

## **Islamic Perspectives on Architectural Art: A Comprehensive Review**

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### **Abstract**

Islamic architectural art is a profound manifestation of cultural, spiritual and aesthetic values deeply rooted in Islamic Principles. This comprehensive study explores the philosophical, historical and artistic dimensions of Islamic architecture, emphasizing its evolution, key characteristics and various socio-religious influences. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the construction of colossal architectural marvels-gleaming skyscrapers and futuristic complexes-designed with state-of-the-art facilities to meet modern demands. This paper explores its definition according to Islamic principles and the Islamic perspective on its design, purpose and ethical considerations. Drawing from primary Islamic sources, the study examines how Islamic teachings, functionality, and spirituality intersect. Key themes include the relationship between the Islamic worldview and architectural expressions, Islam's directives on art and construction and the balance between beauty and religious value. The discussion is presented in a clear and engaging manner to enhance readers' understanding of Islamic architectural philosophy.

**Keywords** : Islam, Architecture, Architectural Art, Mosque, the Holy Qur'an, Sunnah.

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## 1. Introduction

Architecture is one of the most significant art forms in human history. Without shelter, it would be impossible for humans to survive and combat the forces of nature. From the dawn of history, people have demonstrated exceptional artistic skills in constructing homes and palaces. In such a context, what is Islam's perspective on constructing grand structures and palaces within the framework of its comprehensive way of life and philosophy? Understanding this issue is essential. The Quran and Hadith, along with references, provide guidance on various aspects of life, including construction. Additionally, the opinions of Islamic scholars offer deeper insights into matters such as building structures. Alongside, Islam offers its unique perspectives and positions on the characteristics, structure, location, purpose and context of architectural art. The statements presented here have been distilled by our predecessors through a thorough examination of the Quran and Hadith, offering us their essence. In the discussed essay, the definition of architectural art, its connection with Islam, and the Islamic perspective on this subject have been incorporated based on relevant texts. Additionally, the Islamic viewpoint on architectural art has been outlined in a manner that allows readers to easily grasp a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Although architecture is not limited to just buildings, as it also encompasses land planning, construction processes, exceptional painting and various types of design. In the current essay, the term "architectural art" generally refers to houses, mansions, palaces and aesthetically pleasing structures as well as human dwellings. Land planning, sculpture, painting and design, along with other aspects related to architectural art, are not the focus here.

### 1. Research Objectives:

- To identify and examine the core theological and philosophical foundations that inform the conceptualization of architectural art within Islamic thought.
- To analyze the formal and functional characteristics of Islamic architectural elements through a qualitative framework grounded in religious, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions.
- To investigate the integration of Qur'anic worldview and Prophetic traditions in shaping spatial design principles and artistic expression in Islamic architecture.
- To evaluate the applicability of traditional Islamic architectural principles in contemporary architectural practices through case-based and interpretive analysis.

### 2. Research Questions

- What are the core theological and philosophical principles within Islamic thought that shape the conceptual foundations of architectural art?
- How do Islamic architectural elements reflect formal and functional characteristics rooted in religious, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions?
- In what ways do the Qur'anic worldview and Prophetic traditions influence spatial design principles and artistic expressions in Islamic architecture?

- How can traditional Islamic architectural principles be applied or reinterpreted in contemporary architectural practices through case-based analysis?

### **3. Research Methodology:**

This study adopts the Qualitative Research Method as one of its fundamental approaches. As part of the qualitative research methodology, this study employs the analysis of primary sources as a fundamental approach. This primary source analysis was conducted by synthesizing key Islamic texts - the Quran and authentic Hadiths. Through critical examination and hermeneutical analysis, core principles have been extracted to establish a theoretical framework. The including section synthesizes these principles into a comprehensive review, offering structured insights into the research subject.

### **4. Architecture:**

There is no controversy about architecture becoming art. However, there is some variation in how scholars define this concept. According to experts, architecture is the integration of art and science. This is why architecture is often referred to as the “Mother of all arts” (Hasan, 2003). In defining architecture, some historians have described any constructed object as architecture, while others have identified it especially with sturdy and aesthetically pleasing structures like palaces (Rahman & Mujtaba, 2008). Dr. A. K. M. Yakub Ali said, “Generally, by architecture, we mean any human-made structure, whether it is a small hut or a grand building” (Ali, 1982). W. R. Lethaby said, “Architecture is the practical art of building touched with emotion, not only past, but now and in the future” (Lethaby, 1892).

### **5. Architectural Art in the Light of Various Religions & Civilizations:**

Studying the history of ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Sindhhu, among others, reveals that these civilizations have placed significant importance on architectural art since ancient times. The Greek nation held a very high position in art and culture. They also made significant advancements in architectural art. Their creativity in this field was unique. They discovered various innovative techniques in this art, which are clearly evident in their architectural works.

If we examine ancient Egyptian architecture and compare it with Greek architecture, we can observe significant differences in their construction styles. The palaces of the Egyptians were massive and robust in size. This suggests their strong religious beliefs, and their way of life indicates that they believed in an afterlife. On the other hand, Greek art was highly detailed, elegant and meticulously crafted. This reflects their focus on the present life, as they were primarily rooted in worldly existence. Their lifestyle and philosophy emphasized rationality and materialism.

Islam teaches Muslims that one can attain closeness to Allah through all kinds of actions, provided they are done with the right intention. There is no need to abandon worldly life, become ascetic, or isolate oneself solely for worship. In fact, such practices are discouraged in Islam, as they encourage a balanced life where both spiritual and worldly responsibilities are fulfilled. To attain Allah, there is no need

for him to declare something permissible (Halal) as forbidden (Haram) for humans. On the other hand, in the religious philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, we observe that to gain the pleasure of the creator, one must adopt asceticism. It is considered essential to abandon worldly life, leave behind the comforts of society and renounce the blessings of the world. In other words, one must endure physical hardships in various ways to reach the creator. This concept is prevalent in almost all religions except Islam. The influences of this philosophy can be observed in the architectural styles of various communities, particularly in their religious places of worship. For instance, mosques in Islamic culture are often designed with simplicity, allowing natural light and air to flow freely. The interiors of mosques are typically devoid of excessive ornamentation, ensuring that the focus of worshippers during prayer remains undisturbed. Externally, mosques feature minarets for the call to prayer, along with facilities for ablution and sanitation. These structures are usually located near roads, markets or within a neighborhood, making them easily accessible to the community. Here, Muslims fulfill their worldly responsibilities while also performing their religious worship and duties. The mosque is a unique place of worship for Muslims, serving as a common ground that connects their worldly life and the hereafter. Allah (SW) said, “Once the prayer is over, disperse throughout the land and seek the bounty of Allah. And remember Allah often so you may be successful” (Qur’an 62:10).

On the other hand, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians often build their places of worship on mountain peaks or in forests, far from human settlements. The architecture of these religious sites tends to follow a unique style, often featuring dimly lit interiors to create a sense of separation from the outside world, both physically and spiritually. Just as followers of these religions have constructed their places of worship according to their own architectural traditions, Muslims have also built their religious structures following their distinct artistic principles. As a result, each community has developed its own unique architectural style (Ahsan, 1983).

## 6. Islamic Guidelines on Architectural Art:

The fundamental principle of Islam is that everything is considered positive, except for certain specific worldly matters. Similarly, Islam holds the same view regarding architectural art. Islam permits the beautification of homes, buildings and palaces provided that it remains free from arrogance and extravagance.

In the Quran and the Hadith, there are repeated references to those concepts. In the Quran, terms such as fortress (حصون) (Qur’an 59:2), citadel (صياصي) (Qur’an 33:26), towering structures (البروج) (Qur’an 85:1), buildings (قصور) (Qur’an 7:74), chambers (الغزقة) (Qur’an 25:75), walls (جدار) (Qur’an 59:14), palaces (الصرح) (Qur’an 27:44), and fortified settlements (قرى محصنة) (Qur’an 59:14) are used. For instance, in one verse, Allah says, “wherever you may be, death will overcome you—even if you were in fortified towers” (Qur’an 4:78).

This verse indicates that constructing and living in strong, high fortresses or buildings is permissible. Allah (SW) said in another verse of the Qur’an, “Then she

was told, 'Enter the palace.' But when she saw the hall, she thought it was a body of water, so she bared her legs. Solomon said, 'It is just a palace paved with crystal'" (Qur'an 27:44).

Here, a palace is described with streams of water flowing beneath its floor. However, due to a transparent glass covering above, there was no chance of water touching the feet of passersby. This was part of the magnificent palace of the Prophet of Sulaiman (AS), showcasing his exceptional craftsmanship. This verse also serves as evidence that constructing highly artistic, elegant and intricately designed homes or buildings is permissible, as is residing in them.

Allah (SW) said in another verse of the holy Qur'an, "Remember when He made you successors after 'Âd and established you in the land, and you built palaces on its plains and carved homes into mountains. So, remember Allah's favours, and do not go about spreading corruption in the land" (Qur'an 7:74).

In the aforementioned verse, '*You built palaces on its plains and carved homes out of the mountains.*' After stating that, '*remember the favors of Allah*' this statement implies that a palace is considered a significant blessing from Allah. If building a palace were not permissible, it would not have been referred to as a blessing from Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad (sm) once compared all the prophets and messengers, including him, to a magnificent and towering palace. He said, "...They said how magnificent the architecture of this palace would have been if only this brick had been placed in it..." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 1999, Hadith no. 9337).

The prophet said in another place, "The relationship of the believer with another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each strengthens the other.' He (sm) illustrated this by interlacing the fingers of both his hands" (Al-Bukhari, 1987, Hadith no. 467). If building houses and mansions were not permissible, the Prophet (sm) would never have compared the prophets, messengers and Muslims to such things.

Some researchers argue that constructing elaborate, ornamented buildings is not permissible in Islam as the religion discourages worldly extravagance. They believe that building unnecessarily luxurious structures or excessively decorating homes is prohibited in Islam as it promotes materialism and indulgence. Among those who held this opinion, the Tabi'i Hasan al-Basri R. is prominent. Those who support this view present the following hadiths as evidence: the Prophet (sm) said, "When Allah wishes to humiliate a servant, He lets them waste their wealth" (Al-Baihaqi, 1988, Hadith no. 10720). Another hadith states, "A believer will receive the best reward from Allah for whatever they spend in His cause. However, if they spend on building houses or in disobedience to Allah, they will not receive such a reward" (Al-Daraqutni, 1966, Hadith no. 101). Hadith narrated by Anas (RA), "All expenses spent in the path of Allah will be counted as good deeds, except for money spent on building houses. There is no blessing in that" (Al-Tirmidhi, 2015, Hadith no. 2341). Another hadith narrated by Abdullah Ibn 'Umar (RA), "Refrain from building extravagant houses, as they are the root of ruin" (Al-Baihaqi, 1988, Hadith no. 10722). Another hadith states, "for the

children of Adam (AS), there is no inherent right to anything beyond these essentials: A home for shelter, clothing to cover oneself, a piece of bread and water for sustenance” (Al-Bukhari, 1987, Hadith no. 467).

In response to these documents, Allama Inn Hajar Asqalani expressed the following opinion: The narrations in those hadiths apply to substances that are not essential for living and do not provide protection from heat or cold. A marfu hadith narrated by Anas (RA) states: “Houses that are considered harmful for their owners will be held accountable except for what is necessary for their dwelling.” He also said from Da’usi’s words, “it appears that constructing all kinds of houses is sinful. However, the core issue is not that. This matter is subject to interpretation. Building houses beyond one’s personal needs is not inherently sinful. In fact, constructing certain types of houses can even be a virtuous deed. For example, if a house benefits others besides the builder, the builder will share in the rewards. Allah knows best” (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, n.d.).

Hassan Ahmad Abd al-Rahman Muhammad al-Banna has explained this in the commentary on the hadith, ‘This curse shall befall those who, hoping to live forever in this world or out of pride, seek to show off as wealthy before the poor and suffering or strive to remain in this world eternally those who build grand houses to imitate such people. To those who act this way, Allah declares, “And you are building massive palaces, as if you will live forever” (Qur’an, 26:129).

The renowned Islamic jurist, Allama Sayyed Sabeq, commented on the matter of elaborately decorating grand buildings. The hadith that mentions disliking the construction of grand buildings and elaborate decorations does not apply in all situations. The essence of these hadiths is that they apply to those who build such structures out of arrogance or to flaunt their wealth before others. However, for those who construct buildings solely to appreciate and enjoy beauty, these hadiths do not apply, as such appreciation is always desirable (Sabeq, n.d.).

Therefore, it becomes evident that constructing beautiful buildings and adorning them with artistic designs is permissible and commendable in Islam. However, the fundamental principle here is that building palaces merely to display arrogance or to show off is not permissible; rather, it will lead to punishment in the Hereafter. For this reason, the Sahaba (companions) of the Prophet (sm) also constructed grand buildings without hesitation. After the Sahaba (companions), in the eras of the Tabi’een (successors), Tabi Tabi’een (followers of successors) and the great jurists, as well as in subsequent generations, Muslims continued to build magnificent structures.

Living in an unnecessarily extravagant palace for one’s own family is considered Makruh (disliked) by Islamic Scholars. However, constructing such buildings for business purposes or earning rental income is not impermissible. In fact, it can sometimes serve as a form of reward, especially in large cities where land is scarce. In such places, tall buildings become necessary, as there is no real alternative. A building may be vacant today, but soon it will serve people’s needs. Major cities cannot function without such smart city planning and well-designed structures.

Islam seeks practical and modern solutions to problems. This is why Islamic jurists stated: 'Where there is human welfare, there is Islam.' Building luxurious homes, castles, or high-end buildings is permissible (Halal) in Islam if: (a) Wealth is earned and spent lawfully, (b) No Haram elements are included in the design, (c) Avoid extravagance (Israf) and Waste, (d) Socially responsive and avoiding arrogance (Kibr), (e) Ensure a comfortable living for dwellers, (f) Avoiding Debt and financial excess (Gharar & Riba), (g) Must include utility and community benefits, and (h) Should be social and environmental responsibilities are upheld.

### **7. Islamic Boundaries and Characteristics in Architectural Art:**

Islamic scholars have provided several guidelines for architectural constructions based on the fundamental principles of the Quran and Sunnah. Below, we present these guidelines.

#### **7.1. Observing Islamic Boundaries and Characteristics**

Islam has specific guidelines regarding certain structures. For example, when building a mosque, its shape should be roughly quadrilateral, constructed in a simple manner, and it must be aligned toward the Qibla, with a Mihrab built in the direction of the Qibla. Here are some recommended aspects to consider alongside offerings, Salah (prayer), and worship in the mosque:

- Different portion for females to perform Salah (Prayer): Every mosque needs to have a separate space for women where they can pray without interruption or rest if necessary.
- Islamic Education: Attending or organizing classes on the Quran, Hadith and Fiqh to increase Islamic Knowledge. A library seminar room can be attached to the mosque complex.
- Charity and social welfare: Supporting Mosque fundraising, helping the needy and volunteering for community welfare.
- Dawah and Outreach: Inviting non-Muslims or less-practicing Muslims to learn about Islam in a gentle manner.
- Youth Involvement: Encouraging young Muslims to participate in Islamic programs and leadership roles.
- Charity Healthcare: There could be a charity clinic in the mosque complex where people from the community can seek medical care.
- Construction of a rest house: There can be a guest house in the mosque complex, where local and foreign guests can rest and stay if necessary.
- Supporting New Muslims: Helping reverts integrate into the community and learn Islamic practices.

#### **7.2. The Mosque will be the Social Hub**

Islamic culture is mosque centric. Because, in Islam, all welfare activities for society are part of a religious duty. Therefore, the mosque should be located in an open space at the center of a city or locality so that people can easily access it.

### 7.3. Ensuring Modesty for Women

One of the key aspects of building a home is incorporating privacy provisions, especially for the women residing in it. In Islam, maintaining modesty and observing Hijab (covering) are important and obligatory commandments, as emphasized in various verses of the Quran. Therefore, thoughtful architectural planning, such as separate living spaces, screened windows, and private courtyards, helps uphold these values while ensuring comfort and dignity.

### 7.4. Comfort in One's Home

A house should be designed in a way that brings mental peace and contentment to its residents. It should be a place where one can spend time in solitude, find tranquility and live comfortably. Allah (SWT) says, "Indeed, Allah has made your homes a place of rest and serenity for you" (Qur'an, 16:80).

### 7.5. Build in a Strong and Beautiful Way

A Muslim architect should strive to build strong and beautiful structures with skill and excellence. The Prophet Muhammad (sm) mentioned in a hadith: "When any of you performs a task, he should do it with perfection, for Allah loves excellence in work" (al-Mawsili, 1984, Hadith no. 4386).

### 7.6. Toilet Should Not Face the Qibla

The toilets inside the home should not be aligned toward the Qibla. This is because the Prophet Muhammad (sm) prohibited facing or turning one's back toward the Qibla while relieving oneself. The Prophet (sm) said in this context, "Therefore, avoid sitting in a position where the Qibla is directly in front or behind you when using the toilet" (Al-Bukhari, 1987, Hadith no. 386).

### 7.7. Made with Simplicity and Humility

Muslims' homes should be simple and modest, fulfilling their needs without extravagance or pride. Allah (SWT) said, "O children of Adam, dress well for prayer, eat and drink, but do not waste, indeed, He does not love the wasteful" (Qur'an, 7:31).

### 7.8. Always Remember the Responsibility of Stewardship Entrusted by Allah

An architect is both an artist and a servant of Allah. Therefore, an architect must always ensure that their designs promote human welfare and, through this, secure their success in the Hereafter. Allah said, "Remember! When your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to place a successive (human) authority on earth'" (Qur'an, 2:30).

### 7.9. Expanding Living Spaces

The third consideration when building a house is to ensure it is spacious. The Prophet Muhammad (sm) preferred spacious homes, considering them a sign of blessings. On this matter, he said, "Here are four things considered symbols of good fortune: a virtuous and devoted wife, a spacious home, honest neighbors and a patient mode of transportation" (Al-Nasa'i, 1986, Hadith no. 112). He (the Prophet

sm) often recited this prayer, “O Allah, forgive me my sin, and expand for me my abode, and bless for me that which You have provided me” (Al-Tirmidhi, 2015, Hadith no. 3500).

## Conclusion

Human beings have not come to this world to live permanently; they must eventually return to their Creator and account for their deeds. This fundamental truth must be kept in mind when undertaking architectural endeavors. Homes and buildings should undoubtedly be strong, elegant and well-crafted. However, above all, care must be taken to ensure that the design does not disrupt and environment conducive to worship and devotion. Additionally, structures should be free from unnecessary extravagance. Bangladesh is the second-largest Muslim-majority nation, and its architecture should reflect Islamic architectural principles. Considering this, there is a pressing need to establish and implement architectural laws that align with the country’s cultural heritage and Islamic values. It is also important to remember that Islam is a religion of harmony. It does not oppose the practice of other religious values. This inclusivity is what makes Islam universal and all-encompassing.

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