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Historical Development of Mosque Architecture in Nepal

Dan Heera Kansakar

Department of Architecture, Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk Campus, Kathmanudu, Nepal

Abstract: The historical development of Mosque architecture in Nepal, the world's only one Hindu Kingdom is a very interesting phenomenon. Nepal has population of 22.5 million people, 95% of the population belongs to Hindu & Buddhist communities, and only 5% belong to Muslim, Christians & other communities. History shows that there have never been clashes between different religious groups in Nepal. "Pancha Kashmir" was the Ist Mosque built in Nepal, which lies on the east of Ranipokhari, the heart of Kathmandu City capital of Nepal, very near to Royal Palace.

About 500 years ago, during Malla period, a group of Sunni Muslims came to Kathmandu from Kashmir as merchants. It is said that those merchants were very clever in business policies and they created good relationship with Nepali people. The then King Pratap Malla was so influenced by them that he gave them permission to reside in Kathmandu valley. He also gave them land just east of Ranipokhari to make their own dwellings. It was at this time, the Ist small mosque was built in the form of hut. With the passing of time, Kathmandu became centre for Kashmir Muslims who go to Tibet for Business purpose. And thus population of Muslims grew and the mosque was extended from time to time. During the earthquake of 1930, this mosque was also destroyed. The present form of this mosque is the renovated form after 1930s' earthquake.

This mosque has sharp features of Islamic architecture regardless of the fact that it lies at the heart of Kathmandu City. This mosque has a beautiful covered praying hall for about 200 people, open yards for thousands of people to pray. This mosque is run by trust. The trust is extending the mosque by building 3-storeys building for thousands of people to pray.

Next to "Pancha Kanya" lies another mosque named "Emam Bada" which was built by Nawav Ali Shah of Lucknow (India) who escaped to Nepal with his wife Begum Hazrat Mahal during British rule in Lucknow. This mosque has been recently refurbished & renamed as "Nepali Zama Maszid". "Nepali Zama Maszid" has again sharp features of Islamic Architecture, regardless of the fact that it lies at the heart of Kathmandu City, capital of Hindu Kingdom.

Besides, these mosques at the heart of Kathmandu City, there are a number of mosques in other towns of the country, viz. In Gorkha, Nepalgunj, Kalaiya, Birgunj etc. Our history shows that about 200 years ago, during reign of His Majesty King late Prithivi Narayan Shah, the 10th forefather of His Majesty the King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (present King of Nepal), many Muslim soldiers were brought to be indicted in the Gorkha army, as Muslims were very perfect in sword handling. Those Muslims made their own mosque in Gorkha. Similarly, the other mosques in different parts of Nepal were made by different Muslim communities migrated to Nepal from India.

Introduction

Nepal is located in between Tibet (China) on the north and India on south and east and west. Cultural and religious aspects of Nepal were much influenced by these two countries from ancient times. As a result Buddhism and Hinduism became dominant religions of Nepal. Although India is dominated by Hindu religion, Mughals ruled India for more than 300 years and during this period Muslim religion spread and many mosques and monuments were built by them throughout India. Taj Mahal, one of the most magnificent monuments of India was built in this period. In 1605 BC boundary of Moghul Empire of India extended up to southern border i.e. Terai region of present Nepal. Up to this period

there is no historical evidence that Muslims has entered Nepal. This may be attributed to the fact that Nepal was highly influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism or because of geographical reasons since Nepal consists mostly of hilly and mountainous terrain and is a land locked country.

Historical evidence shows that Kashmiri Muslims entered Kathmandu Valley (then called Nepal itself) for the first time during the rule of King Ratna Malla in 15th Century as merchants. In those days Nepal had good commercial relation with Tibet. Kashmiri merchants noticed this quickly and extended their business up to Tibet. As the population of migrant Muslims grew, they built first mosque "Pancha Kashmiri" in Kathmandu.

This paper makes an effort to trace the historical development of Mosque architecture in Nepal. Although documented evidence of evolution and development of Mosque architecture in Nepal is non existent, this paper tries to summarize the evolution of mosque's in Nepal. Nepal has only 3 percent of Muslim population and unlike as in India was never ruled by mughals. Mosques in Nepal were thus built mainly by the efforts of Muslim people. Since head of states did not have any participation in building these mosques, they are few in numbers and it could not make significant impact on the architecture of Nepal. Mosques of Nepal carry a familiar form of Islamic architectural forms as domes arches and minarets, typical to mosque architecture in other countries.

Nepal is a country with a total area of 147.28 km, lies between 26° 22' N – 30° 27' N latitude & 80° 4' E – 88° 12' E longitudes. Roughly rectangular in shape, the country is sandwiched between two Asian Giants China in the North and India on the South, East and West. It is a land locked country. Nepal extends approximately 885 km East-West and 195 km. North-south at its narrowed and 241 km at its broadest.

Geographical Location of Nepal

The southern Nepal adjoins with terai area of India and rises towards the north to Himalayas, highest mountain in the world. Mt. Everest, highest peak in the world is located in Nepal. Nepal is divided into fourteen zones and seventy-five districts. The capital of Nepal is Kathmandu.

Kathmandu valley covers an area of 218 sq. miles. It is situated at 1310 m above the sea level. The valley consists of 3 cities: Kathmandu,Bhaktapur & Patan (Figs. 1, 2 & 3).

Status of Muslims in Nepal

Nepal has a total population of about 22.5 million. 95% of the total population belongs to Hindu & Buddhist communities & 5% belong to Muslims, Christians & other communities. As Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world, therefore the historical development of mosque architecture in Nepal is quite interesting phenomena. [1-7]

The minor Muslim communities in Nepal feel here safe and are living in harmony with other religious communities. Muslims of Nepal actively participate in all politico-socio-economical fields of Nepal's activities. We have Muslims from Zonal Chief to Ministers. Late Minister of Tourism Seikh Idris was a prominent figure of our country. He actively participated in the 1951 revolution to establish democracy in Nepal and the 1986 people's democratic movement against the partyless system of parliament. There are other significant Muslims presently in the Nepalese parliamentary structure. Mr. Anwar Ansari is the present Nepali parliamentarian.

Historical Background

History of Nepal shows that Kiranties , Lichhavies & Mallas were some of the remarkable rules. Among them, Mallas are said to be more advanced. They ruled Nepal from 13th Century to the end of 17th Century. About 500 years ago during reign of RATNA MALLA, a group of Sunni Muslims came to Kathmandu from Kashmir, India, as merchants. It is said that those merchants were very clever in business policies. They created a good relationship with the local people. Later King Pratap Malla, who became influenced by them, gave them permission to reside in Kathmandu valley. He also gave them land on the east of Ranipokhari to make their own dwellings.

Historical Development of Mosque Architecture

It was at this time the first mosque named 'Pancha Kashmiri' was built in Kathmandu. This was the first mosque in the country and the mosque was small in size. The 1st. Mosque by that time was built in form of small hut.

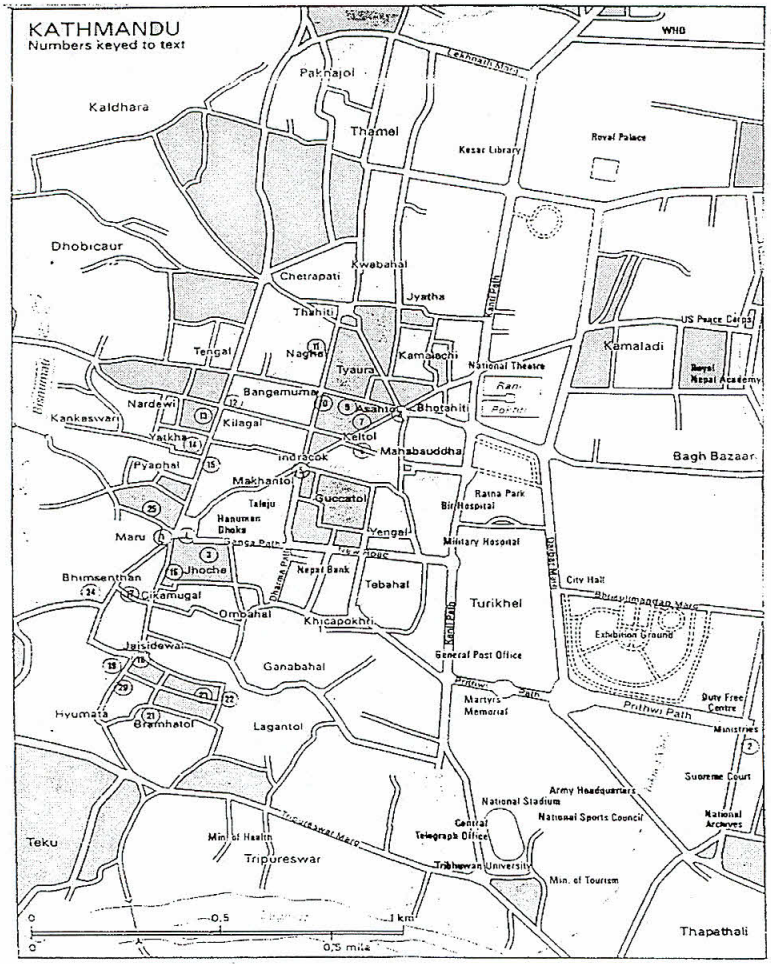


Fig 1: Map of Kathmandu

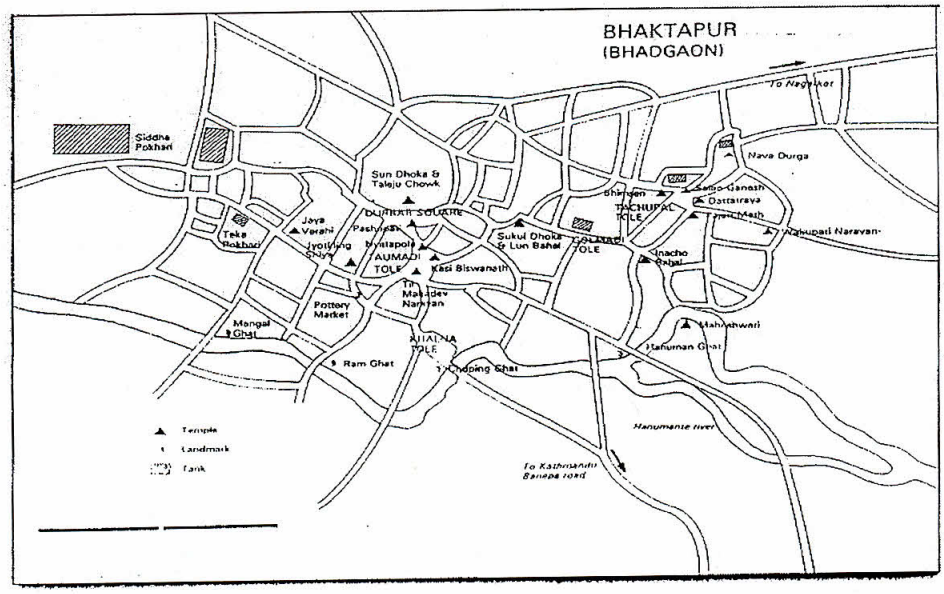


Fig 2: Map of Bakhtapur

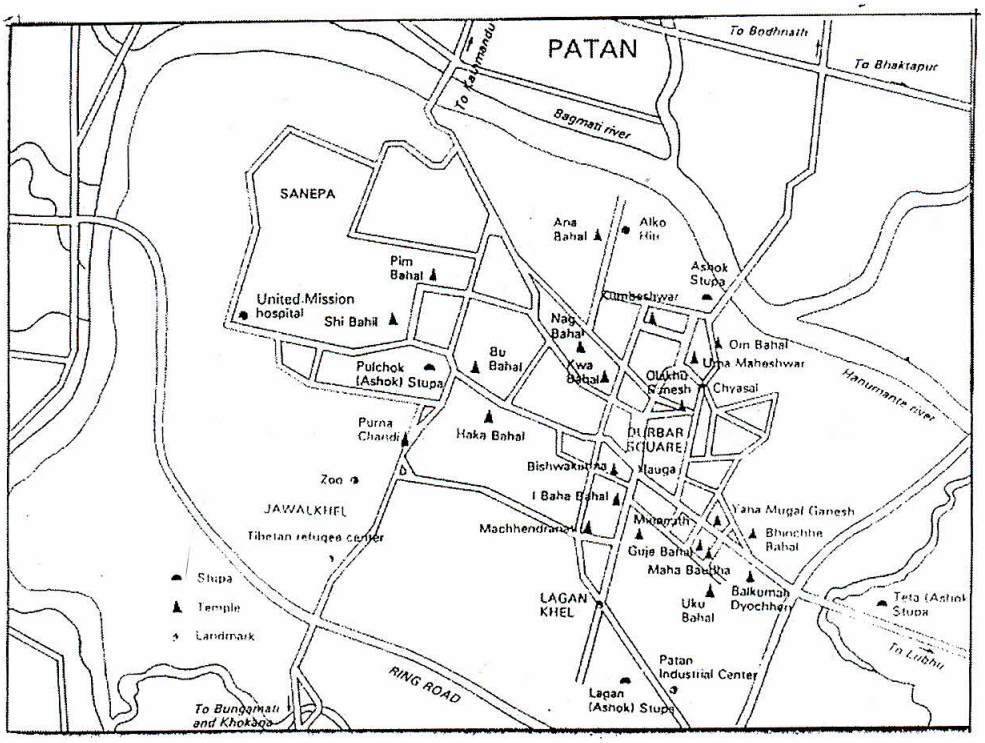


Fig 3: Map of Patan

Nepal has Tibet on its northern border. Nepali people had good trade link with Tibet from ancient times. The Muslims who came to Kathmandu from Kashmir did not limit their business within Kathmandu only. Soon they also learnt to establish trade-links with Tibet. And thus, the population of Muslim communities grew in Kathmandu valley. Gradually, the size of mosque 'Pancha Kashmiri' was extended from time to time. In January of 1930 a big earthquake of rector scale 6.8 occurred in Kathmandu valley & 'Pancha Kashmiri' was destroyed totally. The mosque was then reconstructed. The present form of mosque is the reconstructed form after the 1930 earthquake (Figs. 4 & 5).

Today 'Pancha Kashmiri' owns an area of 54,000 square metre on the heart of Kathmandu City. It is a single storey building. The shape of plan is rectangular having approximate dimension 20m from south to North and 8 metre from east to west. The hall faces to west to the direction of Mecca. It is a beautiful hall with seven arches supported in between circular pillar with capital. The six minarets at Four Corners and in the centre of longer side of hall and 3 domes (typical of Islamic architecture) at the roof which sharply represents the Islamic architecture. About 200 people can Namaz (Salat) at a time. In front of the hall there is an open yard and at the centre of mosque area AJAN - (the announcing tower) is located, from were the Muezzin announces indicating time for praying Namaz. When the hall is full people can sit on the open yard to pray.

Pancha Kashmiri lies at the East Side of Durbar Marg. Durbar Marg runs up to Royal Palace on north. (Fig. 6) 'Pancha Kashmiri' is run by a Trust. The Trust was established mainly to run the Masjid.Once in a month, most of the Muslims of Kathmandu gather here, and the Trust provides free meal. The Trust also looks after the daily & long-term maintenance of the mosque complex like cleaning, maintaining garden etc. & painting, renovating & new extension. Realing the need of covered space so that it will be convenient to prayers even at rainy season and hot sunny days. The Trust of is constructing a 3 storey building about 100m long from South boundary to North, and about 10 metre wide from East to West. This is a frame-structured building. The arches and domes constructed in this building lead to architecture of Islamic character. Thousand of peoples can read Namaz (Salat) at a single time in this new constructed building (Fig: 7).

Durbar Marg is one of the most posh areas of Kathmandu. The Trust has constructed number of shopping arcades on the Durbar Marg Road side (Fig: 8). The money collected by renting these shopping arcades is a big source of income to the Trust.

The trust of Panch Kasmiri has a eleven member committee, with an elected president as its head. Besides day works of management of the mosque, it also takes active part in other activities of Durbar Marg.

The Trust also takes active part with Kathmandu Municipality in social activities like campaigning on control alcohol among youths, preventing girls trafficking to India, awareness in 'Aids Control etc.

Besides these, in Durbar Marg a new campaign is going on to save and plant more trees. Few existing trees in Durbar Marg can now be sponsored and anyone now can plant a new tree for US$ 350. The sponsor can advertise its name on the tree. He also has the liability to maintain & look after the tree. The Trust has bought several trees & thus is helping to maintain greenery in Durbar Marg. (Figs. 9,10,11 & 12). It was built by Nawaz Ali Shah of Lucknow (India) two hundred years ago, who escaped to Nepal with his wife Begam Hazrat Mahal during British rule in India. They belonged to Shia groups of Muslims. The then Prime Minister of Nepal, Jung Bahadur Rana arranged their stay near by early settled Muslim community i.e. near by 'Pancha Kashmiri'.

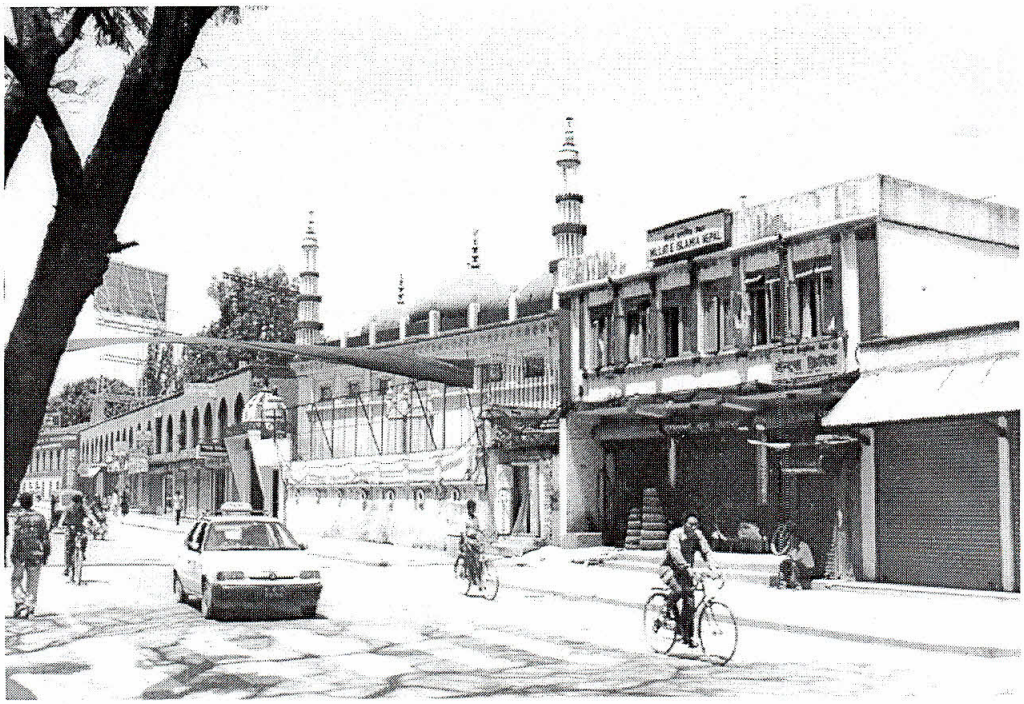


Fig. 4: Pancha Kashmir (Roadside View)

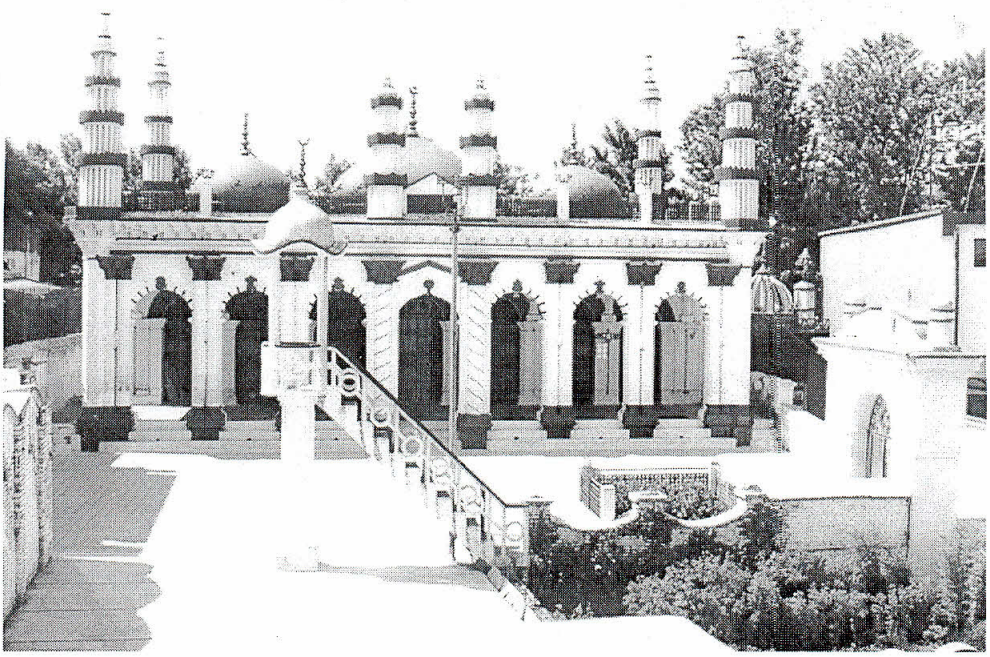


Fig 5: Praying Hall

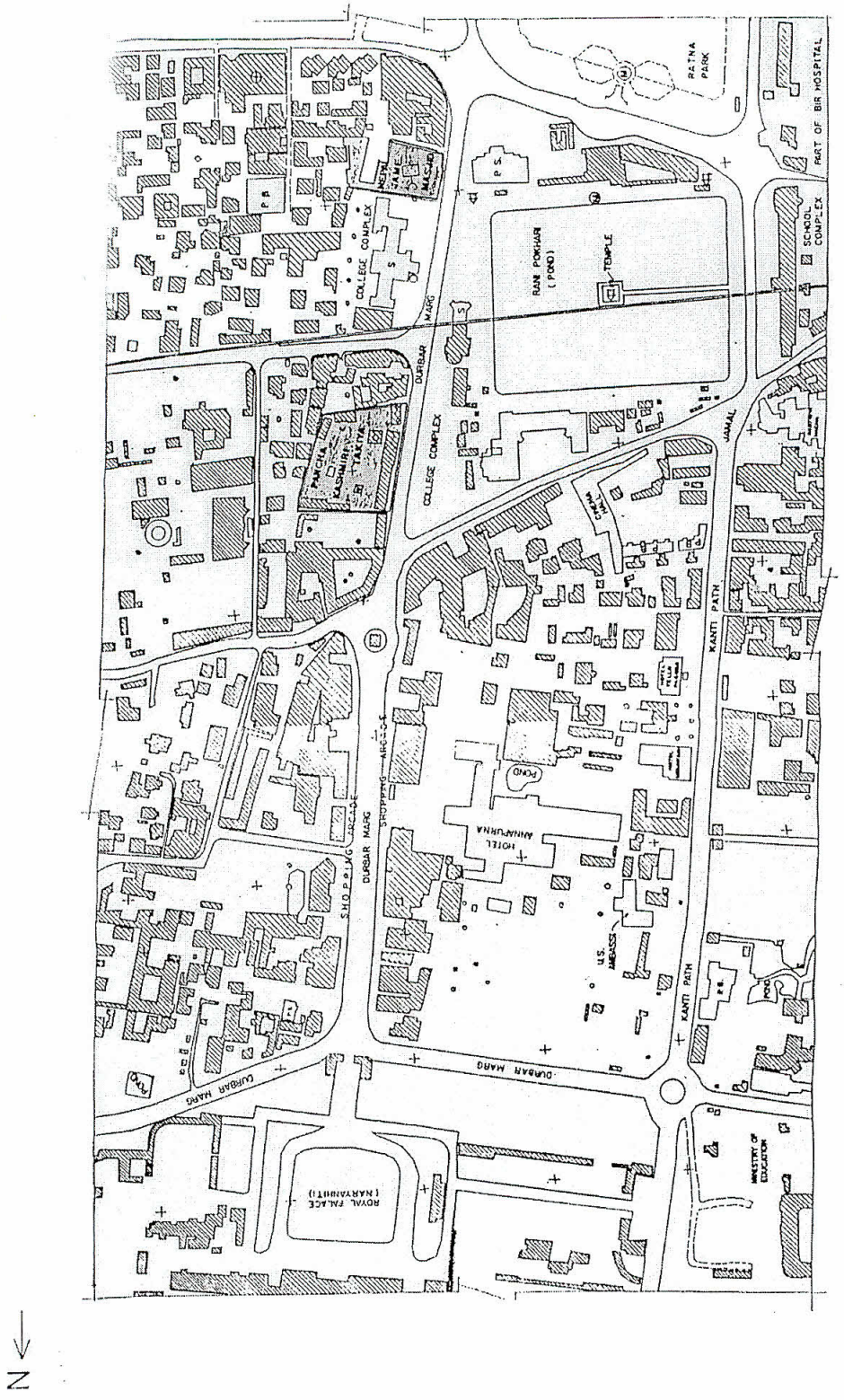


Fig. 6: Locations of Mosques in the Heart of Kathmandu

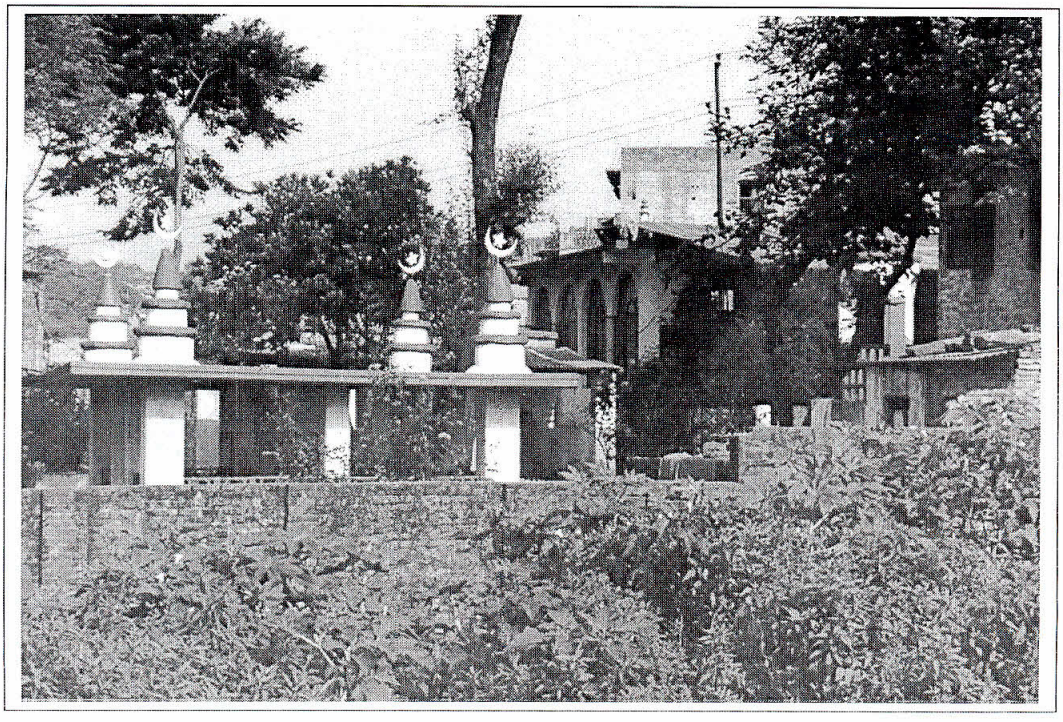


Fig 7: View of Shopping Arcade of Pancha Kashmiri on Durbar Marg



Fig 8: Extension of Pancha Kashmiri under construction

Mosque 'Emam Bada' has sharp features of Islamic Architecture. Although, it was built in the heart of country, it's features are not affected at by the Nepalese Architecture like Pagoda style roof, exposed brick facings, carved wooden windows etc.

With the increase in Muslim population, it was realised from time to time that the Masjid should be extended. Finally, about 10 years ago in 1988 the mosque was reconstructed & renamed as 'Nepali Jame Masjid'. (Fig. 13 ~ 19)

Reconstruction of Emam Bada as Nepali Jame Masjid was mainly for expansion of the mosque to accommodate increasing Muslim population and desire for modernization.

The newly constructed 'Nepali Jame Masjid' has shared nothing of the Nepalese Architecture. It is a 4 storey building complex within area of 27,000 m^2. It has got four covered praying halls with each capacity of 500 people and several open yards for thousands of people to pray 'Namaz' (Salat). Every Friday many Muslims from different localities of Kathmandu gather here to pray Namaz.



Fig 9: View of Emam Bada Masjid from Durbar Marga

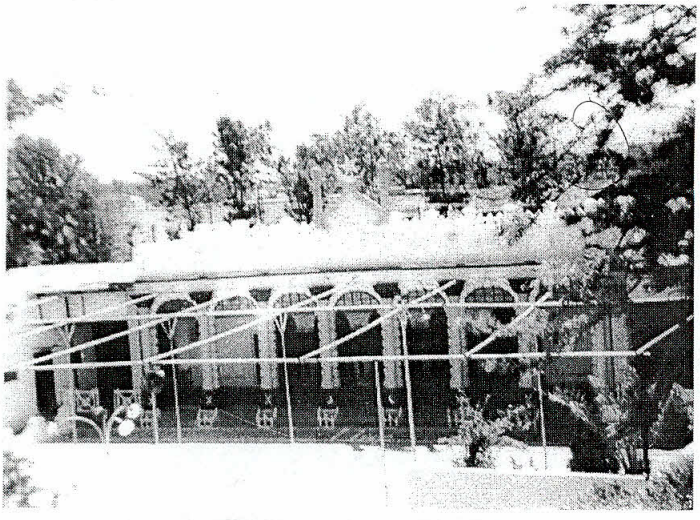


Fig 10: East View of Emam Bada Masjid

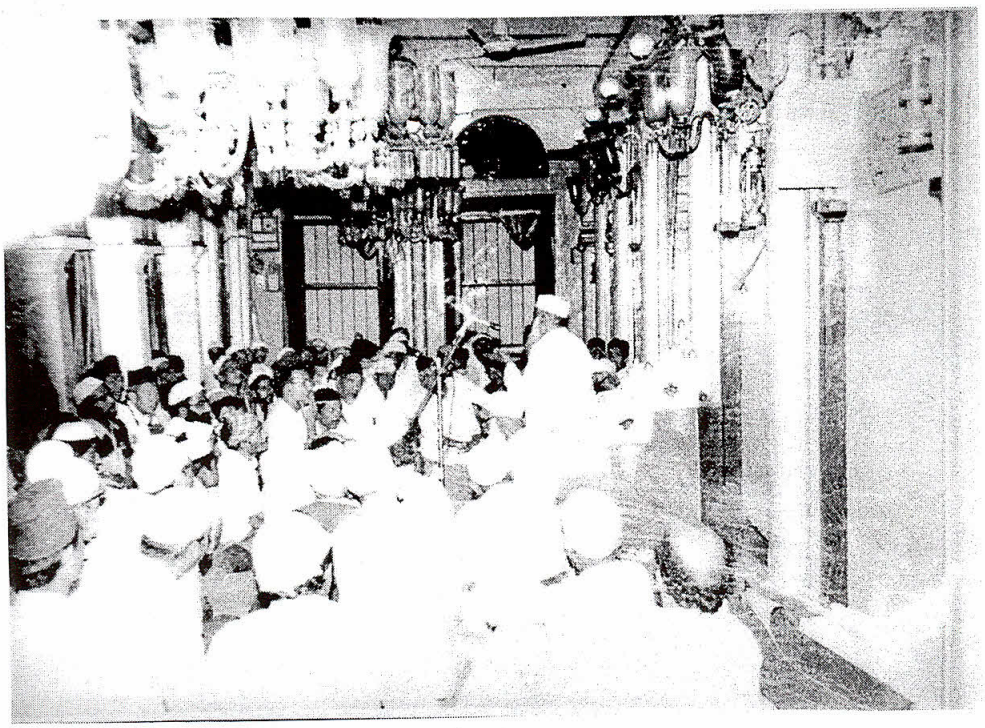


Fig 11: Praying Hall



Fig 12: Nepali Jame Masjid (View from West)

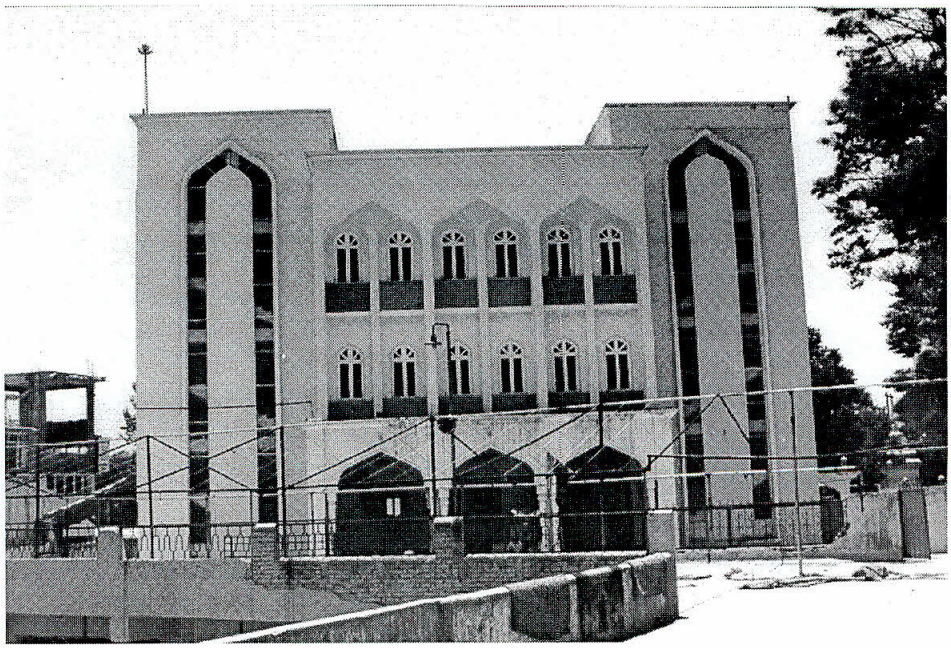


Fig 13: Nepali Jame Masjid (View from East)

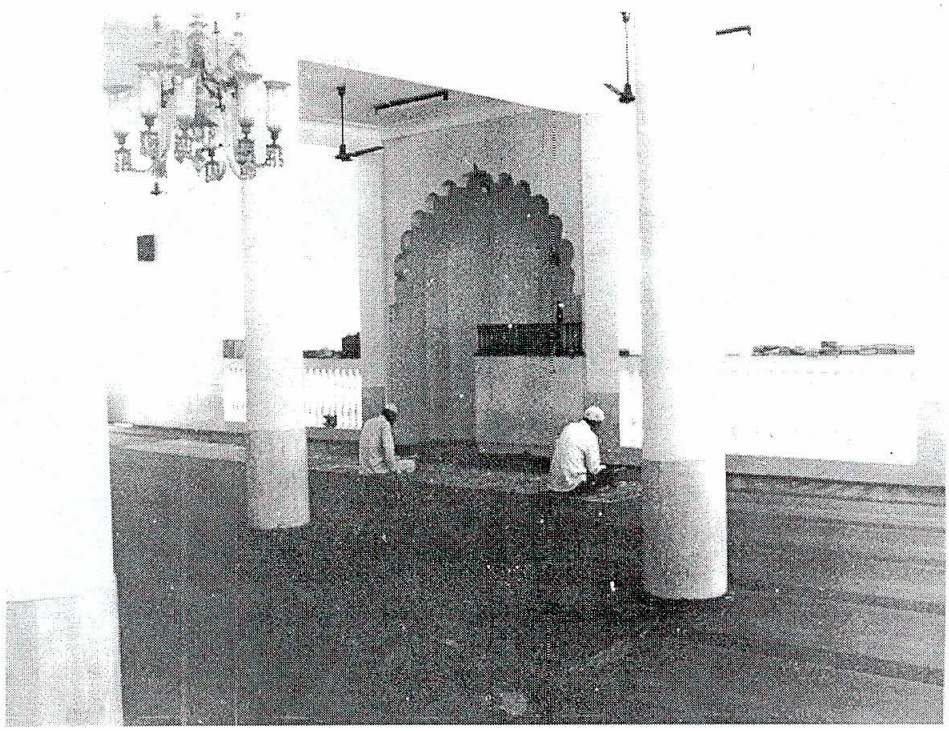


Fig 14: Nepali Jame Masjid (Interior of Praying Hall)

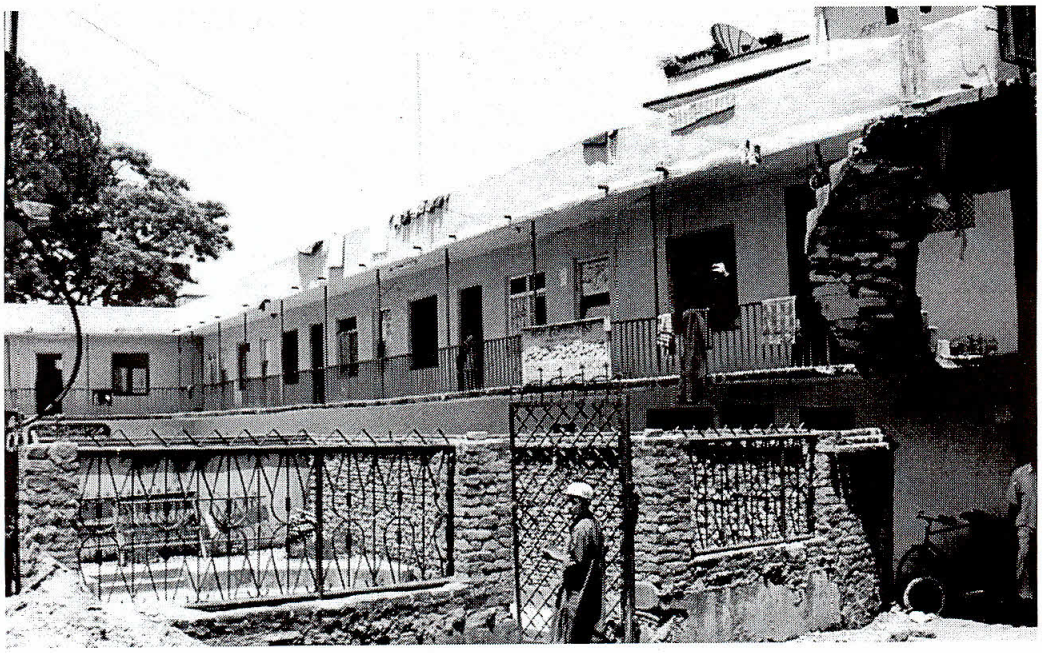


Fig 15: View of Islamic School 'Madrasa' within Nepali Jame Masjid

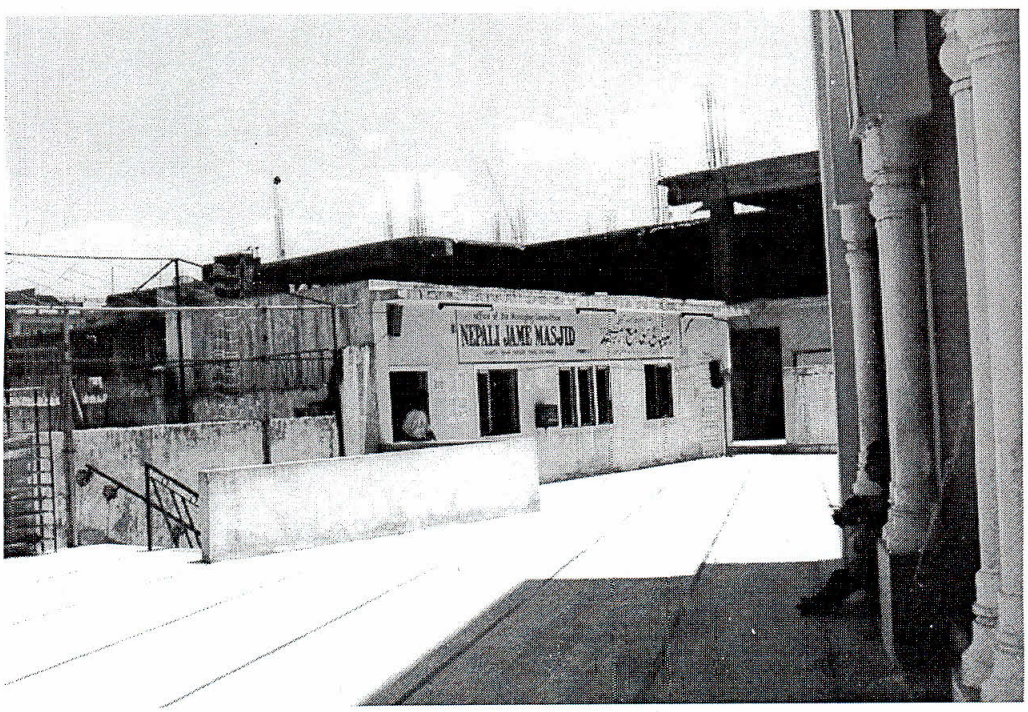


Fig 16: View of 'The Office of Organization Committee' of the Nepali Jame Masjid with the Hotel Construction in the background.

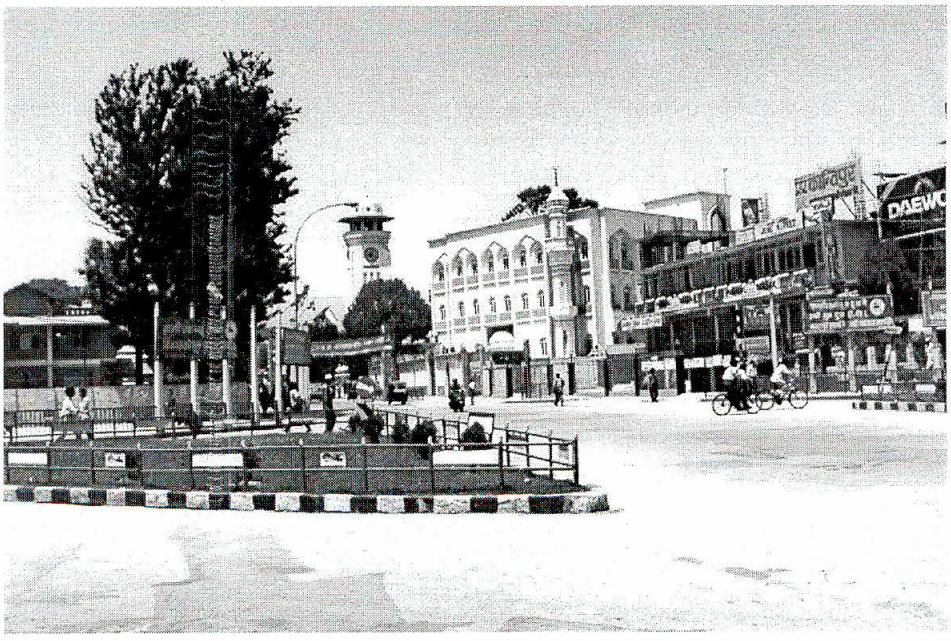


Fig. 17: View of Nepali Jame Masjid along with Clock Tower "Ghantaghar"

The Organising Committee of Nepali Jame Masjid is the Trust of this masjid. The Trust has constructed a number of shopping arcades on the south–east part of Masjid, and from the rent the Trust receives it's operational income. The Trust is also constructing a new Hotel on south. It runs a typical Islamic type school 'Madrasa". The school lies on the east of 'Nepali Jame Masjid' complex. It is a government-recognized school and is meant mainly for orphans. Most of the students in this school come from rural hilly areas of Nepal like Gorkha, Lamjung etc.. Some non Muslim Nepali children are also studying in this school. The trust looks after Swoyambhu and Bhaktapur Jame Masjid.

Physical Features Shared By Other Building

If we look at the site plan of early Muslim community settlements, we do not find any building nearby influenced by it. But on the south west of Durbar Marg a tower named 'DHARAHARA' (Bhimsen tower) was built about 144 years ago by the then Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa. We can see that Dharahara has features leaning towards Islamic minaret style. (Fig. 18)

The First Administrative building of Nepal 'Singh Durbar' built, about 140 years ago, by the then Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher lies on the south-east of Pancha Kashmiri.

The surroundings of the main gate of this complex has once again sharp-features similar to that of Islamic Architecture. (Fig. 19 – 20)

Other Mosques in Kathmandu Valley

Raqi Bazaar lies on the north of 'New Road' central core business area of Kathmandu valley. On the east of Raqi Bazaar lies 'Raqi Masjid'; which is named after the bazaar. It is said that in ancient times Iraqi Muslims from the country IRAQ who were migrated to the place called 'Lari' on the north of

India came to Kathmandu as businessmen & established 'Iraqi Bazaar' as their own business road. 'Iraqi Bazaar' over time changed to 'Raqi Bazaar'. Today 'Raqi Bazaar' is known as 'Bhedasingh' in Kathmandu.

'Raqi Masjid' is a very old building. Though it has no historical evidence as to when it was built the Muslim residents of this area say it is as old as 400 years. These days also Muslims of this area come to the mosque to pray. It has no features of Islamic architecture. There is no Minar as noticed in other mosques. It covers an area of about $50m^2$. (Fig. 21 – 22). This masjid demands immediate renovation as most of its parts are in poor state & may cause inconvenience to the prayers.



Fig. 19: View of Singh Durbar

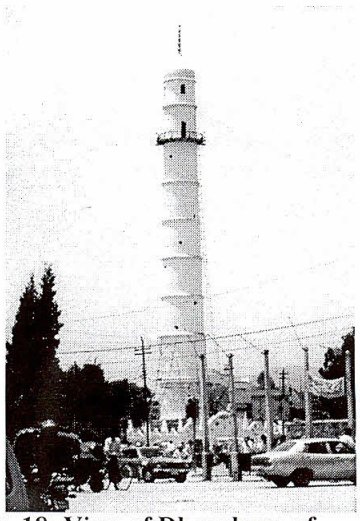


Fig. 18: View of Dharahara of Bhimsen Tower (Tower with Minaret Style)



Fig. 20: View of Main Entrance Gate of Singh Durbar

Swoyambhu Jame Masjid

Pancha Kashmiri used to be masjid as well as 'Samadhi' up to the year 1900, A.D. From the year 1901 the 'Samadhi' was shifted from here to Swoyambhu site.

There was a Palace named 'Seto Durbar' on the northwest of Pancha Kashmiri. The then Prime Minister Dev Shamsher used to live in that palace. It is notable that Swoyambhu Nath is one of the biggest Buddhist stupas in the world and a world heritage site. This again shows that different religious groups in Nepal are living in peace and harmony (Fig. 23 – 24).



Fig. 21: View of 'Raqi Masjid'



Fig. 22: View of 'Raqi Masjid'



Fig. 23: View of Swoyambhu Zame Masjid



Fig. 24: Praying Hall

Patan Zame Masjid

The city of Patan lies on the south at a distance of about 3 km. of Kathmandu Metropolitan city. It is believed that Patan is the oldest among 3 cities of Kathmandu valley. The Muslims who came to Kathmandu about 500 years ago scattered to Patan also. In ancient times all the Muslims from different parts of Kathmandu used to come to either 'Pancha Kanya Kashmiri' or 'Nepali Zame Masjid' to read 'Namaz' (Salat). With the increase in Muslims community, it is realised that different mosques should be constructed at different places so that it will be easier for people to come to masjid to pray. As a result Patan Jame Masjid was constructed 10 years ago. This is a small mosque built in $75m^2$ area, and is said to be constructed through the efforts of the local Muslims of Patan area. They bought the land and built the mosque on their own expenses. This is a single storey building with a praying hall of capacity for 300 people. (Fig. 25 – 26). As we see on the photograph this mosque lies

in between two typical Nepali styled houses, but it has maintained Islamic features by erecting Minaret at its main gate. There are two shops owned by mosque and authority of this mosque has given them on rent so as to generate some income. The devotees of the Masjid donate some money and it is said that this donation by the local Muslim people and the rent from the shops are the only source of income to run the Masjid.

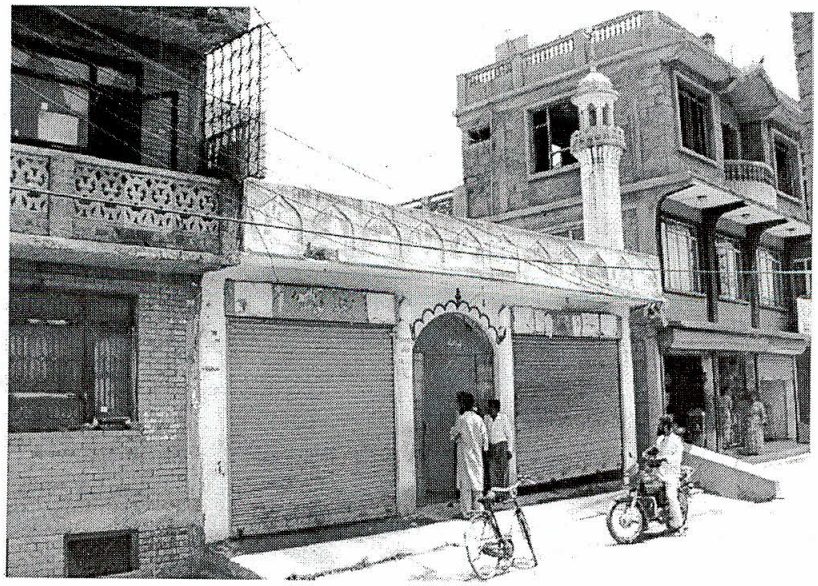


Fig. 25: View of 'Patan Jame Masjid'

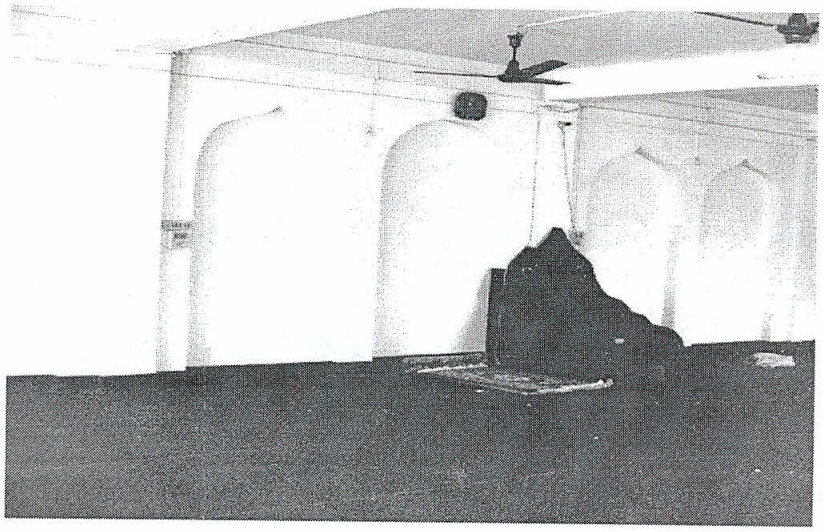


Fig. 26: Praying Hall

Bhaktapur Masjid

Bhaktapur is one of the ancient cities of Kathmandu valley at a distance about 8 km from the capital city. The Muslims who came to Kathmandu about 500 years ago were scattered to Bhaktapur also. The community of Muslims in Bhaktapur is not as big as in Kathmandu.

In Bhaktapur, there is a small old masjid with a covered praying hall, for about 100 people to pray at a time. It is used by local Muslims to read Namaz (Salat) daily.

There is no historical evidence about this masjid but the local people say that it is as old as Pancha Kashmiri. (Fig. 27 – 28).

Kalimati Masjid (A Recently Constructed Masjid)

The newly constructed Masjid is located on west of Kathmandu (Kalimati). It is constructed about 1 year ago. But the building has very less significance regarding modern Mosque Architectural design & the materials used. The minaret erected on the masjid building hardly indicates the significance other Islamic minarets, It covers an area of 75 m^2 and is constructed by effort of local Muslim people. (Fig: 29-30)

Other Mosques of Nepal

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Gautam Buddha lies on south of Nepal. There are many of masjids scattered around Lumbini Zone. There is no exact date of entry of Muslim people into Lumbini area. But the local Muslims say it is as old as 300 to 400 years. Majority of the Muslim population here is engaged in agriculture, but there are some businessmen too. Lumbini and Bhairawa both lie within Lumbini zone and very near to each other.

The Masjids of Lumbini are generally a single storey hall of rectangular shape. Different arches of Islamic character have been built around the walls of hall. There are also minars at the corners of the hall. The capacities of such halls are between 50 to 100 persons. Most of these Masjids illustrated in this paper are newly constructed within last 10 years and uses new construction materials.



Fig 28: View of Masjid at Bhaktapaur



Fig 27: View of Masjid at Bakhtapur

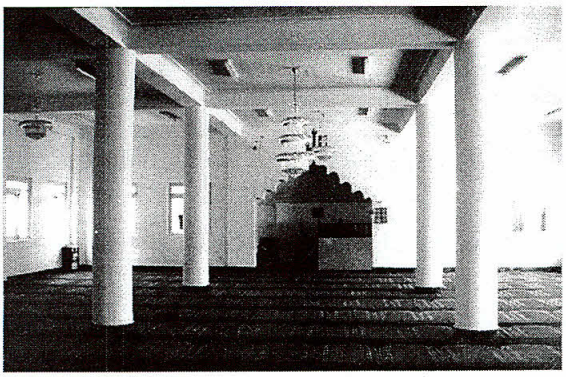


Fig 30: Praying Hall

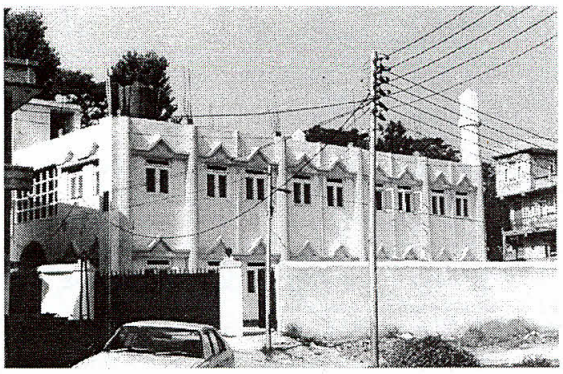


Fig 29: View of Latest Masjid at Kalimati

Masjids at Gorkha

The masjids of Gorkha are different from other masjids of Nepal. The local Muslim people here have adopted themselves into Nepali culture. But they do their Islamic rituals in their own houses where as a symbol of Islam they keep a flag on the roof.

Conclusion

We can see that all the mosques of Nepal, face to the direction of Mecca i.e., west. Except the two mosques, Pancha Kashmiri and Nepal Jame Masjid, all other mosques of Nepal have been constructed with the effort of local Muslim people. The hall is an essential part of such mosque, which is rectangular in plan and made with cheap and simple materials. By the side of the hall there is a Wudhu (place for washing) to fresh up before praying. In the main gate of mosque there are some minarets of Islam style, which indicate to other people that it is a mosque. Efforts are being made even in this simple mosque to give the character of Islamic architecture by providing arches, domes etc.

After the declaration of democracy in the country in year 1986, people of Nepal got freedom to advocate and propagate their individual religion, as a result many Mosques were constructed all over Nepal, specially in Terai region. These mosques built within the last ten years has been constructed with modern construction materials as reinforced cement concrete, metals and glasses but there are no evidence that these mosque were designed and planned by professional architects. Present cost of such construction is about US Dollars 25.00 per square feet. The pattern and design of mosque do not seem to be copied from neither any other mosques of neighboring India, nor do they seem to be a prototype mosque. As most of the mosques of Nepal were built by local Muslim people seeking a hall to pray, they were not constructed with proper planning and design. So the present trend of development of Mosque architecture in Nepal not satisfactory. The main reason of this may be the lack of finance, skill and knowledge of Islamic architecture. Among all these reasons, lack of finance seems to prevail most and international Islamic communities can help overcome this situation of Nepalese Muslims.

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التطور التاريخي لعمارة المساجد في نيبال

دان هيرا كانساكار

قسم العمارة, معهد الهندسة, جامعة بولشوك

كاتمندو, نيبال

ملخص البحث: يعتبر تاريخ تطور المساجد في نيبال، والتي تعتبر المملكة الهندوسية الوحيدة في العالم، مثيرا للتأمل. ويسكن نيبال ٢٢ر٥ مليون نسمة، وينتمي ٩٥٪ من السكان إلى الطوائف الهندوسية والبوذية ، وينتمي ٥٪ إلى الطوائف المسلمة والمسيحية وغيرها من الطوائف. ويشهد التاريخ أنه لم توجد أي خلافات بين المجموعات الدينية المختلفة في نيبال. ولقد كان مسجد بانشا كشمير تاكيا أول مسجد يبنى في نيبال ويقع إلى الشرق من حي رانين بوخارى الذي يقع في قلب عاصمة نيبال، كاتمندو، بالقرب من القصر الملكي. منذ ٥٠٠ عام، وفي أثناء حقبة مالا ، جاء بعض التجار المسلمين السنة من كشمير إلى كاتمندو. ويقال أن هؤلاء التجار كانوا على حاذقين في سياستهم التجارية وقد أقاموا علاقات جيدة مع الشعب النيبالي. وقد تأثر ملك نيبال في ذلك الوقت الملك براتاب مالا بهؤلاء التجار لدرجة أنه سمح لهم بالإقامة في وادي كاتمندو. وقد أعطاهم أيضا أراضي إلى الشرق من رانى بوخارى لكي يبنوا عليها مساكنهم جوار المساكن بنى المسلمون مكان للصلاة أول مسجد على هيئة كوخ، ومع مرور الزمن أصبحت كاتمندو مركزا لمسلمي كشمير الذاهبين إلى التبت بغرض التجارة. وهكذا نما عدد المسلمين واتسع المسجد من آن إلى آن. وفي أثناء زلزال ١٩٣٠، دمر هذا المسجد غير أنه قد تم تجديده بعد الزلزال حيث عاد إلى سابق حاله وبقى حتى الآن.

هذا المسجد يتمتع بسمات معمارية إسلامية بغض النظر عن كونه في وسط كاتمندو، فهو يحتوي على قاعة صلاة جميلة ذات سقف يظل ٢٠٠ مصلى بالإضافة إلى ساحة كبيرة لآلاف من المصلين. ويتم إدارة هذا المسجد من قبل هيئة وقف قامت ببناء ٣ أدوار لاستيعاب عدد أكبر من المصلين. وبجوار مسجد بانشا كانيا تاكيا يوجد مسجد آخر يسمى مسجد إمام بادا بناه نواز على شاه الذي هرب من لكناو في الهند إلى نيبال مع زوجته البيجوم هزرات محل أثناء الحكم البريطاني للهند. وقد تم تجديد وإعادة تأثيث هذا المسجد حديثا وسمي "مسجد جامع نيبال ". وبالإضافة إلى هذا المسجد في وسط كاتمندو يوجد مساجد أخرى في مدن مثل جوكا، نيبال دونج، كاليا، بدجونج. ويشير تاريخ نيبال إنه منذ حوالي ٢٠٠ سنة، وفي أثناء حكم صاحب الجلالة الملك برتيفي ناريان شاه، عاشر جد لصاحب الجلالة الملك برنيبارا بير بيكرام شاه ديف ملك نيبال الحالي، انخرط كثير من المسلمين في قوات الجوركاو، ذلك لتميزهم في استخدام السيوف. وقد بين هؤلاء المسلمون مسجدهم الخاص في جوركا وبالمثل، فلقد بنى كثير من المسلمين مساجد في أنحاء مختلفة من نيبال لخدمة هؤلاء الذين هاجروا إليها من الهند.