

## **Rationalizing the Phenomenon of Converting**

### **Hindu Temples into Mosques**

#### **Merasionalkan fenomena menukaran kuil Hindu ke dalam masjid**

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#### **Abstract**

In this paper, some aspects of the phenomenon of reclaiming and converting Hindu temples into mosques, following the arrival of Islam and Muslims to the Indian shores, are discussed. The underlying reasons for the phenomenon which were not only of expedient socio-economic and political, but also of profound spiritual nature, are the focus of discussion. The main thrusts of the paper revolves around the issues pertaining to the expediency of converting temples into mosques, Muslim general tolerance towards conquered peoples, converting temples into mosques as a relative and qualified trend, as well as the relationship between converting temples into mosques and the evolution of the identity of Islamic architecture. The nature of the paper is conceptual or philosophical, rather than empirical.

**Keywords:** Hindu Temples, Mosques, India, Islam, Muslims, Islamic Architecture.

#### **Abstrak**

Kajian ini memperbincangkan beberapa aspek fenomena menuntut kembali dan menukar tokong Hindu ke masjid selepas ketibaan Islam dan umat Islam ke tanah India. Fokus perbincangan ialah dasar alasan fenomena yang bukan sahaja bermanfaat untuk sosio-ekonomi dan politik, tetapi juga alam rohani yang mendalam. Kajian ini berkaitan

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dengan isu-isu seperti kesesuaian menukar tokong ke masjid, toleransi umum orang Islam terhadap orang ditawan, menukar tokong ke masjid sebagai trend relatif dan berkelayakan, serta hubungan antara tokong-tokong hindu yang ditukar menjadi masjid dan evolusi identiti seni bina Islam. Kajian ini berunsurkan konsep atau falsafah, dan bukan empirikal.

**Kata Kunci:** Tokong Hindu, Masjid, India, Islam, Muslim, Seni Bina Islam.

### **Introduction**

It is advocated in certain circles that after its arrival in many regions, including India, Islam spread and Muslims proselytized at the point of the sword, and that conquered peoples were given the choice of conversion or death.<sup>1</sup> In addition, conquered peoples' places of worship were mercilessly either razed to the ground or converted into mosques. This paper attempts to prove that such a phenomenon, though not entirely unknown in the history of Islam and its culture and civilization in India, is either completely unfounded or grossly exaggerated. Such reports are often taken out of contexts and are both shrouded in fibs and infused with irrational sentiments and thoughts.

### **The Expediency of Converting Temples into Mosques**

An intriguing aspect of the early evolution of Islamic architecture was a phenomenon of converting churches and temples into mosques. This Muslim interim architectural preference existed mainly in the established cities and settlements to which Muslims came and where they eventually settled like, for example, Damascus, Homs and Aleppo in Syria, Jerusalem in Palestine, some Persian cities in Iraq and several cities in North India. K.A.C. Creswell went so far as to allege -- baselessly though -- that there is no reason for believing that any mosque was built as such

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<sup>1</sup> Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 198.

in Syria until the time of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 97 AH/ 715 AC) or possibly his father ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (d. 87 AH/ 705 AC). The only thing that Muslims had during that period of time were the churches which they had turned into mosques.<sup>2</sup>

As regards North or Northwest India, the first ruler of Delhi and the founder of Ghulām or Mamlūk Sultanate of India (this was the first of five unrelated dynasties to rule India's Delhi Sultanate from 603 AH/1206 AC to 689 AH/1290 AC), Quṭb al-Dīn Aybak (d. 607 AH /1210 AC), formerly a military general of Turkic descent from Central Asia, built the oldest mosque in Delhi. The mosque is called *Qūwwat al-Islam* (Power and Authority of Islam) and is the earliest extant Muslim edifice on Indian soil. It is situated in the famous Quṭb complex south of modern Delhi. About this mosque and the circumstances under which it was created, Satish Grover stated that following the enthronement of Quṭb al-Dīn Aybak as the ruler in Delhi, the structuring of the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque commenced in right earnest. “In his hurry to carry out (Prophet) Mohammed’s dictates of laying out a place of worship for the faithful in the conquered territory, Quṭb al-Dīn could not wait to import artisans, masons and architects from his native country. And, so, right at the inception of Islamic building activity in India, a sort of joint venture between local Hindu master builders and Muslim overseers was inevitable. In his haste, though Quṭb al-Dīn did not even have the building material, he was content to remove readymade blocks from existing Hindu and Jaina temples and reorganize around a rectangular court to quickly assemble the essential rudiments of a mosque. The net result of this earliest effort in mosque architecture in India may well be termed an ‘archaeological miscellany’.”<sup>3</sup>

According to an inscription on the interior architrave of the eastern portal of the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque, materials from 27 Hindu and Jain

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<sup>2</sup> K.A.C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Satish Grover, *Islamic Architecture in India*, (New Delhi: CBS Publishers & Distributors, 2002), p. ix (Introduction).

temples demolished in the neighborhood, were used.<sup>4</sup> The mosque, in fact, was built on a temple plinth,<sup>5</sup> in which case the existing temple foundation might have been utilized, partly or completely. The pillaged temples provided columns, walls, roofing materials and paving. Sculptured figures, which abounded in each and every dimension of the arts and culture of India, and which denoted not only anathema to the Islamic worldview and its value system but were its direct antithesis, were mutilated or were so set in walls that the unutilized or un-worked sides of the stones were all that could be seen.<sup>6</sup> On visiting the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque in Delhi, Ibn Battuta (d. 771 AH/ 1369 CE), who in the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AC century from Morocco traversed the Muslim lands, also remarked that on the mosque's original site was a temple. Near the eastern gate of the mosque there were on the ground two huge Hindu idols of copper connected together by stones. Everyone who came in and went out of the mosque treaded over them.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from Delhi, reutilization of temple materials, especially for mosque architecture, was a feature of the initial phase of Muslim conquest in a number of other regions of India,<sup>8</sup> such as “at Ajmer and Jalor in Rajasthan; Bharoch, Cambay (Khambayat) and Patan in Gujarat; Jaunpur; Bijapur, Daulatabad and Warangal in the Deccan; Gaur (Lakhnauti), Pandua and Tribeni in Bengal; Dhar and Mandu in Malwa; and many other sites.”<sup>9</sup> On the word of John Burton-Page, those initial build-

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<sup>4</sup> Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, (London: Laurence King, 2000), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, edited by George Michell, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Mahdi Husain, *The Rehlah of Ibn Battuta, Translation and Commentary*, (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1953), p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> E. B. Havell, *Indian Architecture*, (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co, 1913), p. 39-78.

<sup>9</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, p. 4.

ings were of so heterogeneous and, often, of so makeshift a nature that there was little of a coherent style about them. By and large, they were uninteresting buildings.<sup>10</sup> The culture of conversion and reutilization of temples was mainly in relation to mosques. Extremely rare were the instances where other Muslim building types were conceived and crafted from temples' resources. An example of those rare instances is the tomb of Sheikh Farid at Patan in Gujarat of *c.* 700 AH/1300 AC, which is merely a converted temple. The tomb is the earliest surviving Muslim building in Gujarat.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, a temple is said to have been converted into a religious school or *madrasah* as well.<sup>12</sup>

Although the architecture of Hindu and Jain temples and mosque architecture stood worlds apart, manipulating the former to fit the purpose and moral fiber of the latter was anything but impossible, especially if we bring to mind that the material requirements of Islamic worship, both individual and collective, were very few and sensible, and that the first and exemplary generations of Muslims always exhibited an aversion to excessive and highly specialized and sophisticated mosque architecture. Moderation, flexibility, open-mindedness and sheer functionality were paramount. For this reason, chiefly, most of the early mosques in many newly conquered territories were simple and plain enclosures with unpretentious doorways piercing all but the *qiblah* (direction of prayer facing Makkah) side. On the *qiblah* side, which was the focal point of mosques as places of collective worship and community centers, there were routinely open arcades or colonnades (*riwāqs*) the roofs of which were supported by rows of columns applying firstly beam-and-bracket and later the arch, thus creating in the interior of mosques isles which could run either perpendicular or parallel to the *qiblah* wall, depending on the arrangements of column rows. These were plain and virtually una-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), p. 15.

dorned hypostyle mosques whose foremost features were square or rectangular plans, enclosed courtyards and covered prayer halls or colonnades (*riwāqs*).

Due to the same reasons which, among other things, aimed at minimizing and mitigating the complexities potentially arising from the structural, economic and religious implications of reusing and adopting churches and temples as mosques, the earliest extent mosque in India, *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque, was also at first a plain and unembellished enclosure. It had a central courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) which was surrounded by *riwāqs* on all sides which were formed by superimposed, or placed one above the other, Hindu columns and pillars. On the northern and southern sides, the *riwāqs* were divided into two isles. On the eastern side, where the entrance to the mosque was, there were three rows of pillars. The *riwāq* on the *qiblah* side to the west was four isles deep. This *riwāq*, like the rest of them in the mosque, was formed by Hindu pillars and columns placed one above the other. Its roof was covered by Hindu roofs of the 'lantern' type.<sup>13</sup> It was only later that the mosque's morphology commenced to significantly change and get more intricate. The first such change came to pass about eight years after the mosque's foundation.<sup>14</sup>

While adopting Hindu temples as mosques, Muslims, to whose fundamental *tawhidic* (Allah's Oneness) beliefs and practices figurative representation was anathema, had to overcome a few sensitive issues.

Firstly, the fact that the interior of the Hindu temple was poorly lighted,<sup>15</sup> as window-openings were rare and minimal, was displeasing to the Muslim psyche and soul. The dark labyrinths of Hindu temples needed to be done away with. That was feasible by creating central courtyards

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<sup>13</sup> Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. Satish Grover, *Islamic Architecture in India*, p. 5. Subhash Kak, *Early Indian Architecture and Art*, in "Migration & Diffusion - An international journal", Vol.6/Nr.23, 2005, p. 6-27.

whence light was supplied in abundance to surrounding mosque colonnades or *riwāqs*. Intermittent and strategically positioned light-wells were also an option; as were clerestories whereby a portion of an interior is raised above adjacent rooftops and is fenestrated or windowed so as to admit daylight to interior.

Dark temple interiors were objectionable because Islam loathes darkness and obscurity. To Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, it is imperative that the Islamic building be clearly lit. That is because "Islam abhors darkness. It has no mysteries, no secrets and tolerates no paradoxes or ambiguities. Its aim is always perfect clarity, perfect vision, perfect obviousness and distinctness...Its revelation was not something born in darkness, shrouded in mystery, beset with ambiguity. The Prophet often received the revelations in presence of the public. Its advent never required or accompanied the slightest lapse of consciousness."<sup>16</sup>

The performance of Islamic decorative arts is greatly enhanced by ingeniously manipulating light. An artist who wishes to express the Islamic ideals, in particular the idea of the "unity in existence" or the "unity of the real" has several means at his disposal one of which is light "which is to visible forms what Being is to limited existence."<sup>17</sup> Stressing at once the architectural, artistic and ontological importance of light, Titus Burckhardt wrote that "there is no more perfect symbol of the Divine Unity than light. For this reason, the Muslim artist seeks to transform the very stuff he is fashioning into a vibration of light. It is to this end that he covers the interior surfaces of a mosque or palace -- and occasionally the outer ones -- with mosaics in ceramic tiles. This lining is often confined to the lower part of the walls, as if to dispel their heaviness. It is for the same purpose that the artist transforms other surfaces into perforated reliefs to filter the light. *Muqārnas* also serve to trap light and diffuse it

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<sup>16</sup> Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and Architecture*, in "Fine Arts in Islamic Civilization", edited by M.A.J. Beg, (Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya Press, 1981), p. 109-110.

<sup>17</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), p. 76.

with the most subtle gradations. Colors reveal the interior richness of light. Light viewed directly is blinding; it is through the harmony of colors that we divine its true nature, which bears every visual phenomenon within itself.”<sup>18</sup>

Allah has likened Himself to light in a Qur’anic chapter called *al-Nūr*, which means *Light*. In it, Allah declares that He is the Light of the heavens and the earth (*al-Nūr*, 35). A parable of His light is then presented in a breathtaking style. The Qur’an also identifies divine revelations with *nūr* or light which helps people walk and persevere on the right path. Accordingly, the quintessence of the mission of all prophets was to guide people from darkness to light (*al-Mā’idah*, 15, 44). The term *nūr* in the Qur’an is used to express physical and moral vision.<sup>19</sup> The job of Satan, on the other hand, is to deceive people and (mis)lead them from light to darkness (*al-Baqarah*, 257). The whole of existence on earth is thus a struggle for supremacy between the forces of good and evil, truth and falsehood, enlightenment and ignorance, civilization and backwardness, vision and blindness, light and darkness.

The interior of the Hindu temple was esoteric, mysterious and recondite. Its kernel was the secret shrine of an idol god whose mysteries were known only to a few initiated priests and were not for public display.<sup>20</sup> Subhash Kak wrote about *garbhagrha* or “womb room or chamber”, which represents the interior of the *sanctum sanctorum* (the holiest place) of a Hindu temple where the main idol or image is housed,<sup>21</sup> that it is “typically a dark, unadorned cell, with a single doorway facing the

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Isma’il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and Architecture*, in “*Fine Arts in Islamic Civilization*”, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *North Indian Temple Architecture*, Encyclopedia Britannica Academic Edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/419263/North-Indian-temple-architecture> (accessed February 12, 2013).



east. Only the priest is permitted to enter the *garbhagrha* to perform rituals on behalf of the devotee or the community.”<sup>22</sup> This exactly, in addition, was one of the reasons why the interior of the Hindu temple was kept dark and secretive -- in order to strengthen the myths, legends and mysteries upon which the notions and beliefs on whose strength temples were founded and existed, and to help empower, as well as authorize, the missions of those who subscribed to and in various capacities sustained the same supernatural and mysterious notions and beliefs. It goes without saying that while mosques are always completely and very well illuminated – sometimes even excessively -- in most temples and shrines, light is frequently cleverly manipulated, rendering some curvatures, sections or images in the buildings deliberately dim or poorly lit, in addition to the strategic positioning of those curvatures, sections and images and how they are related to each other, so as to manipulate the feelings, impressions and thoughts of a visitor. This is so because the very concepts, philosophies and thoughts, which those temples and shrines exemplify, have themselves been shrouded in clouded mysteries, myths, fables and uncertainties, and so must always be presented in the same manner with the aim of ensuring their acceptance and survival. In those places, one is to be overwhelmed and guided by manipulated, pseudo and inexpressible moods and emotions, rather than by objective and critical thinking and by rational reasoning and judgments.

The exterior of the Hindu temple, on the other hand, was “as luxuriant and prolix as the interior was esoteric and recondite, for all its surfaces were covered with a profusion of exuberant sculpture of iconographic significance, in which the human form preponderated. Free-standing statuary was also known, with the human form again dominant; but frequent also were the vehicles and attendants of the Hindu gods, especially Shiva’s bull, and also the *linga*, the representation of the phallus as the generative principle of the world.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Subhash Kak, *Early Indian Architecture and Art*, p. 6-27.

<sup>23</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, p. 3-4.

Owing to the complex and multifaceted polytheistic or idolatrous disposition of Hinduism, which was sumptuously represented in the realms of its temple art and architecture, the enterprises of reusing and transforming Hindu temples into mosques, seemingly, often had to entail some considerable dismantling and even defacing. Entire structures had to be taken to pieces and some of its materials disfigured. New edifices were then put up over existing or new foundations reusing the existing materials. Since many new mosques thus created were bigger than temples, materials from more than a temple were needed for one mosque. We have already mentioned that materials from 27 Hindu and Jain temples demolished in the neighborhood were used for constructing the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque in Delhi whose site absorbed the site of one of those temples.<sup>24</sup> Also, in the Adina mosque in Gujarat, a province in India, over 1,000 rich temple pillars were assembled for its plan.<sup>25</sup> However, the processes of transforming temples into mosques at times were very rapid and economical, which was a result of efficient collaboration between the Hindu master builders and Muslim patrons and overseers. Thus, some of the main goals and purposes of the whole scheme were duly accomplished. According to a tradition, the great mosque at Ajmer in Rajasthan was put together in two and a half days.<sup>26</sup>

Undoubtedly, the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque is one of the best examples of the occurrence of converting temples into mosques in India, a venture that led to the creation of what some observers and scholars somewhat unfairly dub a heterogeneous, makeshift or improvised and incoherent or inharmonious phase of Islamic or mosque architecture in

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See also: *North Indian Temple Architecture*, Encyclopedia Britannica Academic Edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/419263/North-Indian-temple-architecture> (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> E. B. Havell, *Indian Architecture*, p. 42.

India. Some even referred to the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque as “an archaeological miscellany rather than as architecture.”<sup>27</sup> Others are made to assume on the basis of a small number of initial Muslim monuments that Muslims “did not trouble themselves with spreading any new architectural propaganda in India.”<sup>28</sup>

How it was possible to quickly and effectively convert a temple into a mosque explains Satish Grover: “Naturally, a building (a temple) put together with so much precision (and with little or no mortar) could be ripped apart with equal ease and each element extracted intact. The only trouble with the building blocks (such as beams, columns and lintels) recovered from the temples was that they were profusely covered with sculptures of the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses... In view of the expediency of the times, Muslims had to be satisfied with defacing the sculpture by cutting off a nose here, an ear there or a face altogether in a rather feeble and crude attempt to render the human form unrecognizable. Hereafter, the task of erecting a mosque was fairly simple: reassemble these structural elements to create a colonnade around an open-to-sky courtyard, instead of the dark labyrinths of a Hindu temple.”<sup>29</sup> Even the procedure of digging trenches and laying new foundations for earliest mosques in India was not always necessary. What was normally done was the razing of the superstructure of the Hindu temple *in toto*, and the re-erecting of the columns, beams and brackets over existing foundations.<sup>30</sup> “Thus, the general east-west orientation of temples, too, suited their (Muslims’) intentions admirably. To achieve their purpose of emphasizing the direction of prayers, all they had to do was to make the western veranda into a more spacious pillared hall. The rear wall of the

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<sup>27</sup> Satish Grover, *Islamic Architecture in India*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> E. B. Havell, *Indian Architecture*, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Satish Grover, *Islamic Architecture in India*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

hall so formed was then adorned with the traditional *qiblah* arch to guide the faithful to pray in the direction of Makkah.”<sup>31</sup>

### Muslim Tolerance towards Conquered Peoples

Historians are unanimous that upon opening a new territory to Islam (*fath*) and upon overcoming the resistance of an enemy -- if there was any -- one of the immediate things that Muslims normally did was making a peace treaty with the local population. In the treaty, the local population was always given an assurance of safety for themselves, their property and their places of worship, provided they did not oppose or harm Muslims, nor obstruct the free preaching and practicing of Islam. They were promised that Muslims will inhabit or utilize neither their houses nor the places of worship, except that which they had already given up and had left standing alone and idle. In addition, Muslims always assured the locals that there would be no destruction of property and that nobody would be forcibly converted to Islam. What Muslims were doing, as a matter of fact, was the continuation of the Prophet's traditions that stemmed from nowhere but the contents of the Qur'an. It is an Islamic norm that there cannot be a forced conversion because “...*truth stands out clear from error*” (*al-Baqarah*, 256). People are to practice the religion of their own choice.

Islam establishes a relationship with the people of different faiths on the basis of tolerance, justice, benevolence, and mercy.<sup>32</sup> The basis of this relationship is Allah's saying in the Qur'an: “*Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves*

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Protection of Non-Muslims' Places of Worship*, <http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/dawah-principles/dawah-to-non-and-new-muslims/175222.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).

*those who are just. Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong.” (al-Mumtaḥanah, 8-9).*

According to the Qur’an, furthermore, Muslims are duty-bound to protect the places of worship of non-Muslims who live under their authority and to allow them to observe their religious ceremonies: “*Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid his (cause);- for verily Allah is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will).” (al-Hajj, 40).*

When the Prophet (s.a.w.) concluded a contract with the people of Najrān, the contract contained the following provision: “Najrān and its neighbouring area are in the security of Allah, the Almighty, and His Messenger. The property, religions and churches of the inhabitants, as well as properties, whether much or little, are under the protection of the Prophet.”<sup>33</sup>

When Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 24 AH /644 AC) opened Palestine to Islam (*fath*), he wrote to the people of Jerusalem: “... This is the assurance of safety which the servant of God, ‘Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, has granted to the people of Jerusalem. He has given them an assurance of safety for themselves, for their property, their churches, their crosses, the sick and the healthy of the city, and for all their rituals that belong to their religion. Their churches will not be inhabited (by Muslims) and will not be destroyed. Neither they, nor the land on which they stand, nor their cross, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted...”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *The History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), vol. 12 p. 191.

It was ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb who while on his deathbed dictated a long will consisting of instructions for the next Caliph the last sentence of which reads as follows: “I instruct you on behalf of the people who have been given protection in the name of Allah and His Prophet (i.e., the non-Muslim minorities within the Islamic state known as *dhimmis*). Our covenant to them must be fulfilled, we must fight to protect them, and they must not be burdened beyond their capabilities.”<sup>35</sup>

Also, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb once wrote to Abu ‘Ubaydah (d. 17 AH /638 AC), his military commander in Syria: “Prevent Muslims from wronging or causing harm to them (non-Muslims) or taking their property illegally.”<sup>36</sup>

On opening Egypt to Islam, ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 42 AH /662 AC), the commander of the Muslim army, made a peace treaty with the local population. A fragment of the treaty reads: “This is the text of the covenant that ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ has granted the people of *Miṣr* (Egypt) concerning immunity for themselves, their religion, their possessions, churches, crucifixes, as well as their land and their waterways. Nothing of these will be interfered with or decreased...”<sup>37</sup>

When Damascus capitulated to Muslims, Khālīd b. al-Walīd (d. 22 AH /642 AC), the Muslim general and commander, laid the terms of the surrender: “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is what Khālīd b. al-Walīd would grant to the inhabitants of Damascus if he enters therein: he promises to give them security for their lives, property and churches. Their city wall shall not be demolished, neither shall any Muslim be quartered in their houses. Thereunto we give to them the

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<sup>35</sup> *Religious Freedom in the Eyes of Shari`ah*, <http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/international-relations-and-jihad/relations-during-peace/175710> (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Protection of Non-Muslims' Places of Worship*, <http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/dawah-principles/dawah-to-non-and-new-muslims/175222.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *The History*, vol. 13 p. 170.

pact of Allah and the protection of His Prophet, the Caliphs and the believers...”<sup>38</sup>

This same attitude Muslims displayed towards the Hindus as well, treating them as *dhimmi*s or protected subjects. *Dhimmah* was a covenant and not a status. Linguistically, the term signifies covenant, security and guarantee. It is a covenant made by Allah and His Messenger, not anyone else. It was intended to safeguard non-Muslims’ rights, to respect their religion, and to recognize their right to keep their faith.<sup>39</sup> It contained provisions on *dhimmi*s’ rights and duties as citizens. As non-Muslims, naturally some of the rights and responsibilities of *dhimmi*s had to be different from those of Muslims’. Hence, under the auspices of *dhimmah* or divinely-given covenant, fair alternates were needed to be put in place for *dhimmi*s with the sole purpose of equitably reflecting their dissimilar but protected status, and to encourage as well as facilitate the fulfillment of their rightly projected roles and contributions to society. An example of those fair alternatives, as part of social contract, was the concept of *jizyah*, a per capita tax levied on a section of an Islamic state’s non-Muslim citizens who, in return, enjoyed all the rights mentioned earlier and, additionally, were entitled to the state’s protection from outside aggression, and were exempted from military service and the *zakat* taxes obligatory upon qualified Muslim citizens. If, however, some non-Muslim citizens participated along with their Muslim counterparts in defending the country, their paying of *jizyah* was set for review or total annulment, something that happened quite a few times in Muslim history.<sup>40</sup>

Initially, following the first contacts between the two sides, the Hindus having been not from the ranks of the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*, Jews and Christians) posed a quandary to Muslims as to how ex-

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<sup>38</sup> Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), p. 150. See also: Ross Burns, *Damascus, a History*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 96-107.

<sup>39</sup> Mohammad Salim al-Awa, *A Contemporary Islamic View of Dhimmah*, <http://www.onislam.net/english/shariah/shariah-and-humanity/applying-shariah/410314.html> (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

actly to deal with them. However, the scholars of Islam decided that the Hindus, as well as Buddhists and anyone else who was neither a Jew nor a Christian, that is, from *Ahl al-Kitāb*, should be treated like the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) with the exception that Muslims will not marry their women and will not eat the meat slaughtered by them.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, they were all regarded as *dhimmi*s. This meant that following the first Muslims conquests (*futūḥāt*) in India in 93 AH /711 AC, as a result of which the territories of Sind and parts of Punjab up to the borders of Kashmir were soon annexed to the Islamic Umayyad state, the Hindus were dealt with just like other conquered peoples, even though they regarded Muslims, like all non-Hindus, as *mleccha*, unclean.<sup>42</sup> Upon accomplishing his military tasks, Muhammad b. Qāsim, a general of the Umayyad governor in Iraq, Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, was thus explicitly entrusted by the governor: “After they (the Hindus) have become *dhimmi*s, we have no right whatever to interfere with their lives or their property. Do, therefore, permit them to build the temples of those they worship.”<sup>43</sup> Consequently, it is said that Muhammad b. Qāsim’s treatment of the Indian population was so just that when he was called back to Baghdad the civilians were greatly disheartened and gave him farewell in tears.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Muzammil Siddiqi, *Do the Polytheists Qualify for Dhimmi Status?*, [www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/international-relations-and-jihad/relations-during-peace/175803.html](http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/international-relations-and-jihad/relations-during-peace/175803.html) (accessed February 12, 2013). H. K. Naqvi, *History of Mughal Government and Administration*, (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishing House, 1990), p. 143-147.

<sup>42</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals*, Translated by Corinne Attwood, (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 2005), p. 107.

<sup>43</sup> Satish Grover, *Islamic Architecture in India*, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> A. Zahoor, *History of Muslims in India*, [http://www.indianmuslims.info/history\\_of\\_muslims\\_in\\_india.html](http://www.indianmuslims.info/history_of_muslims_in_india.html) (accessed February 12, 2013).



### **Converting Temples into Mosques as a Relative and Qualified Trend**

In view of the essential nature of Islam, in general, and in view of the essential qualities of Islamic architecture, in particular, reclaiming and converting not only temples but also churches and some other forms of non-Muslim ceremonial edifices, into mosques, or simply sharing them with the local non-Muslim population, was not at all a strange or an abominable thing. That can be explained in the following way.

Firstly, as expounded earlier, Islam forbids Muslims to unjustifiably pull down or appropriate the places of worship of conquered peoples. This prohibition notwithstanding, it is very instinctive that the conqueror tends to completely subdue and dominate the conquered. This applies to all fields of human existence, including thought, culture and religion. Hence, the places of worship by no means could exist and function completely unaffected by ongoing intellectual, cultural and religious conflicts and tensions. Besides, they often represented the very avenues and battlegrounds for such ideological confrontations. Islam and Muslims, surely, were no exception to this innate rule which, nonetheless, had to be restricted only to the precincts of the prescribed code of Islamic war ethics, as well as to those moral guiding canons and principles intended for living in multi-religious environments. Although there subsisted exceptions -- sometimes more and sometimes less -- in almost every phase of the history of Islamic culture and civilization, however, extremely seldom were the noble Islamic standards in question by design, systematically and for long periods violated.

In order to shore up our point, John Burton-Page affirms that destruction of the religious buildings of the enemy is known in many religions other than Islam, and indeed in India itself there is more than one record of a Hindu king doing just this to his neighbor's lands either as an assertion of superiority or out of expediency.<sup>45</sup> Definitely, it stands to reason, when Islam arrived on Indian shores -- as well as elsewhere -- its

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<sup>45</sup> John Burton-Page, *Indian Islamic Architecture*, p. 4, 43.

followers' rather tolerant and shrewd treatment of the local population and their properties, including their places of worship, must have served as a revelation and welcome reprieve to the locals, regardless of the implications of some sporadic and separate outright violations of Islamic moral values and beliefs, and how some local observers then and now (mis)interpreted them.

It would be completely illogical and baseless to assert that Islam and Muslims did not wish, nor plan, to assert as quickly and as effectively as possible their superiority over indigenous religions in newly conquered lands, and to convert to Islam as many of their followers as possible. Indeed, they did; however, just as essential and critical such a noble undertaking was, so were the means and ways by which it was planned to be attained. In Islam, there is no such thing as a doctrine of the end justifying the means. Righteous objectives could be achieved only by equally righteous means and channels. If the end should justify the means, so should the means, in equal measure, justify the end. Evil means cannot justify a noble end, and *vice versa*. If adopted virtuous means and strategies are not in a position to lead to a virtuous end, it is all well and good, as far as the Islamic message is concerned, so long as a person tried his or her level best. As a religion of clemency and comprehensive excellence, Islam is not concerned just about doing things in any way and by any means. It, by the same token, is concerned about how those things are done and how effective and beneficial they eventually are. Allah thus instructed His Prophet, Muhammad (s.a.w.), to give admonition only if the admonition was going to profit the hearer. (*al-A'la*, 9). Allah also declares that he accepts the deeds only of those men and women who embody a culture of God-consciousness (*taqwā*) (*al-Mā'idah*, 27). Surely, it is because of these premises that in Islam feature prominently, for example, the concepts of peace, moderation, freedom of belief, freedom of thought, dialogue, peaceful coexistence with all peace-loving and law-abiding people, education, excellence, earnestly propagating Islam but only within the scope of one's abilities and only through effective means and media, etc. This principal character of the Islamic message could be summed up in Allah's words to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.): "*If they*

*turn away, we did not send you as their guardian. Your sole mission is delivering the message.” (al-Shūrā, 48). Allah also says: “Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases, and He knows best the followers of the right way.” (al-Qaṣaṣ, 56). And finally: “Proclaim: ‘This is the truth from your Lord,’ then whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve.” (al-Kahf, 29).*

Reusing, converting and adopting temples as mosques could in no way connote an ethos of belligerence and aggression. Nor did the trend signify a strategy of forcefully converting people to the call of Islam. These two possibilities in the name of Islam ought to be ruled out completely, for they stand diametrically opposite to the essence and spirit of the Islamic cause. Historically, Hindu temples were demolished and some converted into mosques for several socio-political and military reasons, the least established of which was the one relating to out-and-out religious bigotry or intolerance. For example, Aurangzeb (d. 1119 AH/1707 AC), the sixth Mughal Emperor who ruled 49 years over most of the Indian subcontinent, is customarily referred to as a controversial Mughal Emperor because some of his policies abandoned the religious toleration of his predecessors,<sup>46</sup> as a result of which demolition of Hindu temples was intensified. However, according to M.L. Bhatia, it appears as though, as a whole, “the Mughal government was not very much interested in encouraging demolition as is usually believed.”<sup>47</sup> During the reign of Aurangzeb, destruction of temples was infrequent and at random

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<sup>46</sup> Muhammad Qamaruddin, *A Politico-Cultural Study of the Great Mughals (1526-1707)*, (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2004), p. 104-120. *Aurangzeb*, Encyclopedia Britannica Academic Edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/43255/Aurangzeb> (accessed February 13, 2013).

Nivedita Mukherjee, *Complete Biography of the Mugal Emperor Aurangzeb*, <http://www.preservearticles.com/201012302033/aurangzeb-biography.html> (accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> M.L. Bhatia, *The Ulama, Islamic Ethics and Courts under the Mughals*, (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2006), p. 51.

and was not always directly connected with religious attitude alone.<sup>48</sup> Some of the given reasons which led to infrequent and qualified demolition were related to political practice of showing victor's success as a part of both civil and military strategies to look after Mughal interests. Selective demolition was also done as manifestation of imperial anger emerging from Mughals' frustration to achieve certain military objectives. Also, some temples were destroyed because of their and their people's encouragement of rebellious tendencies against the Mughal authority. It has also been suggested that in some particularly sensitive areas demolition of temples occurred in order not to give Muslims opportunities to visit them.<sup>49</sup> It could be contended here that the temples in question were proselytization centers, so to speak, whose efforts might have targeted especially freshly converted (reverted) Muslims of Indian origins. Hence, one of Aurangzeb's decrees was: "It has been decided according to our Canon law that long standing temples should not be demolished but no new temples be allowed to be built...Our royal command is that you should direct that in future no person shall, in unlawful ways, interfere with or disturb the Brahmans and other Hindu residents in those places."<sup>50</sup>

However, due to the more liberal practices of the governments of Aurangzeb's predecessors: Emperors Akbar (d. 1014 AH /1605 AC), his son Jahangir (d. 1037 AH /1627 AC), and, to some extent, the latter's son Shah Jahan (d. 1077 AH /1666 AC), it was not a rare tradition that during their reigns -- especially the reigns of the first two -- new temples were built and old ones repaired. A comparatively small number of temples were destroyed and converted into mosques mainly in relation to military operations and perhaps due to some other abrupt and extremely critical

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 50-52.

<sup>50</sup> Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, p. 129.

social and political issues.<sup>51</sup> Thus, for example, it is said for Emperor Jahangir that only in one city towards the end of his reign more than seventy new temples were built. But at the same time, a contemporary poet of his court used to sing “his praises as the great Muslim emperor who converted temples into mosques.”<sup>52</sup> Also, while Emperor Akbar is acclaimed as the most liberal and tolerant to non-Muslims and their ideologies Mughal emperor -- so much so that some people felt compelled to even question the sincerity of his eventual affiliation with Islam -- he, at the same time, boasted that Islam had spread to territories where it had never been heard of before on account of his conquests, and that he had converted the temples of the non-believers into mosques.<sup>53</sup> It stands to reason that Emperor Akbar converted some temples into mosques primarily because of the above-mentioned expedient socio-political and military reasons, as well as because the temples in question and their roles and functions must have violated his renowned blanket liberal and tolerant policies and agendas. Emperor Shah Jahan is also said to have converted quite a number of temples into mosques. This was the case particularly somewhat at the beginning of his rule – a period of only about five years, from the sixth to the tenth year of his reign -- before his religious zeal spent itself and his ardor as a great proselytizing king cooled down.<sup>54</sup>

Without a doubt, all this explains why Muslims remained a minority when they ruled major parts of India for nearly a thousand years. In their days as rulers, Muslims constituted only about twenty percent of India’s total population.<sup>55</sup> Had they resorted to a culture of religious and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 62, 129-130.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 62-63.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 86-95. Sri Ram Sharma, *The Crescent in India*, (New Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2003), vol. 2 p. 583.

<sup>55</sup> A. Zahoor, *History of Muslims in India*, [http://www.indianmuslims.info/history\\_of\\_muslims\\_in\\_india.html](http://www.indianmuslims.info/history_of_muslims_in_india.html) (accessed February 12, 2013).

social oppression, intimidation and coercive proselytization and conversion to Islam -- as is often in some circles alleged -- demographical situation in major parts of India would certainly have been drastically different after approximately a thousand years of Muslim rule. Indeed, a similar assessment could be delivered in connection with several other regions and territories where Muslims ruled for many centuries but are today minorities, such as Andalusia (Muslim Spain) and the Balkans, to name but a few.

As a small digression, even various contemporary small and large-scale military conflicts were likewise not immune to taking up unrestrained religious bigotry and intolerance as a means of inflicting as much harm as possible to the foe. For example, during the aggression against Bosnia, between March 1992 and November 1995, over 3000 architectural monuments, mainly mosques and other religious edifices, were destroyed or damaged by Serbs. A British historian wrote in 1994, one year before the end of the catastrophe: "All over the country, mosques and minarets have been demolished, including some of the finest examples of 16th-century Ottoman architecture in the western Balkans. These buildings were not caught in the cross-fire of military engagements -- in towns such as Bijeljina and Banja Luka, the demolitions had nothing to do with fighting at all -- but were blown up with explosives in the night, and bulldozed the following day. The people who planned and ordered these actions like to say that history is on their side. What they show by their deeds is that they are waging a war against the history of their country."<sup>56</sup> All this clearly shows that people's religious and ideological preferences and their quarrels and conflicts are so intricately interlaced that they could hardly be separated and kept apart. Thus, being a rational and pragmatic religion, Islam did not shy away from recognizing that upsetting truth and, as a consequence, dedicated much time and resources, and concocted more than a few tactics and measures, so as to deal with it in the best possible and most effective way.

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<sup>56</sup> Asim Zubcevic, *Islamic Sites in Bosnia: 10 Years after the War*, <http://islamicamagazine.com/?p=378> (accessed February 12, 2013).

Furthermore, after the exodus of some of the users and custodians of the Hindu temples in question, and after the others had embraced Islam following Islamic conquests, such buildings lost their purpose and function and were left virtually idle. On losing their intended functions, those buildings were reduced to mere dead matter, which Islam not only has no reason to voice any objection against, but also views it as part of nature and of the universal web of existence and as such, as God's faithful servant. It is an Islamic tenet that absolutely everything in the universe – except a group of rebellious people and the *jinn* -- worships God, incessantly and in unison glorifying and singing praises to Him as everyone's and everything's Creator, Master and Sustainer. They do so in ways unknown to us.

It intrinsically mattered little how those temples were created, positioned and some of its foremost spaces arranged, for they certainly could meet the moderate material requirements of Islamic worship -- of course, after some adjustments and restructuring, and after some man-made sacrilegious elements had been neutralized or removed. It is true that some inconveniences were caused by converting such structures into mosques, however, they were pretty inconsequential when contrasted with the potentially repulsive consequences that would have been brought about if, for instance, they were left completely idle, or were demolished out of sheer religious bigotry, or if some new unneeded buildings were constructed on the foundations of some old ones which were inconsiderately torn down. If some of the latter actions were carried out, some of the transgressions that might have been perpetrated are wastefulness, haughtiness, intolerance, injustice and mismanagement, all of which Islam regards as major vices. Also, as a result of committing some of these wrongdoings, the people in the new territories would have been more and more alienated from Islam and its call. They would have developed an aversion to it, Muslims and the Muslim community (*Ummah*), and to the prospects of projected integration.

While avoiding systematic and premeditated destruction of infrastructure in the newly conquered Indian territories, especially destruction of the places of worship, plus making full use of them for the noblest of

Islamic purposes, i.e., worship, Muslims made two major contributions for the good of the future of Islam.

Firstly, while preaching the values and teachings of Islam to others, inviting them to embrace them, Muslims led by example in walking their talk and in applying those values and principles in their own dealings, which certainly appealed to non-Muslims and made the peaceful spreading of Islam and the peaceful integration of others into the body of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) a much easier proposition. Definitely, destroying temples, used or unused, would have been against the very spirit of Islam which Muslims were supposed not only to talk or write about, but also to exemplify in everything they did.

Secondly, Muslims procured much respect from the local population because by using or sharing some of their temples, they demonstrated the natural, tolerant and pragmatic character of the Islamic message that honors man: his primordial nature and his myriad intrinsic abilities and talents, doing its best to nurture and uphold human dignity at all times. The people admired the fact that Islam sees no person, or a thing or a human achievement, as inherently wicked. Wicked are only the persons, things or human achievements that are false, vicious, erroneous and cloaked in non-belief, sacrilege and sin. All the persons, things and human achievements that have been defiled by non-belief and sin can easily be returned to their original pure state by merely removing and eliminating the cloak. In Islam, it follows, everyone and everything possesses a potential to change, or to be changed, and to be set right. The current conditions in a community and its cultural and civilizational propensities and accomplishments are by no means an obstacle towards the goals of change and improvement. Saying otherwise plainly contravenes the quintessence of the Islamic ethos.

Thus, by appropriating and even sharing some temples of the local population who less and less were in need of them, Muslims signaled their utmost respect for those people's humanity, as well as their appreciation for the latter's valuable cultural and civilizational exploits. Moreover, while offering the locals a chance for a new refreshing spiritual be-



ginning in Islam, Muslims expressed their outright refusal to pass a judgment of failure, or loss, upon anyone or anything. Allah is the only and supreme Judge in matters pertaining to the ultimate failure or success. The people admired, furthermore, that the ideology from which such splendid practices originated was fully and transparently practiced right in their midst and in front of their own eyes by the people who viewed themselves not as pretentious conquerors or invaders, but rather as mere servants of Allah entrusted with the task of conveying the heavenly universal message to the rest of mankind, knowing all too well that such a momentous mission could only be fulfilled through the ways and means anchored in the principles of wisdom, beautiful counsel, tolerant interactions and dialogue.

The temples that were reutilized and transformed into mosques basically retained much of their original form – albeit somewhat reorganized and even defaced wherever necessary -- but their functions and roles under the novel circumstances completely changed, something like what befalls a person when he or she discards his or her old religion or ideology and embraces Islam instead. As the reverts to Islam before they alter their life course, misappropriate and gravely mismanage the gifts and “loans” which the Lord and Cherisher of every creature has bestowed on them -- such as life and sustenance, for example -- so do the communities which in favor of some other religious or ideological preferences *en masse* reject submitting to and worshipping the only God, Allah, misuse the environment and its resources while planning and building the places of worship in response to the calls of their surrogate beliefs and religious ceremonies. By subjecting this kind of structures to serving the objectives of Islam, things are only aimed to be set right and the perfect natural equilibrium restored. The earlier functions and services of the appropriated and converted edifices were not compatible with the spiritual disposition of the components of the natural environment which they coexisted with. Nor were they compatible with the spiritual disposition of both the natural resources, upon which people inevitably draw for creating and sustaining built environments, and the spaces those buildings occupied, because each and every element in nature, the most splendid and

most insignificant in equal measure, denotes a faithful and obedient servant of Allah, ceaselessly worshipping and glorifying Him, as the Holy Qur'an on a regular basis reveals.

Rationalizing further the phenomenon of relative and qualified reutilization or conversion of Hindu temples into mosques, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once said that when a wicked and misguided person passes away, all human beings, the land, animals and trees enjoy a moment of respite from him or her and his or her misdeeds.<sup>57</sup> Clearly, not only to the dead individuals does the message of this Prophet's tradition (*hadith*) apply, but also to those who are still alive but whose wrongdoings have become completely neutralized by their return to Islam, the religion of human nature and disposition (*fitrah*) and the only religion before Allah. In a way, such people, together with their fallacious beliefs and practices, have "died", in the sense that they have departed from one "world", or a context, to another; from that characterized by the rejection of truth, deceit and the misappropriation of God's benevolence and incalculable favors given to man, to the one where only Allah is acknowledged as God and the Creator and Master of every creation to Whom alone our unconditional love and worship are due. This, furthermore, partly applies to situations where misguided persons refuse to rectify their erroneous spiritual inclinations, but the scope of their influences over the realities of life becomes if not totally stifled then significantly diminished. At any rate, when those types of people "depart" or "die", regardless of whether that happens in the actual or metaphorical significations of the word, both the physical and spiritual genres of damage that they used to inflict on the earth and everything that lives thereon is to be repaired by whatever lawful means and media and as much as possible by those who possess the ultimate awareness and true understanding, and who walk on the face of the earth responsibly, and in their capacity as the earth's guardians, trustees and God's vicegerents. It is through this prism that the historical phenomenon of appropriating and converting temples

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<sup>57</sup>Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Riqaq, Hadith No. 6031.

into mosques ought to be observed, lest confusion and misunderstanding should arise.

Furthermore, about the idea that the whole earth, yet the whole universe, constitutes a place of worship (*masjid*), and that every being thereon, animate and inanimate, incessantly and willingly submits to and worships Allah, the Creator and Master, also speak the following Allah's words: *"Do not you see that to Allah prostrate all things that are in the heavens and on earth, - the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among mankind? But a great number are (also) such as unto whom the chastisement is justly due. And such as Allah shall disgrace, - none can raise to honor: for Allah carries out all that He wills."* (*al-Ḥajj*, 18).

*"Have they not observed all things that Allah has created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration unto Allah, and they are lowly?"* (*al-Nahl*, 48).

*"Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant."* (*Maryam*, 93).

*"The seven heavens declare His glory and the earth (too), and those who are in them; and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification; surely He is Forbearing, Forgiving."* (*al-Isrā'*, 44).

*"Do you not see that Allah is He Whom do glorify all those who are in the heavens and the earth, and the (very) birds with expanded wings? He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification, and Allah is Cognizant of what they do."* (*al-Nūr*, 41).

That humans with their (mis)deeds can make a substantial impact on their surroundings, not only in corporeal but also psychological and spiritual terms, testify the following. Islam teaches that the earth with everything thereon both rejoices and prospers due to the virtue, devoutness and conformity of man. Conversely, the earth and everything on it suffer and their benefits for man gradually fade – that is, they are withheld -- due to the waywardness, corruption and evil perpetrated by man. Righteousness begets but peace and prosperity on earth; corruption and

evil beget the opposite, that is, disorder and misery. Allah thus reveals: “*And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil) We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they rejected, so We overtook them for what they had earned.*” (*al-A‘rāf*, 96) The Prophet (s.a.w.) said that when people duly observe a religious standard, or a restriction (*ḥadd*), such is dearer to the inhabitants of the earth than that rain is sent forty consecutive mornings upon them.<sup>58</sup>

On the same note, Allah says: “*Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return.*” (*al-Rūm*, 41).

“*They say: ‘The Most Gracious has betaken a son!’ Indeed you have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are about to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, that they attribute a son to the Most Gracious.*” (*Maryam*, 88-91).

A companion of the Prophet (s.a.w.), ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbās (d. 68 AH/ 687 AC), commented about the last Qur’anic verses that the heavens, the earth, mountains and all the created things, except some rebellious and misguided humans and *jinn*s, are all terrified of *shirk* (polytheism or associating other gods with Allah). As a result, they are on the verge of perishing due to the implications of the incompatibility between the committed *shirk* that they witness and their furthest esteem for Allah and His majesty and power.<sup>59</sup>

The Prophet (s.a.w.) also said that for every servant of Allah there are two doors in the heavens: a door from which his sustenance comes out and a door through which his deeds and words enter. When a (pious and obedient) servant of Allah dies, those two doors grieve for him and

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<sup>58</sup> *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Ikhtasarahu al-Sabuni Muhammad ‘Ali, (Beirut: Dar al-Qur’an al-Karim, 1981), vol. 3 p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 466.

cry. However, in case of an infidel or a wicked servant of Allah, neither the heavens nor the earth sheds a tear over him when he dies, as no good deeds or words were coming from him. As such, no worthy traces or effects could he possibly leave behind on earth, and no good deeds were going through his personal gate in the heavens.<sup>60</sup>

### Conclusion

Islamic architecture is a type of architecture whose functions and to a lesser extent form are inspired primarily by Islam. Islamic architecture facilitates, fosters and stimulates the *'ibādah* (worship) activities of Muslims which, in turn, account for every moment of their earthly lives. It is a framework for the implementation of Islam. Islamic architecture denotes the facilities and, at the same time, a physical locus of the actualization of the Islamic message. Central to Islamic architecture is function with all of its dimensions: corporeal, cerebral and spiritual. The form divorced from function is inconsequential. This, however, by no means implies that the form plays no role in Islamic architecture. It does play a prominent role but its relevance is a supportive one supplementing and enhancing function. The form is important, but in terms of value and substance, it always comes second to function and its wide scope. There must exist the closest relationship between the ideals that underpin the form of buildings and the ideals that underpin their functions, with which the users of buildings must be at ease. A rift or a conflict between the two is bound to lead to a conflict of some far-reaching psychological proportions in the users of buildings. Transforming Hindu temples into mosques without much ado also signified that Islamic architecture, just like the religion of Islam from which it originated, is universal, wide-ranging, fluid and open-ended. This means that under all circumstances, including the conquering or the opening-to-Islam of new territories, the followers of Islam primarily strove to implement and propagate to others the comprehensive message of Islam by all rightful means. However, as for the

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3 p. 303.

building systems, styles and techniques that they in the meantime may have evolved, as part of life's essential affairs, it at the end of the day did not matter what they should be so long as they stemmed from the matrix of Islamic teachings and norms, conformed to the *tawhidic* (Allah's Oneness) worldview, and were subjected to the realization of the objectives that man is commanded to accomplish while on earth. By the same token, it did not matter whether such systems, styles and techniques were developed solely by Muslims or, after having been duly refined and corrected, were totally or partly imported from other cultures and civilizations. Acts of converting Hindu temples into mosques denoted only a short-term strategy. They never signified a permanent and open-ended trend. It was a phenomenon resorted to out of expediency rather than principle or religious bigotry, as explained earlier. It was a pattern practiced not only in India, but also in other places of the Muslim vast lands where such proved inevitable and advantageous for all. Some of the most recognizable Muslim landmarks and icons of Islamic architecture, such as the *Qūwwat al-Islam* mosque in New Delhi, the Great Umayyad mosque in Damascus, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, and others, are powerful testimonies to the sensitive, yet fair-minded, historical trend. Some of the images of controversial structures are given below so as to let the readers develop clear picture of the issue.



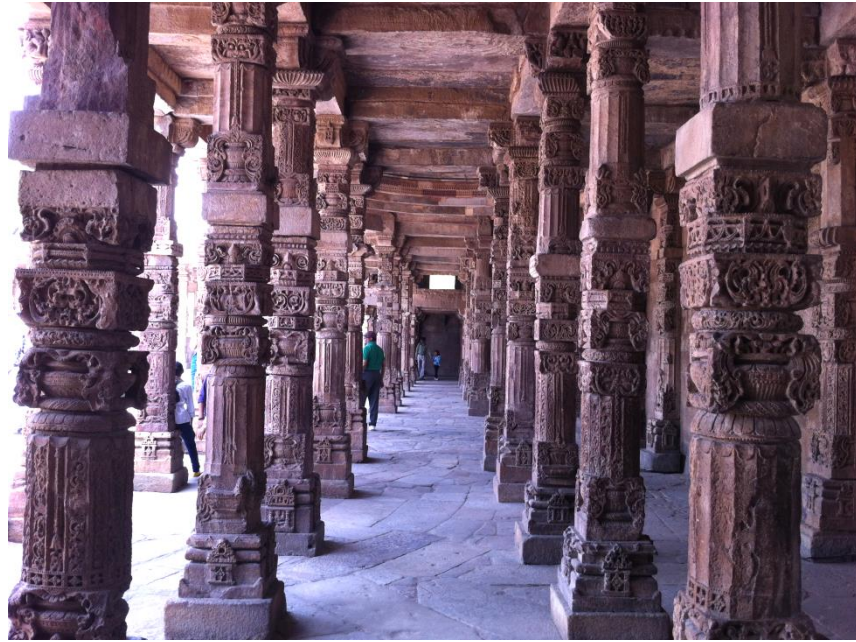
Remains of *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque in New Delhi.  
Materials from 27 Hindu and Jain temples demolished in the  
neighbourhoods were used for constructing the mosque.

Rationalizing the Phenomenon of Converting  
Hindu Temples into Mosques



The courtyard and *riwāqs* (arcades) of *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque. The *riwāqs* were formed by superimposed, or placed one above the other, Hindu columns.





*Riwaq* (arcade) at *Quwwat al-Islam* Mosque with materials, especially columns, from Hindu and Jain temples.

Rationalizing the Phenomenon of Converting  
Hindu Temples into Mosques



According to some theories, since adapting the columns from Jain and Hindu temples to use them in *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque proved problematic, given Islam's injunction against the use of statues and images, the masons were forced to plaster over the highly sculpted Hindu columns and presumably cover them with geometric designs. However, after centuries of neglect the plaster has fallen away, revealing the original Hindu carvings.



*Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque is a brilliant amalgamation of Hindu and Islamic architectural styles. While, on the one hand, there are beautifully carved ceilings and pillars decorated with numerous Hindu motifs like divinities, bells, cows, branches and leaves, there are many examples of arabesques and calligraphic inscriptions of verses from the Holy Quran carved on the porticoes, on the other.



Rationalizing the Phenomenon of Converting  
Hindu Temples into Mosques



Disfigured human sculptures used as the capital of a column supporting the ceiling of *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque.

Statues and sculptural representations of people and even animals are prohibited in Islam. By statues it is meant complete, solid figures which have not been disfigured or otherwise defaced. Statues are to be defaced or disfigured by breaking off their heads.



Disfigured image of a cow on one of the columns inside *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque.

Cow is the most sacred animal for Hindus. It symbolizes good nature, purity, motherhood and prosperity.

Rationalizing the Phenomenon of Converting  
Hindu Temples into Mosques



Headless statue of a Hindu deity on a column in *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque. This is in line with the words of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) that the heads of statues be cut off so that they look like tree trunks.



Another headless female Hindu deity on a column of *Qūwwat al-Islam* Mosque with some uncovered private parts also disfigured. Erotic imagery is very much a part of Hindu texts and paintings, suggesting creation, transformation, love and human desires as essential aspects of human life and values.