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Mosque architecture is the most representative symbol of Muslim material culture. Mosque architecture very early in its history acquired domes and minarets and spread across the globe. While local styles have an endless variety, a mosque even without a signboard can be identified anywhere on earth whether in Spain or Indonesia. Sana Haroon in her book *The Mosques of Colonial South Asia: A Social and Legal History of Muslim Worship* has thrown light on the social history of mosques while it was passing through the colonial tunnel of time.

How South Asian mosques were built, endowed, and functioned before, during, and after the colonial rule has been brought out in rich historical detail. The social function of mosques and their legal status became problematic only due to European Colonialism. What this experience actually was has been explored and mapped out meticulously filling a void in our knowledge of the past. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, almost all Muslim lands had come under colonial rule. The difference was that all other lands had a Muslim majority and any contention was between the ruler and the ruled. In South Asia, Muslims were in a minority which is why social and legal issues arose concerning Muslim places of worship.

Sana Haroon has illustrated her findings by recounting five case studies. 1. Tajpur, Bihar 1891, 2. Rangoon (Myanmar) 1916. 3. Aurangabad and Kanpur (UP), 1924 4. Lahore 1940 and 5. Kora Jehanabad (UP). All the cases are well chosen and fulfill the purpose the author set out for herself namely: ‘To identify previously un-recognized patterns of control over the ubiquitous mosques of South Asia.’ And ‘[t]his is not a narrative or reform or revival but a history of dissimilar Muslims brought together in search for legal

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solutions to civic challenge: creating rules for worship in the colonial state’ (p.9,10).

This need arose partly because of other creeds and partly because in the wake of reformist movements, sectarian differences arose, which led to disputes about which sect is to be followed by the prayer leader and the caller to prayer, the last mostly because it went beyond enclosed space.

The above relates to contentions within the South Asian Muslim community. Since the Muslims despite being centuries old were still a minority and now a ruled community, their concerns were different. Mosques even with seminaries attached did not have to be the venue of social Muslim activity. In the colonial period, mosques became the refuge of most such activity. This has caused Haroon to observe that: ‘Mosque defense movements were often perimeter defense movements’ (p.72).

In such a changed situation the particular Muslim community had to guard their peculiar sectarian identity to be able to regulate their social life according to their traditional molds, thus the colonial privilege to appoint prayer leaders in line with the will of the donor/manager began impinging on their religious freedom, hence their next recourse was extra-legal:

Proponents of religious rights abandoned legal reasoning in favour of arguments for communal appointments of Muslims and Hindus to local posts and their assumption of the privilege to choose religious priorities of the streets. (p.95)

It was because, as she noted above, the social reach of the mosque needed to be expanded to protect the core: ‘[d]uring this period the periphery of the mosque materialized into a discrete urban space, a spatial context for Muslim social life’ (p.105). Thus the social life of Muslims became more orthopractical than in the Mughal Era. The Mughul Era was more liberal because it was more eclectic, which is what occasioned reformist movements. Now the reformist movements cut both ways; the congregation if proto-Barelvi or Barelvi felt constricted with an Ahl-i-Hadith prayer leader or management and vice-versa. Such contentions had another effect under a different legal dispensation: ‘Muslim efforts to reclaim mosques on government or nazul land did not produce an alternative legal basis for assigning religious rights in mosques’ (p.124).
For the legal basis had to be rooted in British law, not Muslim law. Haroon does us a service by relating the religious to the social while recreating for us in the Twenty-first Century the lives of our forebears. Considering the enhanced space of Muslim society, the replacement of rulers by clerics in the colonial era, she comes up with one very startling observation:

The ulama were not litigants in any suits. They had no part in the regulation of mosques at any time from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. They were not among the many officers charged by the courts with settling the affairs of the mosques. Their absence from this foundational platform of religious participation and practice should serve to qualify our understanding of their influence. (p.157)

Thus the present work is not only about the architecture and functions of mosques, it depicts how our social lives have become reprioritized. What Sana Haroon has produced is landmark research. Deep and meticulous inquiry in a strangely neglected area of colonial rule. Her level of interpretation is unusually high and this work promises to become a classic which means reclaiming History.