: Mansell Publishing Limited.

¹¹ Muslim, 2005, *Hadith* No. 6518

¹² Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj. (2005). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. New Delhi: Islamic Book Service

¹³ (<http://www.quranreading.com/blog/facts-about-the-masjid-e-nabvi/>)

¹⁴ (Muḥammad Asif Qidwai, *Maqālāt-e-Seerat Maulana Syed Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi* Kay Muqadmay kay Sath, pp.77-79, Shakeel Printing, Karachi.

¹⁵ (<http://www.quranreading.com/blog/facts-about-the-masjid-e-nabvi/>)

¹⁶ (Al-Bukhari, Muḥammad b. Isma‘il. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr)