
Architectural Design and Ornamentation of Urban Mosques in Islamabad: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract

This research examines the spatial design, architectural configurations, and socio-religious significance of mosques in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. It explores the relationship between sacred spaces and the broader urban environment, with particular attention to architectural language, spatial form, ornamentation, and interior organization. Mosques in Islamabad represent an important intersection of religious identity, urban development, and community life, providing spaces where spiritual practices and social interactions converge. The study analyzes selected mosque case studies to investigate how architectural characteristics contribute to the formation and expression of religious and communal identities within the city. Particular emphasis is placed on the ways in which mosque design responds to changing urban conditions while maintaining symbolic and cultural continuity. The findings indicate that the significance of urban mosques in Islamabad extends beyond their physical and architectural forms. Their enduring relevance is shaped by adaptability, community participation, collective memory, ritual practices, and the ability to create a strong sense of belonging within the urban fabric. The study further suggests that contemporary mosque architecture should not be understood solely through visual expression or formal innovation; rather, its meaning emerges through the interaction between architectural space, religious practice, community needs, and the cultural memories associated with sacred places. By examining these dimensions together, the research contributes to broader discussions concerning religion, identity, sacred space, and urban form. It demonstrates that mosques can function simultaneously as religious, cultural, social, and architectural landmarks, reflecting the complex relationship between faith, community, and the evolving urban landscape of Islamabad.

Keywords: Mosque Architecture, Religious Identity, Sacred Spaces, Architectural Analysis

Background

Over centuries, architecture has evolved as a representation of values and ideologies of a society. The concept of architectural identity, an established idea in architectural design, links to social, cultural, and visual qualities of spaces with a reference to the context it exists in (Rattenbury, 2013). For most societies, this identity evolves; as the society and its people evolve, this evolution in architectural identity is represented by advancement in materials technology, vocabulary of forms, and even reimagined spatial arrangements (Frishman, 2004).

Architectural identity and language combined are responsible for creating a sense of belonging and ownership in spaces, with people's sense of identification and attachment to their surroundings being influenced (Carmona et al., 2003).

The mosque in Islamic communities is the most important spatial representation of Islam and its culture. Though its primary function comes from worship and the ritual of prayer, throughout history it has been a symbol learning, interaction, debate, counselling, and community discussion and engagement (Rapoport, 1969). As a community landmark, it became a symbol of place attachment; used multiple times a day by the community and providing a platform for community interactions (Low & Altman, 1992).

In modern planned cities, mosques have most commonly been designed and built using a balance of traditional religious symbols and contemporary aesthetics. Key architectural elements such as domes, minarets, prayer halls, and courtyards have evolved to meet the needs of contemporary design aesthetics while still carrying symbolic significance (El-Murjan, 1997).

Objectives

This research paper aims to discuss architectural language and identity of mosques in an urban landscape, i.e., Islamabad. The discussion will focus on religious symbolism and its integration with modern design elements and context-specific evolution of spatial layouts

Problem Statement

Mosques in Islamabad are built with many considerations: limited space as allocated by the local authority, and an emotional, religious sentiment that is often maintained with symbolism, form, and colour.

Research Questions

- How do urban Islamabad mosques define a juxtaposition of religious identity and architectural language?
- What role does ornamentation play in representing religious and cultural values in urban mosques?

Literature Review

Sacred Space and Religious Identity

Religious architecture often shows the interaction between people and the divine and acts as an external representation of a community's beliefs and ideals. Different religious traditions have left a lasting impression on the urban fabric of places, influencing the aesthetic and spiritual experience of worshippers and guests alike from ancient civilizations to contemporary society. One might consider the sacred as the opposite of the profane. Hence, a sacred space is one that was designed to allow people to create references to a shared location from their usual daily lives. Humans search for spirituality and the meaning of life in sacred spaces, and therefore, major life events, including birth, coming of age, marriage, and death, all take place in these spaces, in the presence of the divine.

Within Islamic tradition, the mosque, as the nucleus of spirituality, has historically served not only as a place of worship but as a communal space, center for learning, and a space for social discourse. Additionally, it is also seen as a deeply symbolic space, the home of the Divine and a place of purity (Sakr, 1987). The physicality of the mosque is only one layer of the association that the Muslim community has with a mosque. A local neighbourhood mosque is visited at least five times a day for prayers; it is visited at the time of birth and death and may be visited during holy months and on

important religious occasions. This constant physical connection becomes the foundation of place attachment that communities develop with mosques (Beyer, 2008). In its built form, large gathering spaces, interactive areas, geometric forms, and calligraphy in mosque ornamentation, particularly in the layout of prayer halls, courtyards, and minarets, articulate spiritual ideals and the transcendence of the divine. These architectural features play a crucial role in conveying the connection between the earthly and the divine.

Muslim architecture, across the globe, is a conscious statement of the Islamic identity for the Muslim community; it stands as a banner of representation. Historical examples of mosque architecture have developed numerous characteristics unique to sacred spaces, and Muslims across the world collectively associate with and refer to these characteristics in their own contexts (Omer, 2010). Architectural elements such as the dome, the *mehraab*, the *mimbar*, and the *qibla* wall are some of the standard design elements present in almost all mosque architecture. The ornamentation is limited to those that align with the faith, mostly calligraphy from the holy texts, names of God and His Messenger, floral patterns, and landscapes that represent the wonders of God's creation.

Islamic Aesthetic Tradition

Islamic decoration becomes the medium through which religion, beauty, and culture are united while maintaining respect for Islamic values. Various types of decoration demonstrate how local communities view their Islamic beliefs through the prism of ornamentation and artistic skill while at the same time establishing their own religious identity. Islamic decoration, which includes such items as calligraphy, arabesques, and geometry, acts as a symbol of the cultural identity of the community. Fundamental to Islamic art, these ornamental aspects not only reflect deeper philosophical and religious themes like infinity, abstraction, and symmetry, but they also serve as decorative elements (Shafiq, 2014)

Mosques in Urban Centers

Urbanization, causing unprecedented growth in urban population, resulted in an increased number of mosques in urban areas to facilitate growing populations. In pluralistic urban settings, different sects of Islam may require distinct spaces of worship, resulting in the construction of multiple mosques within a single urban area. Commonly, the basic purpose of the mosque remains the same; however, sectarian mosques are built by followers of the sect to represent their part of the belief (Nasr, 2010). In all matters of the local community, whether it is fundraising for a cause or after-school sessions for children, a center for collecting and distributing donations, or free meals to visitors during the fasting month, the mosque is very much an active functional center for the community and responds to the multifunctional needs of urbanised areas. In planned cities, like Islamabad, land for mosques is allocated, the community and the government help with its construction, and an *imam*, in charge and a government employee, is appointed to live on premises and take care of all mosque-related matters. The amount of space available is not unlimited therefore the optimum use of that space demands a balance of preservation of religious and cultural identity and the demands of modern urban life (Zahra & Ebrahimi, 2017). In addition to religious identity and significance, mosques are vital in developing community attachment and ownership in urbanised areas that often showcase issues of place alienation among residents. Contemporary mosques continue to blend traditional identities with modern aesthetics, often to create a space that is suitable for worship and ritual along with having the capacity to build communal meaning and association (Diba, 2011).

Methodology & Research Approach

A descriptive, qualitative research approach has been adopted that uses case studies and analysis as the basis of exploration of urban mosques. The analysis presents the state of mosques in the capital

city, while discussing the vision they are built with, representations of religion they hold, and their role as a communal space. Selected mosques from various parts of the city are analysed with reference to design, construction, and evolution of the buildings. Data collection was carried out on the ground in the capital, whereby mosques were selected based on their location, size, and construction date. The study sample maintains diversity so that the analysis is truly representative of the scenario. The data collected also included talks with religious leaders and community members who are regular mosque users, along with architects, to understand the use of the spaces and their importance and symbolism. Basic architecture layouts were developed after site visits and historical data was gained from mosque personnel and available previous studies. AI was used in the refinement of some structural parts of the paper and the sequence of content.

Urban Mosque Case Studies

Context

Established in 1963 under the Capital Development Authority (CDA) Ordinance, Islamabad was envisioned by Greek planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis as a “city of the future”—a model of order, efficiency, and environmental harmony. Religious infrastructure was formally integrated into the plan with designated plots and standardised spatial hierarchies of mosques from sub-sector to city scale, aligning religious space with the overall urban order. In this planned framework, the mosque was seen in its true form, as a community anchor, positioned strategically to serve identified catchment populations.

Historical data from news reports and government sources indicates that there were 827 mosques in Islamabad in 2012; these included mosques of diverse sects within the Islamic belief system. At the same time, it was highlighted that only 89 of these were regulated by the Auqaf Department, a government authority responsible for managing state-regulated religious complexes. A 2-3% annual growth scenario, if assumed, would mean the estimated number of mosques in Islamabad currently is anywhere between 1200 and 1400. Although this is a theoretical projection, it represents the existence of a significant infrastructure element that can be studied as a constant of the built environment of Islamabad. Examining mosques in Islamabad provides an opportunity to understand how sacred spaces have been treated within the urban context.

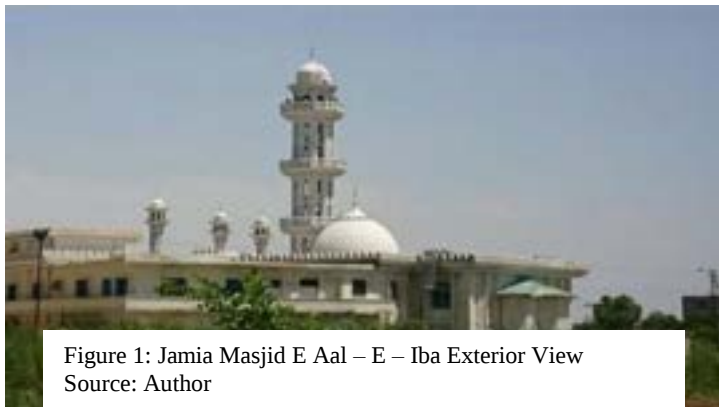


Figure 1: Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba Exterior View
Source: Author

1. JAMIA MASJID E AAL – E – IBA

Location: F-11 Markaz, Islamabad

Construction Date: 2001 – 2018

Plot Area: 17,400 sft

Total Covered Area: 9,720 sft

Total number of worshippers: 1,500 – 2,000

Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba is a community-driven project that began with donations from the community after a need for a large-scale mosque in the locality. The mosque has become a local landmark and serves hundreds of visitors throughout the day.



Main Entrance to the Mosque



Inner View of Main Entrance

Figure 2: Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba Interior Views
Source: Author

Architectural Features and Spatial Organization

The design of the mosque brings together classical Islamic design principles with contemporary spatial needs. The user enters the space at the ground level through three large wooden doors, where a courtyard showcases the three-level structure, although over time the courtyard has been transformed into a large prayer hall, an ablution area, and the *imam's* space, to the need of facilitating more users. The scale of the doors aids in enhancing the overall proportion and grandeur of the entrance. A single dome, approximately 20 feet high, is the focus element of the ceiling, translated into a skylight in an attempt to bring symbolic notions of centrality and divinity by the allowance of natural light. The internal space is supported by two staircases that take the user to the first level, which is a designated area for females and a small learning space. The open double height maintains a visual connection between the users on the first level and the head of the congregation [*imam*] during activities.

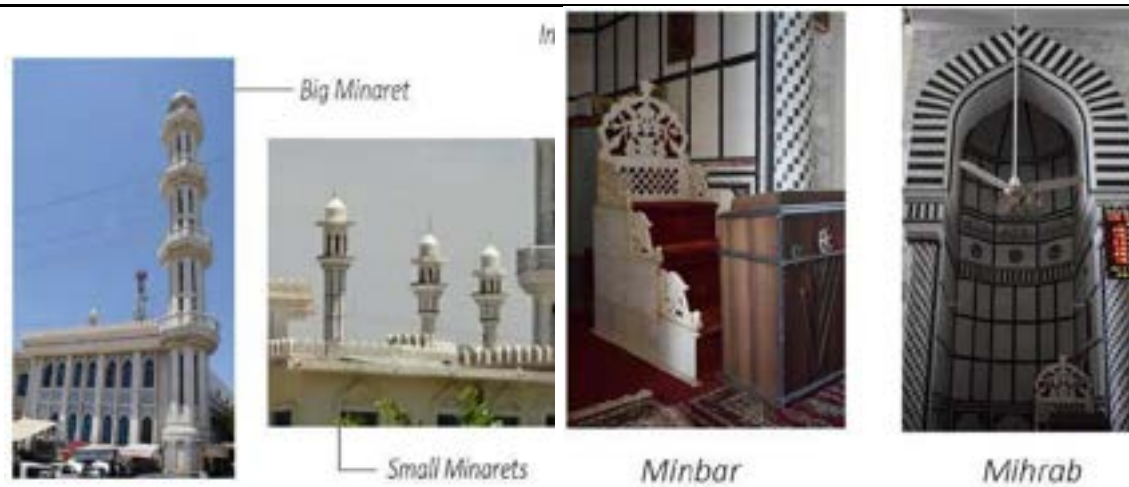


Figure 3: Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba – Architecture Elements

Source: Author

The mosque features a total of seven minarets—six minor minarets each rising to 10 feet, and one dominant minaret reaching 70 feet, serving the traditional function of the call to prayer. Arches—integral to Islamic architectural language—are employed extensively throughout the mosque.

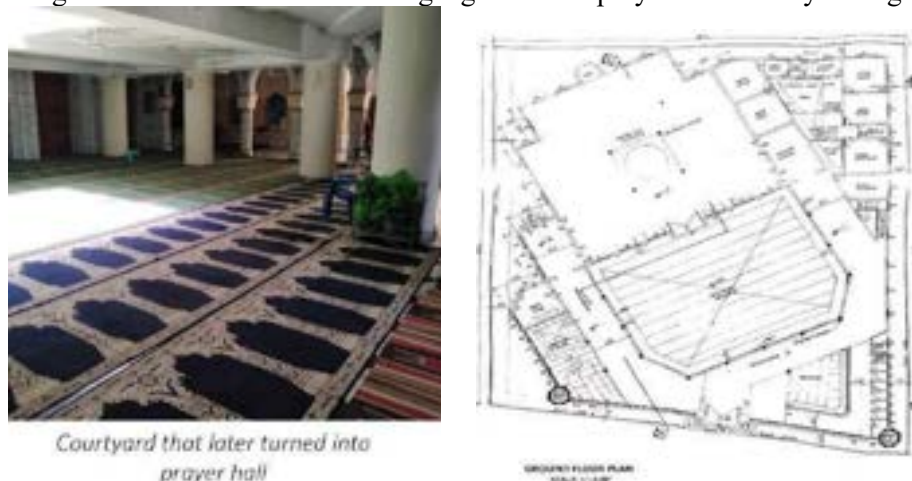


Figure 4: Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba Interior and Spatial Layout

Source: Author

Overall, the spatial organization is hierarchical yet inclusive, allowing visual connectivity, natural illumination, and spatial adaptability, all while maintaining clear functional distinctions.

Ornamentation

The ornamentation themes directly honour Islamic traditions, including embellishments, geometry, calligraphy, and light. Blue glazed tiles have been used on interior surfaces, specifically on the *mihrab* and the column capitals, reflecting a familiarity with classic Islamic architectural ornamentation from Persian and Central Asian architecture. Calligraphic texts inscribed on the walls inside function as both decorative elements and as means of teaching, whereby religious texts are encoded in space.

Jaali, or latticed perforations with geometrical designs, are used in windows and high openings to allow in light while ensuring privacy. The central skylight, spanning 35 feet x 32.5 feet, provides light for the heart of the prayer hall using natural light sources. An opening purposely created in the first-

floor slab allows natural light coming from the skylight to pass to the ground floor, creating the symbolism of divinity through architecture.



Top of Columns



Walls of Mihrab



Terrace view from First Floor

Figure 5: Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba – Structure Elements
 Source: Author

sizes of the columns, some as big as 3 feet wide while others are 1' wide, implies a lack of formal structural design. Additionally, there also exists a variety in arch designs contributing to the informally designed nature of the space.



Circular Column



Octagonal Column



circular column with octagonal base



Horseshoe Column

Figure 5: Jamia Masjid E Aal – E – Iba Structure Elements
 Source: Author



Figure 6: Jamia Masjid Al Kauthar - Exterior View

Location: H-8 Sector, Islamabad
Construction Date: 2006 – 2012
Plot Area: Not specified
Total Covered Area: Not specified
Total number of worshippers:
 Masjid: 1100 Imambargah: 1200

Jamia Masjid Al Kauthar, also known as Masjid Bab -ul- ilm, was completed over a period of 6 years from 2006 to 2012. The mosque was envisioned and planned under the patronage of a Shiite organization who have supported religious institutional buildings across Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Though, as witnessed in other case studies, the structure was built in phases, it gradually transformed over the years with the support of the local community and donors. The mosque sits in an institutional and semi-residential area that hosts several religious, educational, and healthcare facilities.



Construction Phases of the Mosque

Figure 7: Jamia Masjid Al Kauthar – Construction Phases

Source: Mosque Records



Figure 7: Jamia Masjid Al Kauthar – Architecture Layouts

Source: Author

Architectural Features

Jamia Masjid al Kauthar takes direct inspiration from the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, Iraq. The inspiration is visible in all aspects of its design, including the façade, the ornamentation, and other exterior architectural elements. Users approach the mosque via a wide staircase that leads to the *iwan*, a celebrated entrance. The building serves regular prayer activity and other mosque-related events at the first level and an *imambargah*, a multipurpose community gathering space, at the lower level.

A sunlit courtyard at the entrance welcomes visitors towards the interior spaces; the main hall holds a skylight as the main highlight of the internal space. The skylight is domed on top, like the Najaf Shrine. Celestory windows within the skylight dome allow for filtered natural light to enter the main hall, adding to the overall spiritual ambiance of the place. The upper balconies, courtyard shading, and the light-filled interiors contribute to a tranquil and welcoming environment.

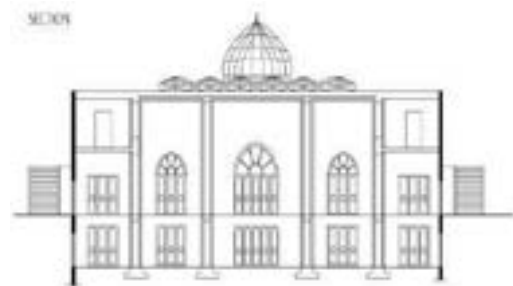


Figure 8: Jamia Masjid Al Kauthar – Interior View and Elevation
Source: Author

The mosque integrates user-centered features such as wheelchair-accessible ramps, emergency egress routes, and a makeshift lift connecting various levels of the building. Female worshippers access the space via a secluded entrance and ramp designed in accordance with ISO building standards, ensuring privacy and dignity.

Beneath the mosque lies the male Imambargah, mirroring the plan of the upper prayer hall. The female Imambargah, library, and administrative rooms are located under the courtyard level. The second structure on site houses the Imam's residence, washrooms, a morgue, and a dining hall on its upper floor, designed with privacy in mind.

Ornamentation

The ornamentation of the mosque is based firmly on the Persian-Arabesque tradition and closely imitates that of the shrine at Najaf. Its principal ornamental feature is the richly arabesqued and calligraphed gilded entrance iwan. Muqarnas decorate the areas beneath balconies and at major transitional points to provide both structural articulation and visual richness. Decorative bands of Arabic calligraphy and geometric tile patterns embellish the exterior and selected interior surfaces. Elaborate floral motifs are incorporated into patterns of niches on the exterior of the building. Control of daylight and visual exposure to the exterior is achieved with highly decorative white jaalis on windows, which preserve the purity of architectural form. The interior of the dome is of exceptional interest because of the integration of mirror work, glass mosaics and inscriptions from the Koran to produce an atmosphere of spiritual experience.



MOSQUE AS SEEN FROM THE MAIN ROAD



DOMES WITH CLERESTORY WINDOWS AND ORNAMENTATION



ENTRANCE DOOR OF THE MOSQUE



DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARABESQUE DESIGNS ALONG WITH CALLIGRAPHY IN DIFFERENT STYLES

Figure 9: Jamia Masjid Al Kauthar – Ornamentation
 Source: Author



GILDED IWAN WITH CALLIGRAPHY AND ARABESQUE DESIGNS ADORNING THE WALLS

3. JAMIA TUL MADINA



Location: Sector G-11, Islamabad
Construction Date: Under Construction (Partially Operational)
Plot Area: Approx. 1.5 kanals
Total Covered Area: Approx. 10,000–12,000 sq. ft.
Total Number of Worshippers: Estimated 500–600

Figure 10: Jamia Tul Madina – 3D View
Source: Mosque Records

The **Jamia Tul Madina mosque**, situated in Sector G-11, Islamabad, is part of a large global chain of Islamic madrasahs set up by the Dawat-e-Islami movement, a global Sunni Barelvi organization. It is both a mosque and a madrasah, and functions under the flagship educational initiative of the organization. G-11 has become an upmarket area during the last two decades through its blend of private homes, business enterprises, and academic institutions.

Architecture Elements and Spatial Organization

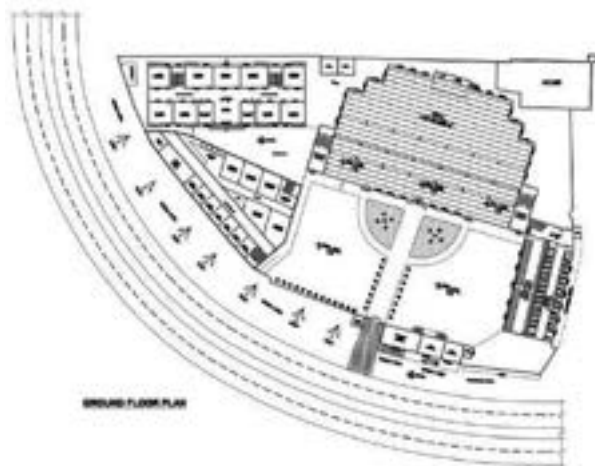


Figure 11: Jamia Tul Madina – Plan and Entrance
Source: Author

Architecturally speaking, the Jamia Tul Madina represents an amalgamation of traditional Islamic design elements with contemporary engineering techniques. The visual elements include one small minaret and three domes above the prayer area, which provide height to the building. The plan is centered around a sahn (courtyard) before the entrance to the prayer hall, which reflects traditional mosque design elements. Inside, there is a colonnade with columns made of reinforced concrete holding up the roof slab. The mihrab is embedded in the Qibla wall in simple decoration, and the minbar, which is located next to the mihrab, follows the same proportionality of traditional mosques. The spatial design is purposefully designed for flexibility and symmetry to allow worshippers to align themselves properly without any obstructions and with many entrance options and views towards the courtyard.

Ornamentation

The decoration of the mosque embodies the aesthetic ideology of Dawat-e-Islami, which consists of veneration, symbolism, and clarity. One can find calligraphy bands with Holy Quran verses in Thuluth and Nastaliq scripts framing the interiors of domes and the roof edge of the prayer hall. The presence of jaalis on staircases and mezzanine railings is a reminder of classical Indo-Islamic vocabulary; such

architectural elements provide ventilation and visual transparency. Blue tiles applied to certain facades and domes symbolize spirituality in accordance with the Islamic tradition and represent the peace and divine infinity of this color. Skylights are deliberately placed on the roof slab to admit filtered natural light into the praying area. Tall vertical windows made of clear and tinted glass add to the overall atmosphere, as well as stress the connection between illumination and natural light typical for Islamic architecture.



Figure 11: Jamia Tul Madina – Interior Views

Source: Author



Jamia Tul Madina is constructed using a reinforced concrete frame system, comprising RCC columns, beams,

and slabs. The domes, primarily aesthetic, are made from lightweight reinforced concrete to reduce structural load. Shear walls may be integrated along the periphery to improve resistance to seismic forces.

4. JAMIA MASJID AL-KAUTHAR



Figure 11: Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar – Exterior

Source: Author

Location: G-5, Islamabad

Construction Date: Early 2000s

Plot Area: Approx. 1,000–1,200 sq. yards

Total Covered Area: Approximately 25,000 sq. ft

Total Number of Worshippers: Approximately 1,500–1,800

The Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar is the key component of the Jamiat Al-Kauthar, a prominent Shiite Islamic madrasa in Pakistan. Founded in Islamabad, this institution had explicitly outlined its philosophical and educational goal, namely the reconciliation of classical Islamic learning and understanding with contemporary intellectual and ethical requirements. In pursuit of this goal, the mosque is not only an assembly space but also a representation of a religious institution that operates within the context of the current times.

The importance of the mosque lies in its ability to represent architecturally and theologically a minority religious community, the Shia. The Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar can be regarded as a relevant object of analysis where sacred architecture acts as a tool for articulation of religious identity, theology, and political presence.

The mosque is part of the overall campus of Jamiat Al-Kauthar, located in Sector H-8 of Islamabad, a highly institutionalized and educational environment of concentrated university, college, and religious school facilities.

Architectural Design & Spatial Organization

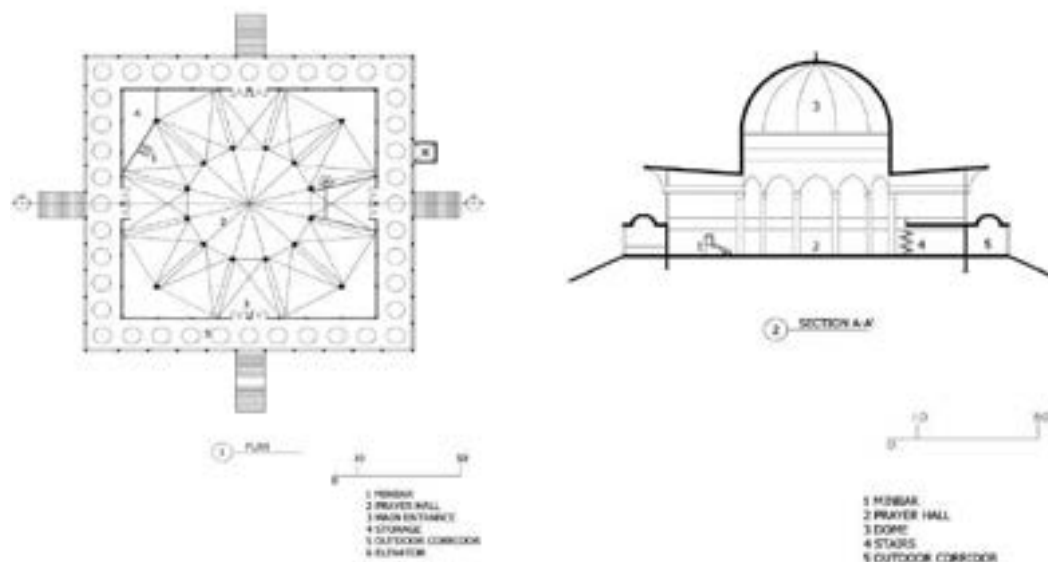


Figure 12: Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar – Architecture Layouts
 Source: Author

construction of buildings following the Shiite and Persian-Islamic architectural styles. It has a prayer hall covered with a domed structure with an imposing iwan facade design, which identifies the entrance of the mosque and establishes an axis of symmetry. The mosque sits on a plinth, making it monumental. There is a double-height prayer hall capped with a dome, which acts as the focal point both structurally and symbolically. The mihrab is centered and is surrounded by fluted columns, with the minbar being small but well incorporated in the whole design. The interiors include separated gender-specific spaces for prayer, which is common in modern mosques.



Figure 13: Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar – Exterior View
 Source: Author

This design strikes a balance between sacredness and functionality, using form and layout to enable seamless spiritual engagement while addressing the institutional needs of a religious seminary.

Ornamentation

Ornamentation at Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar plays a central role in constructing a visual narrative of sacredness, identity, and doctrinal specificity. The mosque's surfaces are adorned with calligraphy, predominantly in Arabic, featuring verses from the Qur'an and invocations from Shiite liturgical texts. These inscriptions are carefully selected to reflect the theological orientation of the institution and are prominently placed on the mihrab, the dome base, and façade panels.



Figure 14: Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar – Interior Views
Source: Author

The decorative language includes geometric patterns and stylized floral motifs, many of which are influenced by Persian and Central Asian tilework traditions. The color palette emphasizes deep blues, turquoises, and golds, which are historically associated with Shiite religious structures. The central dome is covered with glazed tile mosaic, echoing the domes of famous shrines in Najaf and Qom, thereby creating a symbolic link between the mosque design in Islamabad and the broader Shiite sacred geography.



Figure 15: Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar - Ornamentation
Source: Author

cultural statement. It reaffirms the mosque's ideological lineage and situates it within a larger historical tradition of Shiite visual and architectural expression.

Concrete is used as the main material for building, which allows creating an extensive column-less hall covered by the concrete dome. Load-bearing walls are used in combination with the slab-and-beam structure, while the dome is held by the drum-shaped structure reinforced with ribs inside.



Figure 16: Jamia Masjid Al-Kauthar - Ornamentation

Source: Author

Location: Sector G6/4, Islamabad



Construction Date: 1960
Plot Area: 87,700 sq. ft.
Total Covered Area: Not Specified
Total Number of Worshippers: 5,000
 Lal Masjid, alternatively known as

Figure 17: Lal Masjid - Exterior

Source: Mosque Records

the Red Mosque, was constructed in 1960 through the supervision of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and with the sponsorship of the Ministry of Finance. The mosque became a site for religious and political debates, and was influential in shaping Islamabad's ideological environment, especially during the periods of political uncertainty. The mosque is positioned near two of the city's busiest commercial centers: Aabpara Market to the east and Melody Market to the north.



FIRST RENOVATION



SECOND RENOVATION



Figure 18: Lal Masjid – Construction Phases
 Source: Wikipedia Commons

Architecture, Design & Spatial Organization

As far as the architectural characteristics go, Lal Masjid can be described as a unique combination of both Mughal and Ottoman principles of building. It is important to mention the fact that the mosque is an example of central plan building and, therefore, has some architectural features common to the Ottoman mosques. In particular, the mosque has one large continuous domed space which is the central part of the building. The dome is quite high since its height is 14 feet while the width is 30 feet. Symbolically, the dome represents the vault of heaven that is the main idea used when designing Islamic mosques. On both sides of the dome there are two tall minarets that have a number of functions. In addition to their aesthetic and symbolic roles, they were traditionally used for calling people to pray which is the practice that originated from the times of Muawiya I.

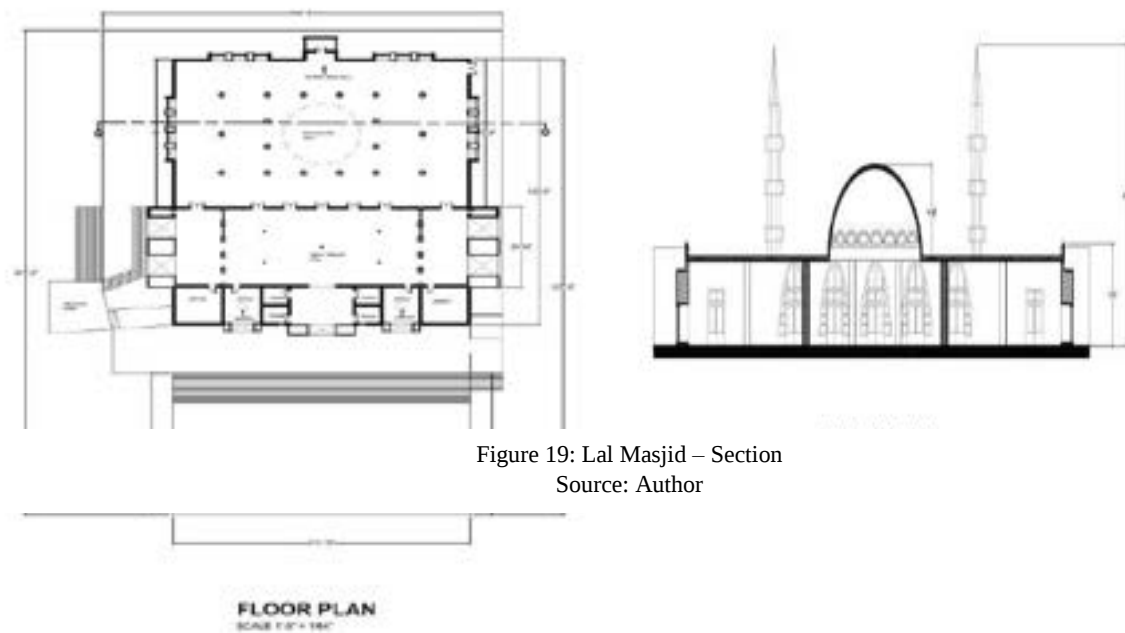


Figure 19: Lal Masjid – Section
 Source: Author

The interior of the mosque is composed of the central prayer hall and additional areas such as offices, library and classrooms for the madrasas associated with the mosque. The hypostyle construction of the mosque makes the building more spacious as it includes rows of columns which support the roof and make the interior able to hold up to 5,000 people



Figure 21: Lal Masjid – Exterior
Source: Wikipedia Commons

Ornamentation

The decoration of Lal Masjid, including the interior and exterior elements, is connected with the meaning and the role of the object in the urban space. First, the exterior of the mosque is made from red sandstone, giving it a unique appearance and helping it earn its nickname "the Lal Masjid." The use of red sandstone indicates regional tradition and gives the object an important architectural statement. The facade of the building includes Islamic calligraphy and geometrical motifs, representing the religious nature of the construction and emphasizing themes of unity and transcendence of God. The interior decoration of the mosque is richer; it involves the use of marble flooring and wooden panelling, enriching the aesthetics of the site. The dome of the mosque is decorated with inscriptions and calligraphy, representing an Islamic tradition of using texts in building decoration. Parabolic and pointed arches of the masjid are decorated with motifs reminding of the architectural style of the Ottoman and Mughal empires.



Figure 22: Lal Masjid – Interior
Source: Author

It is notable that the plan of the mosque is centered on a big dome that is based on arches and columns providing an open interior of the building. The dome as the focal point of the architectural design is

made of reinforced concrete and is decorated with decorations, including calligraphy and geometrical designs.



Figure 23: Lal Masjid – Ornamentation
 Source: Wikipedia Commons

The minarets, an integral component in the architectural design of mosques, serve as visual markers to signify the importance of the mosque within the built environment. Elevated from other buildings, the minarets act in two ways; as practical elements of the call for prayer as well as architectural symbols of the dominance of the Islamic religion. The combination of the spatial planning of the Ottomans with Mughal decoration and modern building techniques has resulted in a landmark mosque of Islamabad.

6. MARKAZ E AHLE HADITH



Figure 24: Markaz Ahlehadith – Exterior
 Source: Author

Location: Street 40, G-6/1, Islamabad
Construction Date: 1972
Plot Area: Not specified
Total Covered Area: Not specified
Total Number of Worshippers: Approx. 1,000

The formation of Markaz Ahlehadith of Islamabad can be seen as having direct relations with the ideological growth of the Ahlehadith movement in Pakistan. It is pertinent to note that the symbolic naming of the mosque occurred after the Markazi Jamiat Ahlehadith annual conference in 1968 which was held at Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi.

Construction of the mosque started in 1972 and the mosque became one of the early Ahlehadith mosques which were integrated into the urban fabric of Islamabad. It is used as a source for religious education, welfare, and social interaction where many Qur'anic educational programs and motivational lectures are held along with welfare activities. The mosque is located in an intensely urban context therefore serves not only as a religious institution but also as an important landmark for the Ahlehadith community.

Architecture Features and Spatial Organization

The architectural configuration of Markaz Ahlehadith is characterized by a restrained aesthetic that emphasizes spatial clarity, functional hierarchy, and symbolic articulation of religious principles. The spatial organization is anchored by a central open courtyard (sehan), which functions as both a circulation spine and an overflow prayer area during congregational gatherings. The courtyard provides axial connectivity between the primary entrance and the main prayer hall, as well as access to subsidiary spaces such as ablution areas, women's prayer zones, and teaching rooms. The plan demonstrates a deliberate commitment to symmetry and order, hallmarks of traditional mosque architecture adapted to a modernist context.

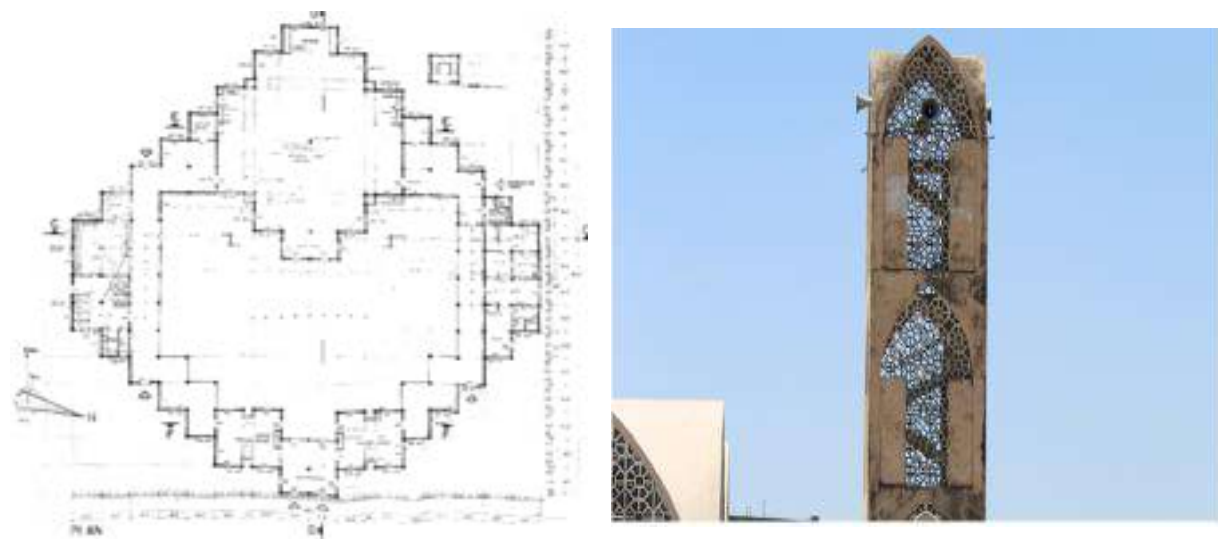


Figure 25: Markaz Ahlehadith – Architecture Plan & Minaret
Source: Author

The main prayer hall (musalla) is situated directly beyond the courtyard and is devoid of ornamental excess, in alignment with the Ahlehadith doctrinal emphasis on simplicity and textual purity. Originally designed as a singular hall, the space has been extended in response to increasing congregation size, yet the architectural vocabulary of pointed arches, vertical fenestrations, and rhythmic bays has been preserved. Two distinct entrances serve male and female worshippers, maintaining gender segregation in circulation and ritual practice.

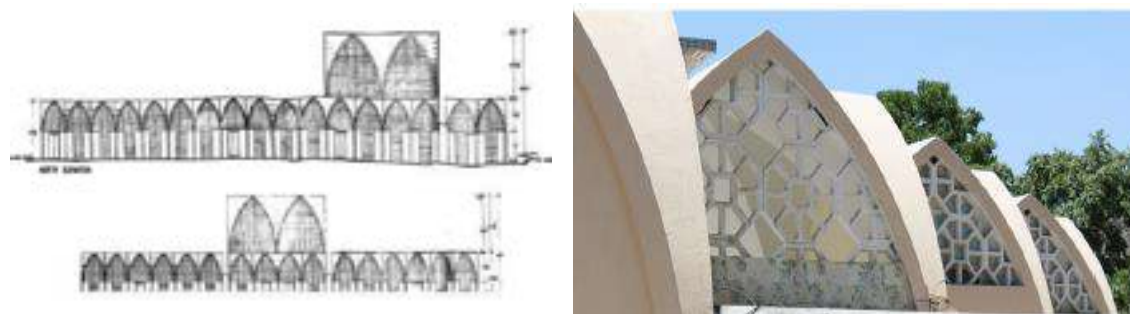


Figure 26: Markaz Ahlehadith – Elevation and Exterior
Source: Author

function. The absence of a traditional hemispherical dome is compensated by the use of eight intersecting arches that simulate a dome-like volume from within, offering a subtle interpretation of

spiritual centrality without recourse to symbolic monumentalism. The minaret, a solitary vertical element, rises modestly from the northeastern corner and serves as both an aural marker and architectural anchor within the skyline.

Ornamentation

Decorative elements at Markaz Ahlehadith are marked by an intentional use of Islamic geometric designs, in which special attention is paid to jaali screens and pointed arches. Ornamentation is done with economy, because of the religious ideology of this sect being sober and practical. The mihrab, a recess in the wall of the mosque that faces Mecca, is relatively small and insignificant; however, it is important from the religious point of view as a direction towards which prayers are performed. Close to the mihrab there is the minbar, an elevated wooden pulpit.

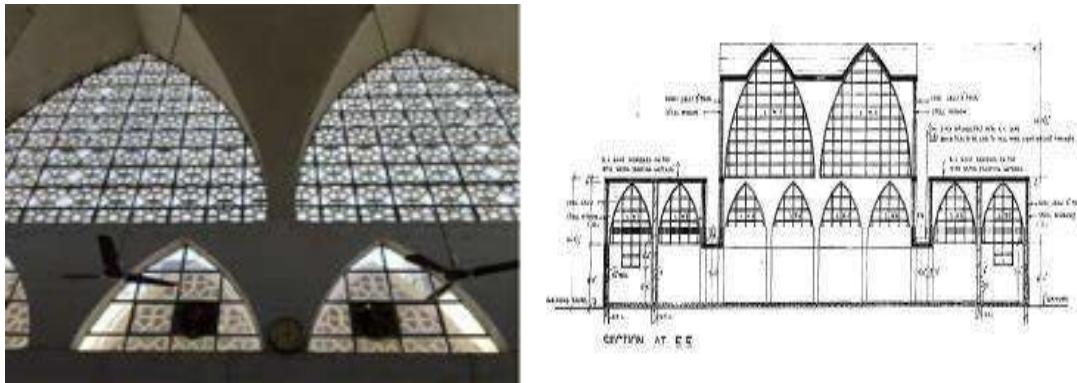


Figure 27: Markaz Ahlehadith – Elevation and Exterior

Source: Author

openings, exterior walls, and some portions of the minaret. The geometrical pattern of these jaali screens is in the form of an octagon, with each side being 6.11 inches and an overall height of 1'-11" per unit. This repeating geometric design of the jaali screens helps in climate control and also provides aesthetic benefits as well. It filters the light into the interior and creates an interesting shadow game within the building.

The structure uses a combination of reinforced concrete frame structure with masonry filling, a typical construction approach commonly used in Islamabad in the 1970s. The roof design involves intersecting arches which are not only aesthetically pleasing but also functional, creating volume without using a complex dome structure.



Figure 28: Markaz Ahlehadith – Views

Source: Author

The minaret is made up of four vertical sections, each of about 16 feet in height, totaling 67 feet and 2 inches in height. The architecture of this building element is in congruence with its symbolic purpose because it ensures not only a clear visual identity but also a distinctive sound element in the neighborhood.

7. BABARI MASJID



Location: G-10 Markaz, Islamabad

Construction Date: 2007

Plot Area: Not specified

Total Covered Area: Not specified

Capacity: 600 worshippers

Figure 29: Babari Masjid– Exterior

Source: Author

As requested by Dr. Ghulam Shabir, a local doctor, the mosque was designed by Nasir Iqbal, the architect, to serve not only as a local place of worship but also as a means of transportation for missionaries of Tableegh-e-Jamaat. The name of this organization honors the Babri Mosque of Ayodhya, which was demolished in 1992 and hence signifies the unity of Muslims throughout the world. The location of the mosque close to markets and health clinics brings out the role of the mosque as an institution catering to different users in the urban environment.

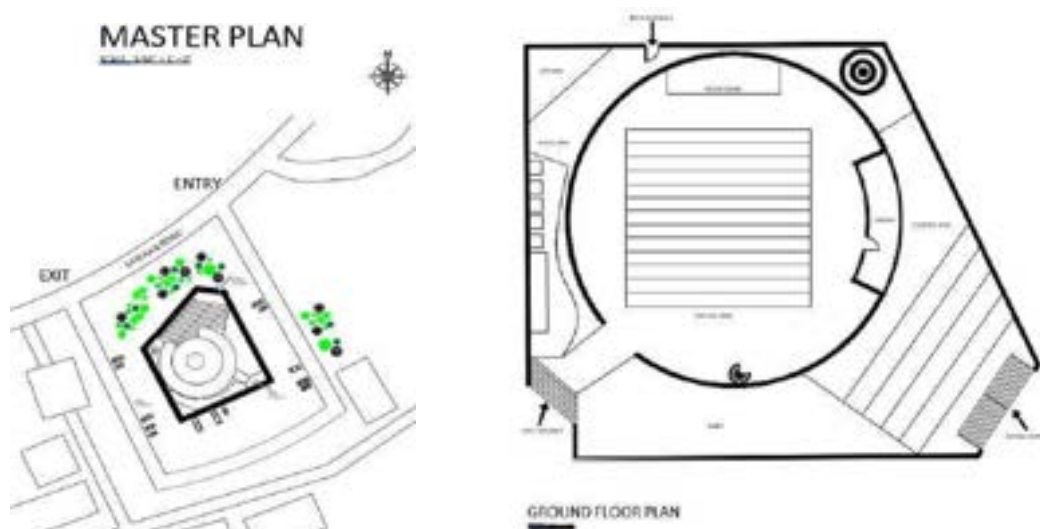


Figure30: Babari Masjid– Plan and Layout

Source: Author

Architecture Elements & Spatial Organization

The Babari Mosque is distinctively planned and consists of a circular configuration that features a centrally planned prayer hall and radial layout, designed to achieve optimal functional efficiency in its urban context. It has three levels, where the ground floor is designated as the main level for prayer and ablutions, the first level is an open-air level functioning both as worship and temporary accommodation, and the basement is used for overflow worshippers during busy times. One of the most prominent design features is the decorative spiral staircase in the courtyard inspired by the ancient Malwiya minaret of the Samarra Great Mosque, which acts as a landmark and not for functional use.

Segmented arches on the facade and windows of the mosque contribute to creating rhythmic continuity and refer to the traditional architectural language of Islamic architecture. The introduction of voids between the floors and an open roof structure enhances ventilation, providing a solution for thermal issues related to praying in crowded conditions. The planning of the spaces reveals the design intent to account for the needs of the users, since the sequence is organized hierarchically from the public entrance to the courtyard and further to the sacred prayer hall, accommodating not only regular worshippers but also the temporary visitors of the Tableegh-e-Jamaat movement using multi-level circulation.



Figure 31: Babari Masjid– Exterior
Source: Author

Ornamentation

Ornaments play a role in spirituality through the creation of a harmonious geometric design. Surah Al Fatiha, written in Thuluth script, surrounds the whole interior of the first floor and thus enhances the ritualistic importance of the interior space. The mihrab is decorated using blue tiles in a way that creates a focal point associated with the crafts of Persia and Kashmir.



The simplicity in the use of ornaments demonstrates the modern view of Islamic art where space rather than decoration becomes the main focus of interest. Sunlight is carefully controlled through skylights and tall windows, thus reducing the need for artificial lighting while maintaining thermal comfort.

The Babari Mosque is designed as a reinforced concrete structure that is held up by its round and three-storey construction. The ground storey prayer hall uses a span without columns and has load-bearing walls that give stability to the structure. The first storey is constructed using cantilevers. There is a light

steel frame roof that has a skylight to illuminate the main prayer area without affecting the strength of the structure.

8. MASJID E AYUB ANSARI

Location: F-10, Islamabad

Construction Date: 1988

Plot Area: Approximately 12,000 sft

Total Covered Area: Not specified

Total Number of Worshippers: Approximately 995

Figure 32: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Exterior

Source: Author

locally funded project, initiated under the supervision of the Capital Development Authority (CDA). Its architecture was designed by Vardag & Associates. The mosque served as an important spiritual center for the local community, incorporating both traditional Islamic spatial models along with contextual modernity. The F-10 Markaz, which is located near the mosque, acts as a commercial center that adds to the importance of the mosque in the urban context.



Figure 33: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Exterior

Source: Author

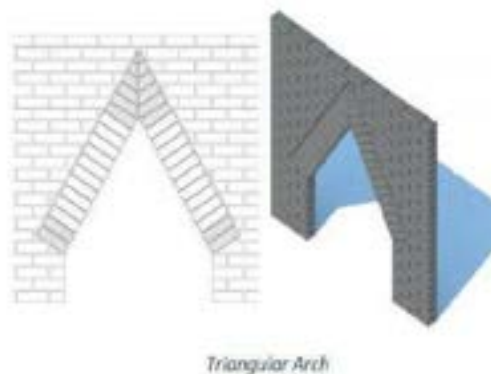
Architectural Features and Spatial Organization:



Figure 34: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Plans and Section

Source: Author

Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari exemplifies the hypostyle typology — a format rooted in the earliest Islamic mosques and derived from the Prophet's residence in Medina. It features a large, columned prayer hall opening into a front-facing courtyard. The entrance procession begins with a modest yet proportionally generous courtyard, which is functionally linked to ancillary spaces such as ablution areas and rooms for the imam and muezzin.



Triangular Arch



Triangular arch, Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari

Figure 33: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Architecture Element
Source: Author

The primary entry point to the main prayer hall features five triangular arches, an unusual architectural feature in Islamic architecture, where horseshoe arches or pointed arches are usually employed. The prayer hall can accommodate 600 worshippers and is supported on either side by the verandah and semi-covered prayer hall that help in creating thermal comfort and varied spaces.

There is a mezzanine level, mainly reserved for women worshippers, to increase the accommodation capacity without losing visual and spatial separation. The layout planning creates clear axes, zoning, and movement to create a welcoming worship environment. The dome placed directly above the prayer hall is able to bring in a slight sense of verticality without overpowering the horizontal language of the hypostyle grid.

Ornamentation



Figure 34: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Minaret
Source: Author

The mosque demonstrates modest ornamentation and an interior that is limited to plaster cast ornaments on the interior beams. Such motifs are based on vegetal arabesque motifs which reflect the

early Umayyad and Andalusian style of decoration as well as fit the economy of the materials used at present times. The dome is the traditional onion dome shape without any interior or exterior mosaic veneers. Its whitewashed color and sparse use of four skylights provide enough illumination as well as formal simplicity. The minaret stands 54 feet 6 inches tall and reflects the aesthetics of Mughal architecture with its canopied top (chhatra). Also, it is surmounted by a crescent finial (Alem) which resembles the shape of Turkish minarets. The only mihrab with wood detailing features triangular muqarnas-like ornaments, which are the abstraction of Islamic classical decorations. Triangular arches, which are used at both levels of the mosque, make up a unique design element of the mosque. The triangular arches reflect more Anglo-Saxon architectural influence rather than Islamic architecture.

The structural system is based on a reinforced concrete frame system, whereby load-bearing columns define a hypostyle grid arrangement. The high-rise tower is structurally integrated into the whole building by having a sound foundation. The relatively small size of the mosque structure does not need much in terms of seismic measures because the mosque is situated in an area with less seismic risk.

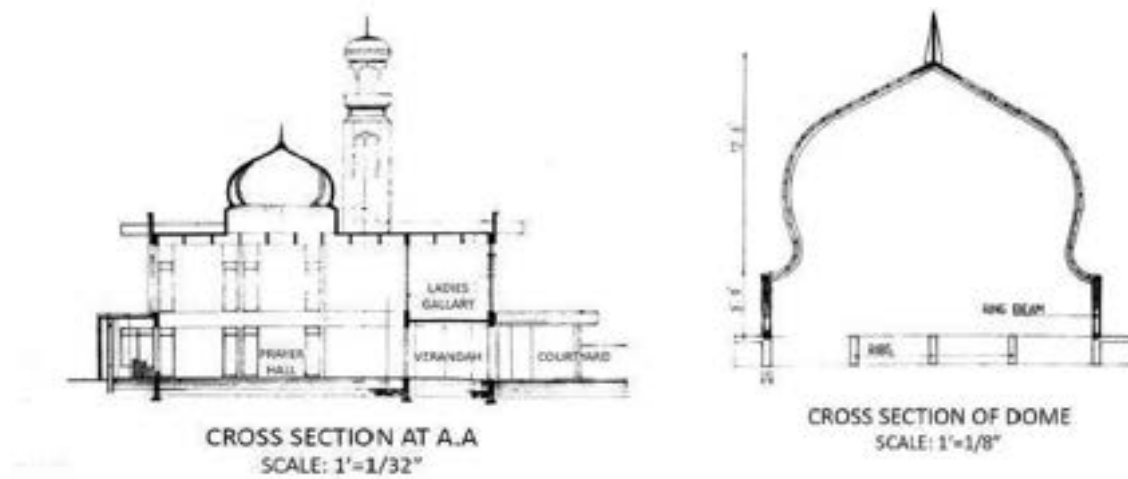


Figure 35: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Section
 Source: Author

9. JAMIA MASJID E TOOBAB



Location: E-11/3, Islamabad
Construction Date: 2007–2010
Plot Area: Approximately 900 square yards
Total Covered Area: Approximately 15,000 square feet
Total Number of Worshippers: ~700–800

The building process for Jamia Masjid Toobah started in 2007 and was completed

in May 2010. This mosque was built to cater to the increasing religious demands of the E-11 area. There is no philosophical or symbolic meaning of the building available, but the mosque serves its religious function well.

Architecture Elements & Spatial Organization

Jamia Masjid Toobah is a Jamia Mosque designed to cater to Jum'ah congregation services, including a basement madrassah with a seating capacity of 150-200 hifz students, comprising both male and female students. The mosque has adopted a square layout for the prayer hall. An important

architectural element inside the mosque is the sail vault, which stands 30 feet tall from the ground floor level to create a feeling of vertical infinity. This sail vault performs well acoustically, making even whispers audible inside the space. This aspect has been inspired by the early Byzantine domes.

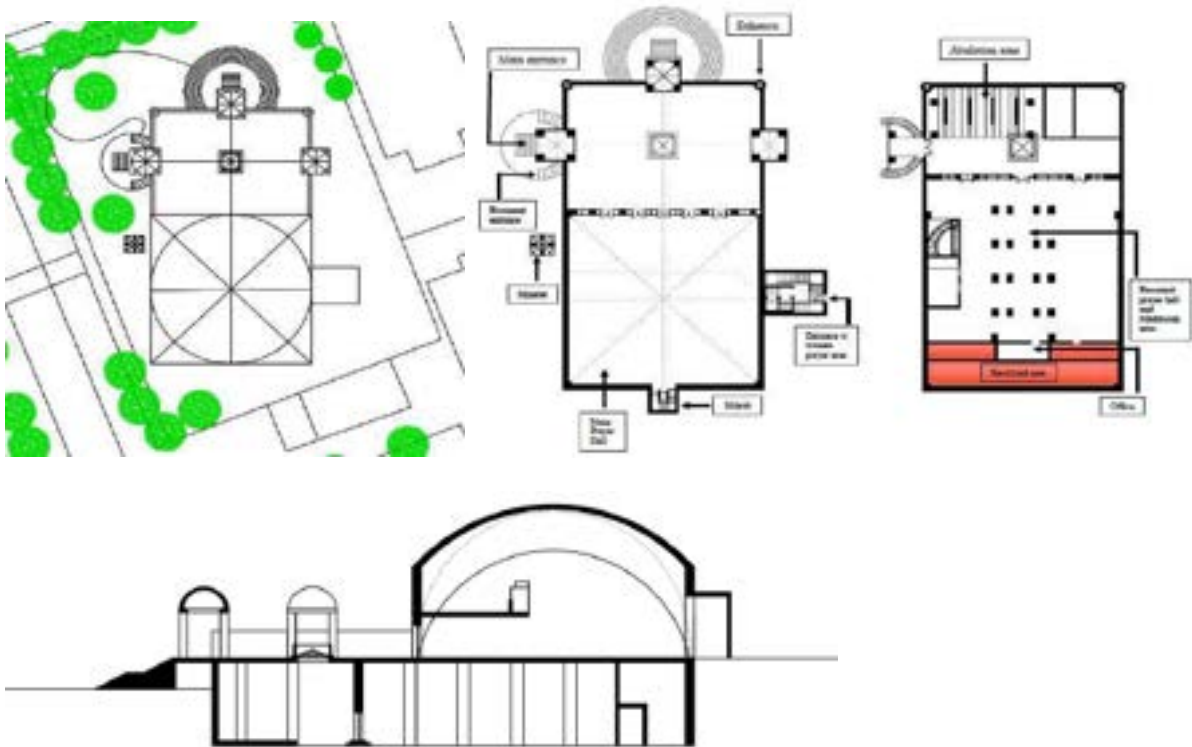


Figure 36: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Plans and Section
Source: Author

There are three vaulted entries into the mosque with arched portals leading to the mosque. In the main courtyard, there is a glass pyramid, which is 22 feet tall with a base size of 10 by 10 feet. Even though it may seem unusual for mosque architecture, it can be seen as a focal element of the building along the vertical axis of the building. There is a basement madrassah, including the ablution facility, washrooms, and administrative offices. Access to the basement is through spiral staircases. The women's prayer area is located above the main entry level, with a jajali screen separating it from other spaces.

Ornamentation

A combination of old and the new is found in the mosque's ornamentation, where geometric and calligraphic conventions are given a modern spin. Take the decorative square windows set into the sail

vault, for instance: they are cut by diagonal and straight lines that hark back to the kind of Islamic motifs you would expect to see.

On the south-eastern wall there is an embossed Kufic inscription facing the Qiblah. Across the arched mihrab wall, the Ayat-al-Kursi has been put in tilework as a semicircular band of emerald green Kufic script, a colour scheme carried through to the tiling on the interior of the mihrab itself. Then there are the vaulted entrances and arched portals which, with their understated detailing, tie in with the central sail vault to give the whole structure a sense of visual continuity.

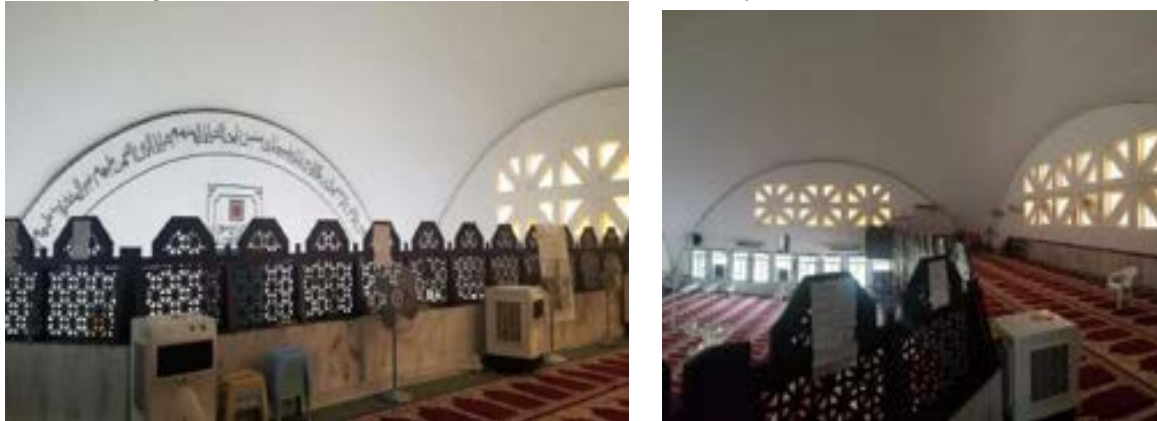


Figure 37: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Interior Views
Source: Author

This framework entails the use of the sail vault system set up on a square grid pattern. This vault acts in two capacities – first as the roof system and secondly as the main design element, allowing large spans without any interior column. Thus, an open prayer area is created underneath.

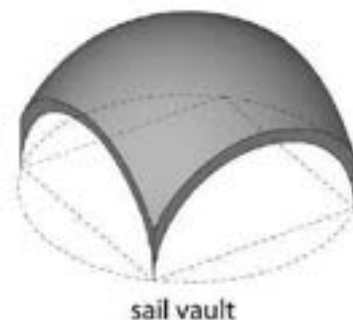


Figure 38: Jamia Masjid Ayub Ansari – Structure
Source: Author

10. ISAL MOSQUE



Figure 39: Faisal Mosque - Exterior
Source: Wikipedia Commons

Location: E-8 Sector, Islamabad

Construction Date: 1986.

Plot Area: 33 acres

Total Covered Area: Approximately 54,000 square feet

Total Number of Worshippers: Approximately 300,000

The Faisal Mosque is an iconic landmark that is an epitome of the national and religious identity of Pakistan. It was conceived on the occasion of the state visit of King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia in 1966 to Pakistan. The futuristic design proposed by the Turkish architect Vedat Dalokay was chosen, which included modern architectural concepts along with abstract elements of Islamic architecture. The mosque was built with full financial assistance from the Saudis and was completed in 1986. The physical presence of the Faisal Mosque accentuates the cultural importance of the northern corridor of Islamabad, where it acts as an anchor point within the urban fabric of the city.

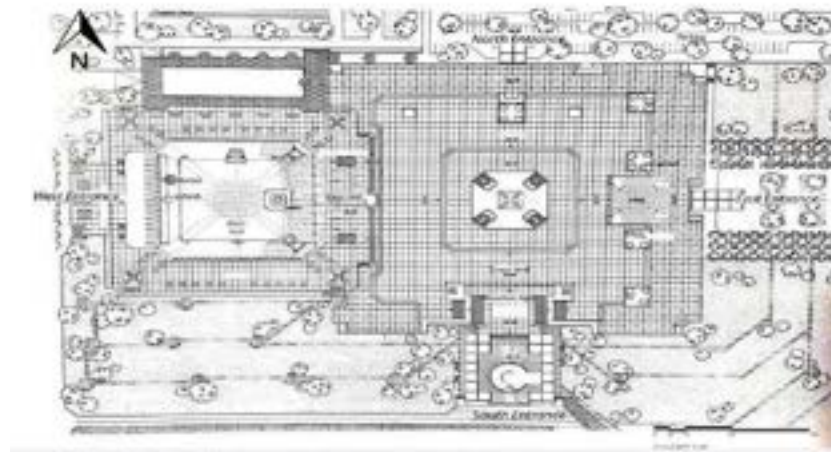


View of Faisal mosque from ablution area

Figure 40: Faisal Mosque - Exterior
Source: Wikipedia Commons

Architectural Features and Spatial Organization

The Faisal Mosque's architectural style emphasizes traditional mosque functions juxtaposed with modern abstraction. Instead of a central dome, the mosque design incorporates a Bedouin tent-inspired eight-sided sloped shell structure. This design is supplemented by four 90-meter minarets, a mosque design feature of slim vertical shafts, also completed with gilded crescents. These mosque design components constitute a triangular design, and along with the minarets, make a bold mosque design statement. These features create an updated design style for mosque architecture in a contemporary Islamic nation and define the Islamabad skyline.



Minarets of Hagia Sophia Turkey



Minarets of Faisal mosque

Figure 41: Faisal Mosque - Exterior
Source: Wikipedia Commons

The lofty, column-free main prayer hall is held aloft by massive concrete girders to a height of 40 meters. Movement and gathering in the prayer space are uninterrupted by any vertical mass. The courtyard and the surrounding colonnades, together with the adjoining porticoes, represent transitional and overflow spaces facilitating movement from one user to another.

Ornamentation

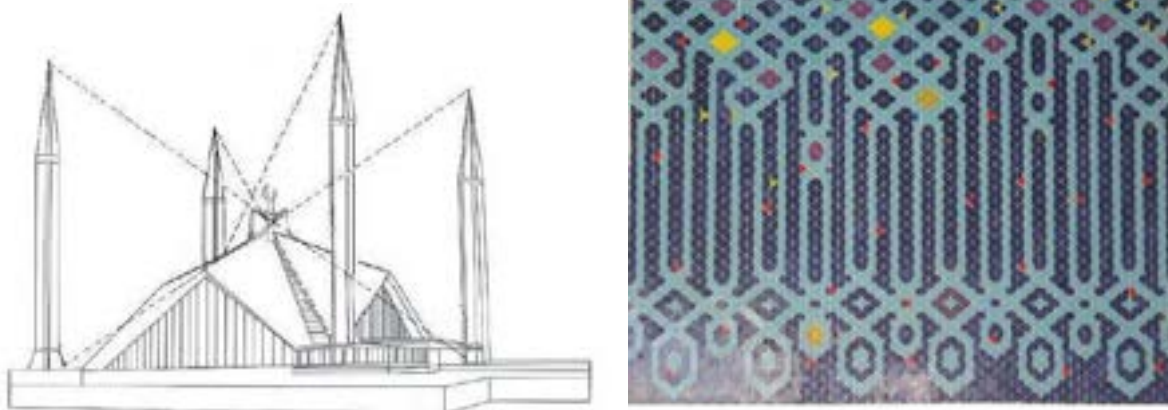
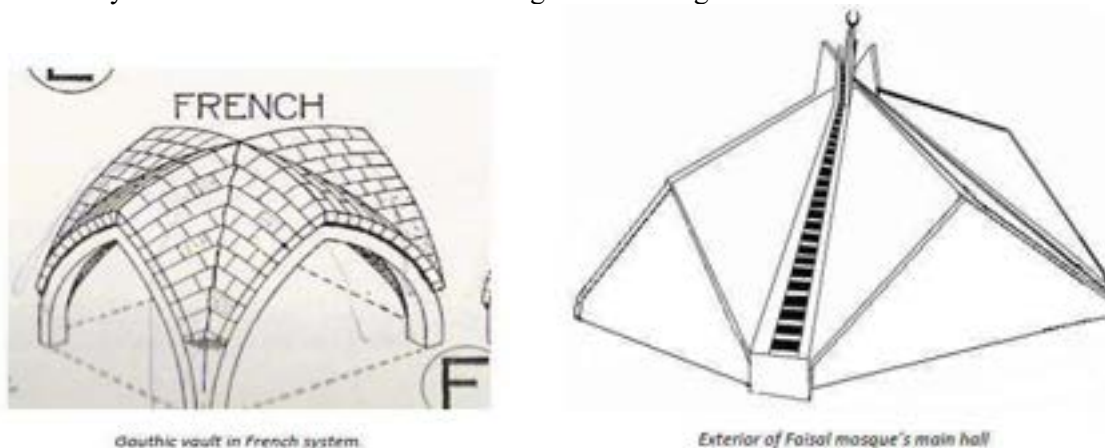


Figure 42: Faisal Mosque - Details
Source: Wikipedia Commons

This particular mosque reflects the modern Islamic design philosophy, which is marked by moderation in terms of decoration but at the same time rich in symbolism. White marble covers both exterior and interior surfaces of the building since this type of stone symbolizes spirituality and cleanliness. The blue tile covering is dominant in the mosque since this color is traditionally used in the mosques located in Persia and Central Asia. This creates a calm atmosphere, especially around the mihrab and entrance gates of the mosque. Lattices used for elevation serve several purposes such as light control, privacy, and ventilation.

Interior surfaces are decorated with calligraphy of the famous Pakistani artist Sadequain, and inscriptions surrounding the mihrab include verses from the Quran as well as the list of 99 names of Allah inscribed on large marble panels. The minbar consists of simple white marble, and it includes eight steps placed behind the sculpture representing opened book symbolizing the Quran. The ceiling includes skylights through which natural light can come into the prayer hall of the mosque.

The mosque's structure does not represent the typical dome-and-arch structure of most mosques but rather uses the pre-stressed concrete structure for the creation of large, spanned areas without any columns. The main feature is the sloped shell roof that is held up by four concrete pylons forming a triangular arrangement and transferring the load to the base. Each of the four minarets consists of a reinforced concrete core covered by a network of vertical ribs that get thinner at the top, providing for the stability of the slender minarets and making them look lighter.





Roof design in main hall of Faisal mosque.

Figure 43: Faisal Mosque - Structure
Source: Wikipedia Commons

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The examination of spatial design and experience of mosques in Islamabad represents an ongoing process of interpretation by the society and its users. This process is rooted in balancing traditional symbolism, modern functionalities, contemporary aesthetics, sectarian identities, and limitations.

Through these case studies, it becomes evident that the above-mentioned layers are forming the discourse on urban mosques in modern cities where these buildings serve not only as religious symbols but as examples of urban construction in the post-modern world. However, despite this fact, some mosques are imagined and constructed through the prism of traditionalist symbolism. Lal Masjid and Masjid Al Kauthar represent two buildings that incorporate domes, minarets, and decorations of the Mughal, Persian, and Ottoman periods. Given the importance of identity formation in modern society, where the issues of identity creation and building are especially significant, such mosques become the symbols of communal identity and religiosity of the society. On the contrary, the example of the Faisal Mosque is indicative of the way of rethinking sacred spaces and designing them in the absence of any dome in bold shapes and with monochromatic ornamentations. The popularity and ownership of Faisal Mosque at the local and national level by the community is evidence that place attachments go beyond architectural language. The case studies also revealed mosques where a combination of traditional and contemporary architectural language and spatial design is seen. The Babari Masjid is a unique circular layout, not often seen in mosque traditions, and the Jamia tul Madina is a multifunction design that responds to both religious and functional needs.

In some cases, contemporary architectural language plays the main role. e.g., the Lal Masjid. This may also be because it has been formally designed by a famous Pakistani architect and Aga Khan Award winner, Nayyar A Dada. In other examples, memory plays a vital role; Babari Masjid recalls the demolished mosque of Ayodhya, Shite mosques in the selection often replicate the shrine of Imam Ali or Imam Hussain, the children of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). In a pluralist urban setting, identity reinforcement by sects is an important part of the teachings and social fabric of the community. The mosque, beyond its function as a spiritual and religious centre, becomes a vessel for this collective memory represented in built form.

Ornamentation of mosques in appropriate forms remains the most vital element common in all the case studies. Whether it is Sadequain's dramatic calligraphic work at the Faisal Mosque or the Thuluth script art at Jamia Tul Madina, ornamentation is used as a key component in developing spiritual associations for the visitors and developing an identity for each of the mosques. Geometric patterns in mosaic, tile, or paint have been used in all case studies to integrate sacred messages and familiar aesthetics into the spatial experience. The support of colour, in tilework, paint, mosaics, and calligraphy, is carefully selected to align with traditional Islamic representative palettes.

In a rapidly urbanizing city like Islamabad, where real estate values and viability are extremely high, the mosque buildings reveal adaptability to limitations of space and cost. Large courtyards are rarely seen; vertical stacking of prayer spaces is a common feature, though the adaptations maintain fundamental elements of ritual and sanctity such as the orientation towards Makkah and the spatial zoning with regard to segregations and privacy. The multi-functional nature of the mosque remains intact, continuing its existence as a hub of knowledge and learning.

In essence, the mosque in Islamabad today reflects a careful negotiation of its dual identity: as a spiritual sanctuary rooted in religious tradition and as an urban institution that must adapt to contemporary realities, and as a living example of community-driven program and design. The architecture of these mosques articulates the tensions and harmonies between memory and modernity, between sacred purpose and civic functionality. The tradition of mosque design is expected to remain consistent in the future, as symbolism and associations hold deep meaning for the users, though representations in architectural language may vary and are just evolving as a living entity and a powerful expression of faith within the urban landscape of a modern planning city.

Conclusion

The analysis of spatial design and architecture of Islamabad's urban mosques is a result of conscious architectural interventions along with socially produced design processes. Even though these and many others exist in a modernist planned city, they are a testament to the fluid nature of religious architecture that incorporates evolution and change with community efforts, as per the needs of the event and the users. Together, they show that sacred architecture is still an evolving urban institution. From all the case studies, it is clear that adaptability becomes an inherent feature of the urban mosque today. The ability of space to be transformed implies that it is flexibility, not formality, which determines the sustainability of mosques.

Just as vital is the continued use of symbolism and ornamentation. Even though many mosques opt for an architectural language derived from existing Islamic tradition and not one that embraces an approach that seeks to be contemporary, the symbols they incorporate still serve an essential cultural purpose. The architectural references allow for a sense of attachment to be formed not only through the visual appreciation of these structures but also through familiarity and repetition. From the case studies presented above, it can be clearly seen that the building of mosques in Islamabad is a process driven by the community. Either in formalized processes or through informal processes of collective action, the vast majority of such buildings have been funded, enlarged, and managed by the very communities who have made use of these mosques. The architectural evolution of these buildings bears witness to the public's continued participation in the process, which makes the mosque one of the most evident forms of collective space-making in the city.

From the collective perspective, the mosques of Islamabad suggest that sacred architecture is something more than just an architectural object but rather a process of culture formation. The importance of those buildings comes from the convergence of architecture, rituals, symbolism, and community, where the architectural form gets its significance in the process of constant occupation and usage.

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