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Beyond Monumentality: Al-Masjid Al-Haram as Sacred Infrastructure, Pilgrimage Governance, and the Ethics of Public Care in Contemporary Islam

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Abstract

Al-Masjid al-Haram, home to the *Kaʿbah* in Makkah, constitutes the direction of the *qiblah* and the ritual center of *Hajj* and *Umrah*. Although commonly approached primarily as a monumental sacred space, its expanding scale, complex infrastructure, and capacity to accommodate millions of worshippers require a broader understanding of its religious, institutional, and ethical functions. This article conceptualizes *al-Masjid al-Haram* as an integrated sacred ecosystem connecting revelation, ritual, architecture, environmental management, accessibility, crowd mobility, urban transformation, and public service. It develops six interconnected arguments: the mosque derives its primary significance from its Qurʾanic sanctity, Abrahamic origins, and centrality to Islamic worship; its operation depends on extensive systems of sanitation, cooling, water provision, wayfinding, crowd management, communication, maintenance, and accessibility; these systems demonstrate substantial state administrative and technical capacity; the facilitation of worship embodies Qurʾanic and Prophetic injunctions concerning ease and public care; the mosque represents an ideal of the public good that exposes tensions between effective pilgrimage administration and persistent public-

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service challenges across many Muslim societies; and its governance reflects a political theology of custodianship in which ritual pressures have generated new approaches to infrastructure and crowd control. The article concludes that the Grand Mosque creatively reconciles sanctity with renewal, equality with infrastructure, and worship with governance. This perspective extends discussions of sacred architecture beyond monumentality by framing pilgrimage infrastructure and institutional administration as ethical expressions of religious custodianship and public care.

Keywords: *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*; Pilgrimage Governance; Sacred Infrastructure; Saudi Religious Governance; Service Ethics

Introduction

Al-Masjid al-Haram is the shelter of the Ka'bah, to which Muslims, wherever they are in any part of the world, turn in prayer five times daily. The rituals of Hajj and Umrah are basically centered on it. Described by the Qur'an as "blessed and a guidance for the worlds" (Qur'an 3:96), the Ka'bah is the sacred House of Ibrahim (AS) and his first son, Isma'il (AS). Al-Haram is the ritual center of the Ummah and it is among the oldest sacred sites in human history.

Public records acknowledge its vast prayer areas, massive capacity, unending crowds, and complicated cleaning regimes, water-coolers, air-conditioning network, wheelchairs, escalators, translation mechanisms and surveillance setup. But these facilities did not capture the actual modern operational life of the Haram.

Beyond engineering spectacle, lies its ethical and theological essence. This study intends to analyze Al-Masjid al-Haram and the Ka'bah from the premise of its designated meaning at the core of which the integrated environment was constituted by revealed sanctity, Qur'anic memory, prophetic practice, and decades of widespread devotion from the Ummah.

This will be done simultaneously with the highly managed environmental services under exceptionally aggressive conditions of high density and diversity with extreme vulnerability. To understand the Haram adequately, one must hold two factual points that are generally separated: a sanctuary and a global pilgrimage. This duality raises many crucial

questions regarding the examination of the relationship between space and experience by asking the following questions:

- What does it mean to think of sacred space, not just symbolically or devotionally, but also as an environment facilitated by operational processes of sanitation, movement, thermal comfort, water, accessibility, communication among others?
- How do scholars interpret the link between worship rituals and the workers such as repairmen, wheelchair attendants, engineers, crowd managers, and so on, who make such worship possible?
- What insights can the Haram offer regarding Islamic public care ethics?
- How does the contemporary administration of Haram reflect the political theology of Saudi custodianship?
- And how should one think about the increasing commercialization and the rising urbanization luxuries in Haram neighborhoods which distinctly embody humility and equality?

Every year, millions of Muslims go to Makkah and Madinah on pilgrimages. What lessons might be learnt from the privileged tightly controlled environment of Al-Masjid al-Haram and how does it show continuities and contradictions in Islamic practice and Muslim society?

At least three reasons make these questions significant. First, the full complexity of Haram as a place that is more than a monument or a devotional symbol. Second, the efforts to create public religious space contribute to wider debates in Islamic studies, architecture and urban studies, plus the anthropology of religion on sacred space, mobility, and infrastructure. Third, the reflection on Muslim societies, prompting a re-think on the puzzling contradiction of why exceptional excellence is often witnessed at sanctified and pilgrimage sites, whereas everyday public facilities whether schools, hospitals, roads, and local mosques among others are manifestations of persistent neglect.

This article proposes that Al-Masjid al-Haram is best thought of as a Sacred Infrastructure Care: a revealed sanctuary whose ritual life depends on organized systems of general welfare and whose contemporary meaning derives at least in part, from the ethical continuity between worship and facilitation.

The provision of cleanliness, accessibility, water, managing crowds, wayfinding and environmental comfort at the Haram is not merely a logistical service but practical

manifestations of the Qur'anic injunction to purify the House, and Islamic requirement to remove harm from the believer.

Methodology and Scope

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and interdisciplinary methodology. It does not aim to provide a purely technical engineering account of the Grand Mosque, or a narrowly theological reading of Qur'anic verses detached from the lived-realities of pilgrimage. Rather, it seeks to integrate textual, historical, architectural, and operational perspectives in order to understand Al-Masjid al-Haram as a sacred environment that is religiously constituted, materially managed and sustained.

Source and Materials

The analysis utilizes five categories of sources which are as follows:

i) **Qur'an and Hadith Texts**: The Qur'an is the textual source for the sanctity of the Ka'bah and Al-Masjid al-Haram. The importance of the sanctuary is amply highlighted in these verses of the Qur'an 2:125-127, 3:96-97 and 22:26-27 among others. Hadith literature is used selectively to illuminate Prophetic teachings on pilgrimage, ease, mercy, public cleanliness, and service to others.

ii) **Historical and Architectural Scholarship**: Scholarly works and architectural history show that the Masjid al-Haram has undergone a key inkling regarding its light and different temporal layering. The noteworthy contribution of Martens (2020) about continuity and renewal work at Grand Mosque is explicit. Regarding the scholarship work on sacred geography, Khalid El-Awaisi (2017) helps frame the Haram as a wider sacred region rather than a mere building.

iii) **Pilgrimage and Infrastructure Studies:** There is an increasing amount of wayfinding scholarship, like that of Basiouni (2020) relating to pilgrims' direction finding satisfaction in Masjid al-Haram. There is also important literature on crowd analytics (Khan et al., 2017) as well as about integrating crowd analytics with augmented reality.

iv) **Contemporary Official Operational Data:** Official statements and operational data from Saudi authorities responsible for the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah are used to anchor the historical and strategic analysis within the contemporary reality. For example, the General Authority for the Care of the Affairs of the Grand Mosque

and the Prophet's Mosque, in a recent announcement stated that "during the First Ten Days of Ramadan 1447 AH, more than 43.8 million worshippers and visitors have performed the pilgrimage to the Two Holy Mosques at the same time. The Grand Mosque reportedly received 23.8 million worshippers and also, 8.1 million Umrah (Minor Pilgrimage) performers during that period. These figures underscore the scale of the contemporary challenges (Pep.gov.sa).

v) **Scholarship on Urbanization, Commercialization, and Religious Tourism:** In discussing Makkah as a sacred space which is continuously shaped by tourism, redevelopment and commercial expansion, the article engages recent literature on the commercialization of sacred space around the Haram and the political economy of the Saudi pilgrimage governance.

Analytical Approach

The article is not based on fieldwork in Makkah, and it does not claim ethnographic access to the daily administrative life of the Grand Mosque. It is rather a conceptual and interpretive mix. The question arises that how can incommensurable components of evidence, scriptural, historical, architectural, and operational services be simultaneously applied and brought into a meaningful concurrence in understanding Al-Haram as a sacred infrastructural system.

The method is textual, historical and partly analytical. Al-Haram is not seen as a static object but rather, a place where various layers superimpose one another:

- Theological sanctity
- Ritual centrality
- Historical trajectory
- Operational complexity
- Service ethic
- Urban commerce
- State custodianship

Scope and Limits

Al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah is the major focus of this article but, as the argument unfolds, there is comparison with Al-Masjid al-Nabawi in Madinah and also with general pilgrimage governance in Saudi Arabia.

Thus, a thorough legal examination of Hajj legislation or a complete economic account of Makkah is not attempted. Instead, the article intend to provide a wider conceptual understanding of the Haram; a glimpse into a sacred ecosystem, the contemporary operation of which raises significant questions for Islamic ethics, urban studies, and the sociology of religion.

Literature Review

Scholarly work on Al-Masjid al-Haram could be categorized into five interconnected bodies of literature. First, there is a huge literature dealing with the sacred space and Islamic religious geography. Secondly, there exists a body of literature focusing on the historical and architectural studies of the Haram. Thirdly, there is a considerable literature on pilgrimage studies and ritual mobility. The fourth category is on crowd management, wayfinding, and smart infrastructure; while the fifth is on commercialization, governance, and the political economy of Makkah. It is, however, important to point out that each of the five categories is distinct; they are rarely brought together in a single framework.

Haram and Islamic Religious Geography

Haram in Islamic thought means sacrosanct, inviolable, secured or sanctified. As El-Awaisi, in his work, "Mapping the Sacred: The Haram Region of Makkah" points out, Makkah's Haram is not merely the building but a wider sacred precinct with legal and symbolic impact. Tracing the sacred region of Makkah as a divinely designated territory, he makes this broader spatial theology clear, saying that the Haram must be included within Islamic sacred geography and not merely an edifice. This work examines Haram as an ethical space, a secured area and a practiced ritual environment (El-Awaisi 2017, 24–47).

Another academic working in this area is Çevik who, in her work, "A Comparative Study on the Architectural and Symbolic Values of Masjid al-Haram and Masjid an-Nabawi," contrasts the symbolic and architectural meanings of the two great mosques arguing that sacred spaces in Islam inform memory, affect identity and devotion.

As Çevik states, it must be underlined that the Haram's sacredness is not limited to making necessary rites there. A body of parallel literature on al-Masjid al-Haram, in fact,

continuously embodies it as a symbolic universe that directs Muslims to the proximity of God, memory of the Prophet, and Muslim community (Çevik 2025: 333–369).

The literature maintained that Al-Masjid al-Haram be read first, as sacred space – present as revealed, sanctity, and ritual memory. However, it pays less attention to the operational systems that enable the modern experience of this sacredness.

Historical and Architectural Studies of the Grand Mosque

One of the contemporary architectural and historical study is that of Martens' "The Masjid al-Haram: Balancing Tradition and Renewal at the Heart of Islam," where he provides an overview of major building campaigns at the Haram across sixteen centuries. In particular, Martens studies the Ottoman arcades as well as the ever-recurring tensions between expansion-demolition, appropriation of peripheral land and preservation of sacred patrimony.

According to him, the Grand Mosque has a history of continuous negotiation and re-negotiation of tradition and renewal. Martens' study spurs thinking over the transformation of Al-Haram in several ways. He also draws attention to the political symbolism of the Haram. In other words, architecture appears to have been mobilized to make Islamic political claims and also to underpin such claims (Martens 2020).

Pilgrimage Studies, Ritual Embodiment, and Mobility

Hajj journey is a multi-day religious observance that brings together millions of Muslim persons annually in Mecca, starting on the 8th of Dhu al-Hijjah known as the Day of Tarwiyah (Yaşar 2021). The pilgrims move to Mina where they spend night in prayer. Expectedly, the narrow streets of Mina Tent City become tightly packed, thus giving rise to abnormal behaviors as people stand or sit on walkways blocking pedestrians' flow (Al Ruwaithi 2021a), and the risk of occlusion, where certain areas become impassable due to overcrowding (Abdallah et al. 2018). This is because, there are several main events that take place during Hajj including the stay at Mina tent city, circumambulating around Ka'aba which is known as Tawaf, and Rammi al-Jamarat, stay at Muzdalifah, and time spent at Arafat (Owaidah 2022).

The broader literature of pilgrimage studies, especially the ethnographic and conceptual work that examines "embodied vulnerability", serves to address Hajj and Umrah within the anthropology and sociology of ritual movement. According to scholars,

sacred travel involves belief and bodily vulnerability. When a person walks on foot; the walking, waiting, thirst, crowding, emotional intensity, exhaustion and encounter with others give rise to some degree of ethical dilemma. This literature does not specifically address Al-Masjid al-Haram but it offers a wholesome hypothetical lexicon for an "embodied vulnerability" in the Haram. That is, this is a site where both the soul and the body "worship."

In Islamic studies, Hajj is viewed through the Abrahamic frame as a ritual about equality, sacrifice, memory, and submission while certain interstitial enquiry remains unexplored. This is the gap between a theological treatment and an operational analysis of pilgrimage sites and environments. Hajj is often discussed as if the rites and rituals have no infrastructural encumbrance. That is, the contemporary dependency on carrying out those rituals on transportation, crowd control, public health, signage, and climate adaptation.

Crowd Management, Wayfinding, and Digital Infrastructure

Crowd density refers to the number of objects within a unit area, such as people per square meter (Rota et al. 2013), while crowd analysis is used to develop crowd management strategies in public events as well as public space design, visual surveillance and virtual environments to make areas more convenient in order to prevent crowd induced disasters (Arif et al. 2013). Owing to population growth, crowd analysis has given rise to research on developing crowd management strategies (Ullah et al. 2017, 28-39).

Although, the main crowd is the subject of the analysis, anomalies like someone opposing the flow of traffic must be taken into account (Shimura et al. 2016). Addressing such concerns involve the management and optimization of the crowd and predict movement patterns (Nour et al. 2017) as the purpose of a group of individuals determines the interpretation of the data obtained. Thus, significant research has been done to understand the way crowds move in order to predict where areas of conflicts may occur (Saqib et al. 2017).

This section concerns the practical functioning of Haram as the research area encompasses crowd density, surveillance, computer vision, machine learning, crowd-flow modeling, wayfinding systems and digital support for pilgrims.

Basiouni in his research, "An Empirical Research on Pilgrims' Wayfinding Satisfaction Study: A Consideration for Improving Wayfinding Experience in Al Masjid Al Haram" (2020, 442–458), explores pilgrims' wayfinding satisfaction in Al-Masjid al-Haram

as he explains that many worshippers get disorientated, confused and stressed while navigating the largeness of the mosque complex; particularly when it is crowded. The research, Basiouni added, is important because it highlights the subjective experience of disorientation for the pilgrim as poor wayfinding could cause more anxiety, and less satisfaction with worship, not just a trivial inconvenience.

Khan et al. in their study, "Towards a Crowd Analytic Framework for Crowd Management in Majid-al-Haram" (2017), presented a system for estimating density, dominant movement pattern, and congestion detection using computer vision-based crowd analytics framework for Masjid al-Haram; contending that machine learning and video analytics could play a significant part in assisting crowd management in high-density pilgrim eventualities.

Refaee's 2025 research, "Automated Crowd Flow Management in Masjid al-Haram Using Space Syntax and Simulation," proposes shifting Masjid al-Haram from reactive crowd control to proactive, automated steering. By combining space syntax spatial analysis with Agent-Based Modeling**,** the study outlines how architectural configuration could naturally guide pilgrims' movement to reduce congestion and improve flow during Umrah and Hajj. The notion is that design and prediction, not intervention of security staff, could optimize crowd flow.

Other related studies that focus on enhancing digital assistance for pilgrims, include Basiouni's work on technology adoption in the Haram. These studies brighten the Haram as an environment where surveillance, data, predictive systems, and interface design increasingly facilitate the worshippers' movements.

Despite that this literature is technical; it attempts to treat pilgrims as units of flow or users of wayfinding systems in crowdedness dissection. This is because; it lacks strong theological or ethical account of why these systems matter in a sacred setting. It explains how crowd management works in a particular situation like pilgrimage where the old, the young, male and female from all walks of life converge in the same place doing the same thing, the same way, and at the same time.

Commercialization, Religious Tourism, and the Political Economy of Makkah

A relatively new area of research is assessing how Makkah city is being transformed through an examination of the mega redevelopment, luxury accommodation, consumer culture, and state-managed sacred pilgrimage tourism by sub-national and state agencies,

actors, and processes. Some significant works in recent years examine the Haram's commercial spaces, as if conceptualizing Makkah as a city of sacred consumption. The increasing pilgrims' population and the ubiquitous commercial services in Makkah, is becoming a site of increasing juxtaposition: coexistence of sacred devotion and market-driven urbanism.

This literature raises three questions:

i) How the city of pilgrimage has become Saudi's hospitality landscape?

ii) Does the luxury urban development of the city guarantee adequate justice to the pilgrimage principle of humility and equality?

iii) Is anything lost when the older layers of urban fabric are erased for towers, malls and luxury services?

These questions point to the importance that this literature is not idealized. The surroundings of the mosque in the city are not just neutral or an inert backdrop; it is an aspect of the moral-lived world of pilgrimage. Yet, several literatures tend toward a critique of commercialization without acknowledging the enormity of a hosting city and the infrastructural demands of hosting millions of pilgrims.

The challenge therefore, is to hold both realities together: the necessity of expansion and service, and the risks of commodifying sacred proximity.

Gap in the Literature

The review conducted above shows a major gap. Scholarship on Al-Masjid al-Haram is often fragmented:

- They focus on theology and symbolism that characterize a sacred space, often neglecting operational systems.
- Architectural history literature highlights continuity and renewal as key attributes, but fails to engage with service infrastructure.
- Crowd-management scholarship explains logistics, but rarely links it to Islamic ethics.
- Political economy and commercialization studies criticise urban transformation without broadening it to the significance of service and facilitation within the ambit of ethics.

This article therefore, seeks to bond these strings by proposing a unifying concept: Sacred Infrastructural Care framework. Through this, Al-Haram could be understood with

its attendant crowd-management challenge and as a state project where worship and public service are interconnected.

Theoretical Framework: Sacred Infrastructural Care

This study proposes the concept of Sacred Infrastructural Care. The phrase seeks to show how a sanctuary that is revealed depends upon organized systems of material support that are ethically relevant within Islamic framework.

Sacred Space of Life or Lived Environment

In Islam, one does not encounter a mosque as a purpose-driven ideal but through sound, surfaces, air, temperature, density, access routes, the presence or absence of care.

Al-Masjid al-Haram is such a large and significant mosque that the scale of visitation magnifies every material condition. From a slippery floor, a confusing sign, a blocked route, poor sound quality, insufficient water to inaccessible facilities could affect not just a few worshippers but thousands at once.

Faith-related Structure as Religious Development

Plumbing, lighting, signage, surveillance, escalators, ventilation, translation systems, cooling networks, and mobility devices infrastructure fall under non-religious services in the Haram.

The provision of clean prayer space, safe movement, accessible routes, drinkable water in the Grand Mosque is not just about maintaining a building, but facilitating the act of worship. The concept of this framework suggests that the spiritual and the operational are inextricably networked.

Importance of Care in the Qur'an

This framework's theological foundation is rooted in Qur'an 22:26, where Ibrahim (AS) is charged with purifying the House for those who undertake tawaf and pray therein. The verse shows that sacred space is not just to be worshipped in, but to be made. The house, which was expressly meant for its worshipers, should be kept holy. In the same vein, the Qur'an's description of the Ka'bah as a house of blessing for humanity (Qur'an 3:96), identifies its universal hospitality; a core principle of the sanctuary.

Prophetic Mercy and Removal of Hardship

The Sacred Infrastructure Care framework corroborates the Prophetic Sunnah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was exceptionally passionate. He tenaciously upheld the spirit of ease, mercy, and concern for the welfare of the weak. He commended the removal of harm from public pathways. Thus, ethical reasoning is straightforward: faith is not indifference to embodied difficulty.

Care, Labor, and Maintenance Ethical Status

A final component of the framework concerns labor. Sacred Infrastructure Care framework acknowledges the importance of the laborers: cleaners, technicians, wheelchair attendants, water distributors, sound engineers, translators, crowd managers, and maintenance staff. They are not merely background workers in a sacred environment.

Through the workers, the House is purified, routes remain usable, the weak are assisted, and worshippers could perform their pilgrimage rites and supplicate to Allah with ease. In the light of these essential services, the value of this framework presents Al-Haram as being theological, sociological, and ethical. It provides grandeur to the material conditions of worship and without encumbrances.

Qur'anic and Abrahamic Foundations of Haram

Discussion of Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām should proportionately prioritize the Qur'ānic injunction which sanctifies the sanctuary before delving into Saudi expansion plans or current crowd statistics. This is important because the revelation places the Kaʿbah at the center of Islamic memory through the Abrahamic narrative.

The First House Established for Humankind

Kaʿbah is the first House established for Humankind. The Qur'an declares:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

Indeed, the first House established for mankind was that at Bakkah - blessed and guidance for the worlds (Qur'an 3:96).

This verse, which is the scriptural foundation for the sanctity of the Kaʿbah, provides a three-prong insight:

i) It is the first House established for humankind, hence its universal significance.

ii) It links the House with barakah and guidance, suggesting that the sacred is not only spatial; it also has ethical constituent.

i) It establishes the Ka'bah as an important site that predates later Islamic political formations and architectural expansions.

The phrase "for humankind" is very significant here. It makes it clear that the House does not belong to a single ethnicity, dynasty, class, or linguistic group. The extraordinary diversity of pilgrims who converge in the Haram confirms its sacred trust for the Muslim World.

Ibrahim, Isma'il, and the Foundations of the House

Allah underscores the significance of the Ka'bah through the story of Ibrahim and Isma'il:

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّاۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

When Ibrahim and Isma'il were raising the foundations of the House, they said: Our Lord, accept this from us. 'Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing' (Qur'an 2:127).

This verse is a departure from current times of self-pride. The architects of Islam's holiest House were humble. They did not celebrate themselves but rather, supplicated for acceptance with humility. This is important as it reminds Muslims that the strong sense of the Ka'bah is one of obedience and surrender.

The prayer of Ibrahim and Isma'il also usher in, an important ethical theme that sacred construction entails an ethical exposure to Allah. The act of constructing, sustaining, enlarging or administering the Haram is not merely an exercise of control over a holy site; but a tradition of service with divine accountability.

Purifying the House for Worshippers

The Qur'an (22:26-27) provides a clear command over the purification of the House for worshipers. Allah says:

وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَٰهِيمَ مَكَانَ ٱلْبَيْتِ أَن لَّا تُشْرِكْ بِى شَيْـًٔا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِىَ لِلطَّآئِفِينَ وَٱلْقَآئِمِينَ وَٱلرُّكَّعِ ٱلسُّجُودِ. وَأَذِّن فِى ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ

You shall not associate anything with Me - and purify My House for those who perform tawaf (circumambulation) and those who stand [in prayer] and those who bow and prostrate. Announce the pilgrimage (Hajj) among men. They will come to you on foot, and every lean camel. They will come from every distant pass (Quran 22:26-27).

This verse significantly connects to sanctity, purification, and pilgrimage. Haram is only for the worship of Allah; and for the pilgrims' sake too, the House must be purified. Additionally, the pilgrims described in the Qur'an as coming "from every distant pass" indicates the global reach of Hajj and Umrah.

Beyond the literal and ritualistic interpretations of the command to cleanse the House, the implication of the verse signifies preparedness, sustenance, and attention.

Haram: Protected and Inviolable Space

Al-Masjid al-Haram is mentioned severally in the Qur'an; emphasizing its inviolability, role in pilgrimage, and its place in the moral geography of Islam. The House is not just holy in an abstract sense. It is a protected place, where certain acts are prohibited. And it is a place where the palpitations of ordinary power are subdued by divine command.

El-Awaisi highlights how Haram functions as a sacred region, not just a central structure; as he explained that the moral and legal meaning of the Haram extends beyond the visible boundaries of the mosque building, embedding the sanctuary within a larger sacred landscape (El-Awaisi 2017).

Ka'bah as Ethical Orientation

Muslims from wherever they are, relate with the Haram regularly since it is the orienting qiblah of prayer. This, aside from pilgrimage, is a lived-link with Al-Masjid al-Haram with the qiblah of Ka'bah.

It is a salient feature of Muslims devotional life across the world. Through the qiblah, Makkah is the daily orientation of every Muslim rather than being a distant sacred city known mainly through text or verbal narration.

Ritual Centrality: Qiblah, Hajj, Umrah, and the Global Muslims

The Grand Mosque is a living ritual center whose significance is sustained by the daily and seasonal practices of the global Muslim communities.

Daily Geography of Prayer and the Qiblah

Muslims all over the world from houses, mosques, offices, schools, airports, deserts, hospitals, and prison cells turn towards Makkah every day. Al-Haram provides a fixed point of reference in a global geography of devotion created by this repetitive turning.

The qiblah provides spatial unity to Muslim prayers. It ensures that worship is not just something done individually, but together as well. The devotee in any city – Maiduguri, Sokoto, Enugu, Kano, Ilorin, Okene, Lagos, Jakarta, Sarajevo or London – is connected to the same sacred center through an act of turning. The Haram becomes a constant presence; a site of ritual imagination for the Ummah.

Hajj as Collective Act of Submission and Equality

One of the five pillars of Islam is Hajj and it places emphasis on the sacred mosque. Hajj is not merely the occasional devotional journey; but a constitutive act of Muslim religious life of those who are able to perform it. Hajj rituals include ihram, tawaf, sa'y, and standing at Arafat; all having their respective significances.

However, Al-Masjid al-Haram is the center of this ritual world. One of the most visually striking acts in Islam is the tawaf around the Ka'bah. It demonstrates equality of all worshippers before Allah. Through ihram, the pilgrim is stripped, symbolically at least, of class distinction, professional identity and social status.

The king and peasant, the scholar and farmer, the minister and mechanic, the teacher and salesman all circumambulate the same Ka'bah. Ritual equality in the Haram challenges the highly stratified human societies.

Umrah and the Year-Round Life of the Sanctuary

Unlike Hajj, which occurs at specific dates in the calendar, Umrah gives the Al-Haram year-round pace of pilgrimage; the sanctuary is always alive. To this end, the pressure on the Grand Mosque for continuous maintenance and crowd planning and services continues to grow.

Official data underlines this scale from the Saudi authorities showed that in the first ten days of Ramadan 1447 AH, the Grand Mosque received 23,839,592 worshippers and 8,110,498 Umrah performers while more than 43.8 million worshippers and visitors throng the Two Holy Mosques during that short period alone (Saudi Press Agency). Beyond mere religious sensation, it is world's largest recurring organized human mobility in the world.

The Feelings of Pilgrimage

Ritual centrality is not just a symbolic unity. It is also emotional. Pilgrims often describe their first sight of the Ka'bah in deeply affective terms: tears, trembling, gratitude, relief, awe, and an overwhelming sense of being received by a place long loved, from afar.

Haram receives not only crowds but biographies. Pilgrims come carrying grief, illness, financial strain, marital challenges, prayer for children, earnest repentance, and unspoken hope. The Haram becomes a site where personal suffering is folded into collective worship.

This emotional dimension shows that the pilgrim is not a mere "user" of infrastructure but rather, a moral and spiritual subject whose encounter with the sanctuary may be one of the defining moments of a lifetime. That is why the quality of care within the Haram matters profoundly.

The importance of rituals is how the worshipers feel. When pilgrims sight the Ka'bah for the time they often become very emotional: shedding tears; feeling thankful, relieved and amazed. They feel finally at home. These feelings are not just random because the pilgrims have thought about the Haram a lot, before getting there. They have prayed, read the Qur'an, heard stories, and imagined what the sacred House would be like. It feels great! The quality of care at the Haram is therefore very important.

Historical Transformation: Continuity, Expansion, and the Changing Urban Form of Makkah

The Grand Mosque has undergone a continuous process of expansion and reconstruction for over 1400 years. However, the pre-modern changes should be taken into account in every chronicling of the site's architecture.

These changes reflect shifts in the ever increasing pilgrimage population, political authority, urban density, and construction technology. They also reveal that sacred permanence and material change have always coexisted in the life of the Haram.

Early Islamic Expansions

The Grand Mosque around the Ka'bah was not very big in the early days of Islam. As more people embraced Islam and pilgrimage population increased, the rulers had to embark on expansion of Haram. The early Muslim leaders knew that the Ka'bah could not stay the same in the face of a growing Umah and successively, they expanded it so that it could sufficiently meet the space need of the pilgrims.

Medieval and Ottoman Interventions

Over time different rulers worked the Grand Mosque; fixed broken materials and added new things. The Ottoman rulers made remarkable changes, especially in the 16th century. They added arcades and domed colonnades that are still part of the Haram today. According to Martens, these changes were very important in shaping what the Haram looks like.

Two important reasons account for the Ottoman changes: A demonstration that the Haram has always been renovated over time; and that the authorities in charge were poised to prove that they cared for the sacred House and the Muslim world. So, repairing or beautifying the sanctuary was not merely an architectural act; but a public statement of piety and custodianship.

Saudi Expansion Policy

The unprecedented monumental changes at the Haram happened in the 21st century, when the Saudi rulers took charge. As population of pilgrims increased with rapidity, Saudi kingdom wanted to make sure that Haram could handle the teeming pilgrims hence the holistic expansion. Prayer areas and courtyards were expanded along with the provisions of several other facilities for the comfort of the pilgrims.

However, the expansion efforts have created tensions over heritage loss, land appropriation, demolition of older neighborhoods, and the changing skyline of Makkah's historic urban fabric.

Demolition, Memory and Modernization

As redevelopment intensified, older neighborhoods, houses, and historic sites gave way to large-scale construction. To critics, this is not just modernization but a sacred amnesia: the replacement of lived-historical texture with generic monumental urbanism.

Distancing himself from any simplistic judgment over the expansion works in Haram, Martens argued that he neither romanticizes the past nor celebrates modernization uncritically. He explained that the history of the Haram is a repeated negotiation between reverence for inherited forms and the pressure of new needs (Martens 2020).

The challenge, therefore, is not to deny the necessity of change but to ask what kind of change is ethically and aesthetically appropriate for a sacred city where expansion is, albeit necessary while erasure is not morally neutral.

Continuity through Change

The history of Haram teaches a lesson: continuity in sacred space does not require architectural immobility. The Ka'bah remains the center. The Haram remains the sanctuary. Pilgrims keep arriving. Yet the built environment through which they encounter Haram has changed tremendously. So, the task of scholarship is not to collapse this complexity into either nostalgia or scholarship voyage, but to understand how sacred permanence is facilitated through continued transformation.

Haram and Operational Ecosystem

Al-Masjid al-Haram is one of the most complex religious environments on earth. It receives worshippers from every region of the world: speaking different languages, varying in age, health, mobility, ritual familiarity, and under conditions of density that would overwhelm ordinary institutions. To function effectively, Haram depends on interconnected systems of crowd management, wayfinding, sanitation, water distribution, environmental control, accessibility, communication, and emergency preparedness. These systems are the material conditions of worship at mass scale.

Scale and Density

Pilgrims population figures provided by the Saudi authority during the first ten days of Ramadan 1447 AH, shows that the Grand Mosque alone received 23.8 million worshippers and 8.1 million Umrah performers (Saudiarabiabreakingnews). The magnitude of concentration transforms every operational challenge into a question of major consequence. This is because, a poorly designed route, a sanitation failure, or a communication breakdown could affect vast number of people in a very short time.

Crowd Management and Human Safety

Crowd control is another important aspect of management in the Haram. Pilgrims' movement during tawaf, at entry points and at changes of level in the prayer area creates hazards of congestion, panic, separation, falling, slipping, and in extreme cases, stampede. Thus, maximization of throughput (bandwidth) with human safety in mind is herculean. This is because; it must be done without disrupting the religious ambience associated with worship. As cited in Khan et al. (2017), computer vision-based crowd analytics could assist

in the detection of density, direction, congestion, and movement patterns in the Masjid al-Haram.

Previous study on crowd monitoring frameworks for the Haram also emphasized the value of automated surveillance for detecting potentially dangerous conditions in dense areas of tawaf and movement corridors. But Khan noted that there are applications of crowd analysis to detect the density, direction, congestion and movement patterns; using computer vision. Authorities could use this to take action before a situation turns dangerous (Khan et al. 2017).

Furthermore, recent research by Refaee (2025) suggests using dimensional analysis and simulation to embed safety into design rather than relying solely on reactive security intervention. However, all these steps are necessary because, crowd control in Haram is an ethical imperative to safeguard the weak in the context of worship.

Wayfinding and Pilgrim's Orientation

Central to the quality of worship at the massive sanctuary is the challenge of wayfinding, especially for first-time pilgrims, non-Arabic speakers, the elderly, and those under emotional stress. Basiouni in his study on pilgrims' wayfinding satisfaction found that many pilgrims experience much confusion in finding their way around Al-Masjid al-Haram and that the street directional signs are not prominent enough. The attendant implication of this disorientation breeds anxiety, disrupts timetables, distances individuals from their companions, prevents moments of prayer, and generates discomfort in a location that should not evoke reassurance.

The challenge is daunting, considering the myriad different users of the Haram: an elderly woman from rural West Africa; a first-time visitor from Central Asia; a wheelchair user from Southeast Asia; a child with parents; a recent convert from Europe; and a sick worshipper looking for an accessible prayer space. This explains why orientation is not a trifling matter.

It also explains why electronic guide apps, multi-lingual signage, color-coding of routes, information desks, and human help in general are ethically significant. They are a way of assuring the pilgrims: "You are not expected to struggle alone in your quest to worship your Lord".

Al-Haram and Sanitation

A remarkable aspect of the Haram is the admiringly unique but less-studied aspect of sanitation in the Haram. The floors, carpets, washrooms, and toilets must be cleaned of heavy usage. In Ramadan, particularly during iftar, Haram has to go through the process of cleaning up the incredible amounts of food-based waste and yet restore the praying condition of the mosque before maghrib and the time for subsequent set of prayers.

This is a herculean task. Maintaining cleanliness in the haram is a theological message. In Surat al-Hajj, Allah prescribed cleansing the House for tawaf and prayer (22:26), thus giving sanitation a sacred dimension: keeping the Haram clean is honoring the House and the worshippers.

In many Muslim communities, concern for purity is ritualistic, whereas public indifference to dirt is large scale. The Haram exposed this contradiction by demonstrating that cleanliness and public good constitute reverence.

Provision of Water and the Material Memory of Zamzam

Zamzam has a narrative intimately linked to Hajar and Isma'il, and the divine provision of water in the Haram. It is spiritually charged. However, when water becomes available at a mosque frequented by millions, such sacred water requires modern logistical means of accessibility and distribution. These involve testing, cooling, storage, distribution, replenishment, and waste management. Hence, water provision in the Haram is both symbolic and structural.

The pilgrims, while worshipping in the Haram, need water for drinking, ablution, bodily cleanliness, and toilet use. Thus, providing clean and accessible water is a basic act of mercy to the pilgrims. It is a manifest example of the sacred and the operational interface.

Accessibility and the Weak

Specialized accessibility services such as wheelchair and access routes, are available at the Grand Mosque to assist the aged, weak individuals, and the physically-challenged pilgrims.

This provision shows that the sanctuary is not to be enjoyed by only the strong and able individuals. The weak too, deserve special attention. Their accessibility should not be a bureaucratic add-on; but a practical expression of rahmah and the fulfillment of the Prophetic ethic of mercy and accommodation.

Thermal Comfort and Environmental Design

The climate in Makkah is very hot and desert-dry. The weather could be really harsh to some pilgrims; particularly the elderly, the sick, and those who are fasting. So, the thermal stress could be controlled with effective management and surface treatment. This paper, specifically, studies heat mitigation in and around the Haram.

Environmental comfort provided in the Haram includes reflective floors, cool air, shade, temperature circulation among others. Such work serve as a reminder that worship does not occur outside the climate and that the right to pray with dignity includes the right not to be exposed to avoidable environmental hazard. Therefore, environmental comfort in the Haram is a public good and an effective welfare function in climate planning.

Sound, Translation, and the Global Congregation

The Haram is a transnational sanctuary. It is therefore imperative that the khutbah, Qur'anic recitation, enlightenment lectures and public announcements in various languages are intelligible across a span distance. The sound enhances shared ritualistic experience among worshippers of diverse language background and so, communication within the Haram should showcase universal inclusiveness.

Al-Haram and Digitalization

The Haram increasingly operates as a digitally supported environment: crowd analytics, surveillance, mobile guidance, scheduling systems, route control, and data-informed management. This raises two questions:

- Does the digitalization of pilgrimage deepen care by reducing hardship and improving safety?
- Does it risk turning worshippers into data points within a managed system?

The answer is probably both. Technology could be a tool of mercy, but it could also intensify the bureaucratic rationalization of sacred experience.

The impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution in controlling the Haram is imperative; given its growing operations as a digitally supported environment coping with crowd analytics, surveillance, mobile guidance, scheduling systems, route control, and data-informed management.

But digitalization of pilgrimage should be an outgrowth of care, by making peopleflow easier to manage; not creating fresh hardships but ensuring safety. It should

avoid the risk of immersing worshippers as data subjects within a managed system. This way, technology could serve as a tool of mercy while at the same time, heightens the bureaucratic rationalization of the sacred experience.

Service as Worship: Labor, Facilitation, and Ethical Economy

One of the propositions offered in this article is that, the work that makes Al-Masjid al-Haram effective is not spiritually a frontline and backline labor because the cleaners, maintenance workers, technicians, guides, wheelchair attendants, sanitation workers, sound engineers, translators, and crowd stewards constitute a part of the ethical economy of the sanctuary.

Theological Basis for Service

The Qur'anic injunction to purify the House for those who are worshippers means it ought to be prepared and cared for. The prophetic statement of making the religion easy, relieving hardship and removing harm from the pathway, provides a moral vocabulary for facilitation as a meritorious religious act.

It is on this premise that service in the Haram could not be classified as a non-religious labor taking place in a sacred setting. Rather, it is religiously meaningful as it directly assists the worshippers. When a worker ensures that a prayer space is clean, a wheelchair is available, or a route is safe, that worker is helping another believer to fulfill act of devotion to Allah.

Hidden Labor and Visible Piety

In Muslim communities, various acts of visible piety that deserve honor are relegated. Leading prayer, giving lectures, and reciting Qur'an are all accepted as rewarding public gestures. However, maintenance work does not enjoy such privilege; it is religated because the labor remains unseen. The Haram unsettles this hierarchy as unacceptable.

The labor of someone who cleans the masjid after iftar so that the Maghrib could take place is doing a service no less than that of the Imam. The same recognition extends to the technician who ensures that the sound system is functioning and also, the accessibility worker who aids an elderly pilgrim.

Dignity of Labor in Sacred Institutions

Recognizing service as worship has implications. The support staff of every Muslim institution must be treated honorably. An establishment that holds its Imam and Scholars in esteem but vilifies the workers who clean and maintain it has disassociated from a certain level of worship. Also, a community that places value on Imams who attend the minbar to deliver sermons while being dismissive of those who clean the musallah has not fully appreciated the idea of service as act of worship.

Haram is a suggestive alternative ethical commitment or legitimacy at work. It is sustained by ecology of service where every act that makes things easy for, and removes hardship from worshippers carries ethical weight.

Public Ethics beyond Pilgrimage

The intensity of public ethics associated with the Haram inspires admiration. It provokes self-examination as it raises a difficult question for Muslim societies: why is such extraordinary care visible in pilgrimage administration, absent from every day public life? Haram should serve as a Mirror to the Muslim Societies.

Sacred Excellence and Civic Neglect

Various Muslim-majority contexts are full of religious devotion. Mosques are crowded; celebrations take place; while sermons emphasize purity and good character. Nevertheless, public institutions tend to be a failure: overcrowded and filthy hospitals, public toilets that cannot be used, littered streets, poor access for the physically-challenged, chaotic transport, and bureaucratic apathy towards citizens' dignity have become synonymous with 'normal' life in various Muslim societies.

In exposing these oddities, the Haram proves that Muslim institutions could, when sufficiently committed, organize cleanliness, accessibility, punctuality, and care on a massive scale. If such seriousness is possible in a sacred environment, it should extend to Muslims public life.

Transitioning from Pilgrimage Ethics to Public Ethics

Not every city can reproduce the immense financial scale of Makkah but without glamourizing the Saudi model or try to copy it blindly, the lesson imparts moral values. The

various values we observe continually within the sacred confines of the Haram are not exotic to Islam. They are parts of its known daily philosophy.

The Islamic civic imagination must, therefore, expand to incorporate schools, clinics, markets, mosques, roads and government offices; all of which are to be places that protect human dignity as a core value.

Public Service as Amanah

The administration of the Haram also emphasizes the principle of amanah. To effectively handle a holy space entails fulfilling a trust to Allah and the worshippers. However, it logically follows that the same would apply everywhere in Muslims' public life. The disparity between inviolable perfection and public carelessness is not just technical; it is ethical.

Commercialization and Luxury Urbanism

The massive transformation of Makkah into a city that is increasingly shaped by luxurious hospitality, commercial redevelopment, and religious tourism has attracted skeptics' concern in the recent time. How could a pilgrimage premised on humility and equality coexist with a city being transformed into a mega commercial hub?

It is unimaginable to find a hotel in Makkah that does not fit ceiling mounted television monitors in every guest room and corridor. Television broadcast of the pilgrims' rituals in Haram led by revered scholars has become the dominant form of broadcasting in the city.

Pilgrimage and Equality

Hajj rituals symbolize extreme equality. As soon as the Pilgrims enter ihram they shed many of their status markers and gather before Allah stripped of their usual worldly markers. No racial or class superiority privilege. The sacred city provides a level playing ground.

Rise of Premium Sacred Proximity

The urban environment that surrounds the Haram increasingly reflects the logic of premium access. Luxury hotels, shopping complexes, brand retail stores and stratified accommodation options are literally shaping the pilgrim experience according to their

ability to pay. So, proximity to the sacred House could become a commodity. A hotel room view of the Haram is not just a hotel feature but a monetized form of religious proximity.

New study on commercialization surrounding the Grand Mosque shows co-existence of sacred and commerce logics, albeit uneasy, due to the broader modernization attempts and tourism goals associated with Saudi development policy. This does not mean commerce is illegitimate around places of pilgrimage. The pilgrims would require food, lodging, transport, and services. The contention is that commercial logic should not dominate Haram's ethical atmosphere.

Ethical Risks of Sacred Commercialization

The commercialization of Makkah city raises several concerns.

i) **Stratification of experience:** Wealthier pilgrims could access greater comfort, closer accommodation, and smoother services thus potentially undermining the symbolic equality ethic of pilgrimage.

ii) **Aesthetic transformation:** Luxury urbanism could overwhelm the spiritual modesty historically associated with sacred cities.

iii) **Consumer mentality:** Pilgrims may begin to experience the city less as a sanctuary and more as a managed religious marketplace.

iv) **Heritage erasure:** Commercial redevelopment often accompanies demolition of older neighborhoods and historical textures.

The challenge therefore, is not to abandon commerce but to subordinate it and with modesty to the ethical logic of the sacred House.

Sacred City and Religious Metropolis

Today, Makkah may be described as a sacred city and also, a global religious metropolis. But how would this dual identity coexist without one hollowing out the other. A city that serves millions of pilgrims requires infrastructure, investment, and modern services. However, the challenge is that, a city whose sacred center symbolizes humility cannot be ethically indifferent to the ways in which opulent structures with the attendant developmental impact on the city.

Custodianship, Governance, and the Political Theology

The Grand Mosques in Makkah and Madinah, aside from being spaces for worship and infrastructure, also provide legitimacy to politics.

The Saudi Kingdom administers the most important places in Islam. For hundreds of years, this has been a lived challenge to the Muslim kings on how the management of the holy places confers ethical authority and power.

Sacred Care as Historical Legitimacy

From early caliphs to Ottoman sultans, and modern Saudi kings, rulers have invested heavily in the Haram; not only out of piety but also because custodianship of the sanctuary strengthens claims to leadership within the Muslim world. Repairing, expanding, beautifying, or protecting the Grand Mosque is a call to divine duty and also, a public demonstration of stewardship.

The Saudi Kingdom and the Title of Custodianship

The contemporary era has seen the care of the Two Holy Mosques as central to the provision of the Saudi state's religious-political identity. The title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" is a political-theological claim establishing state authority as sovereignty but, more importantly, as service to Islam's holiest cities: Makkah and Madinah.

The authority's administration is reinforced repeatedly by descriptions of operational readiness, crowd control and pilgrim services. The General Authority for the Care of the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque regularly issues public statements on integrated plans, preparedness, and data on pilgrims; underscoring their competence as guardian of the Haram.

Infrastructure as Political Performance

The continuous construction projects, deployment of innovative technologies, and application of modern traffic devices serve as means of political messages that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia cares. The massive capacity shown by the authorities apparently says: "We can manage the holy center of Islam; we can serve the Ummah at scale; and we are worthy custodians." Indeed, this does not amount to shouting from the rooftops. It is a modest claim!

This meritorious service generates an intersection of legitimacies of service, state and religion in the Haram. And the kingdom of Saudi Arabia never falters on the onerous responsibility which they assiduously carry out year in, year out.

Security and Surveillance

The political rationale discussed in this study also extends to crowd monitoring and surveillance. This is because; safety is essential due to the large size of the space. The opportunity of using invasive event onboard could be used to determine similar opportunities and then establish what inaccurate systems work on. Today, Haram is a tightly controlled space such that any participant's movement is visible to the state system.

Demolition Rationalization

The custodianship of the Saudi government has considerably enhanced capacities, environmental comfort, and services. However, demolition has resulted along with commercialism and centralized spatial control. At the core of the political theology of custodianship lies a question of ambivalence. It is both a technology of legitimacy and a service theology.

The Two Mosques and the Future of Urbanism

Al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah and al-Masjid an-Nabawi in Madinah serve as global pilgrimage centers even though they generate different ritual atmospheres.

i) **Diverse Religious Aspects:** The Ka'bah is the focus of tawaf and the qiblah along with Abrahamic memory is in Masjid al-Haram while Masjid al-Nabawi is more concerned with the Prophetic presence and visitation as well as Madinah's affective and intimate sensibility. Çevik's comparative study suggests that both spaces are architecturally and symbolically charged, but in distinct ways (Çevik 2025).

ii) **Shared Operational Difficulties:** Although differences occur when observing the built-environment, they face the same contemporary challenges of crowding, wayfinding, access, heat, translation and global religious tourism. The current urban studies of Madinah's sacred sites suggest that pilgrimage governance future would increasingly depend on the integrated planning strategies incorporating ritual sensitivity and mobility.

iii) **Lesson for Sacred Urbanism:** Exploring the sacred cities in the present-day Muslim world requires an analysis that is shaped neither entirely by theology nor by planning. Urban zoning and land use rules should prioritize social integration and protect people's rights and needs since urban planning decisions affect social life in the built environment. Basic Islamic ideals, such as human welfare and glory, justice and equality, central consideration, unanimity and kindness, economic development, security and safety, and environmental protection, must be considered when planning an Islamic metropolis (Kamal et al. 2023, 699-712). To this end, experts call for the establishment of an interdisciplinary ethics of sacred urbanism that would remain spiritually meaningful and humanely functional for millions of worshipers.

Theory of Public Care Lesson

The Haram is subjected to several procedures of cleansing, cooling, routing, monitoring, translating, and watering as well as making it available. Islamic ethics should therefore take seriously, the ethical significance of the common-place apparatuses that secure human dignity.

The benefits of the Theory of Public Care include:

i) **Cleanliness as Public Virtue:** The purification logic should extend beyond ritual ablution to the streets, schools, hospital, public toilets, and transport system.

ii) **Accessibility and Orderliness:** In the design of mosques and public spaces, the elderly, disabled, and physically fragile individuals should always be accorded priority.

The use of queues, schedules, signage and orderly navigation should be integrated into daily life ethos and backed with enabling legislation. It is respect for human dignity and vulnerability.

iii) **Water, Shade, and Comfort as Mercy:** The thorough management of Haram proves that access to clean water, a safe environment, and usable facilities should not be considered as luxury but a key element of respect and good living.

iv) **Ethical Labor of Maintenance:** The invisible workers who operate behind the scenes in education, culture and the health system should be reorganized as indispensable part of the ethical life of the community.

v) **Governance as Amanah:** A public officer must view his role as an amanah, irrespective of where such person works. That trust must be discharged with dedication and fear of Allah.

Conclusion

Al-Masjid al-Haram is often described in superlatives. It has the largest human crowds, the greatest capacity, the most complex sound systems, the most extensive cleaning operations and the most advanced crowd-control systems. It receives millions of worshippers in crowded conditions.

A mega-structure, tourist splendor, and an engineering masterpiece, Al-Masjid al-Haram houses the Kaʻbah. It is the direction that Muslims face when they pray, and the destination of Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. It is the place where Muslims connect with, and renew their faith. Its importance comes from the Qur'an, and also, the story of Ibrahim and Ismaʻil who built the Kaʻbah with humility.

Haram teaches Muslims that taking care of people is an important part of spirituality. The floors need to be clean for prayer, ease movement for pilgrims performing tawaf, provide wheelchairs for the elderly, water for the thirsty, and the lost need directional signs. The disabled pilgrims also need access while language translation should be provided for the diverse global congregation. Also, the exhausted deserve shade and cooling while the weak receives institutional mercy.

Haram demonstrates the connection between worship and taking care of people; between devotion and maintenance. The implication this interface goes beyond the city of Makkah. If the House of Allah needs cleanliness and accessibility; so do schools, hospitals, roads, local mosques, markets and government offices. Haram's ethics should not be limited to pilgrimage. Rather than trapping them inside pilgrimage seasons, they should become part of Muslims' public life.

The Saudi authorities would also have to contend with the challenges of ensuring that the concept of equality during pilgrimage survives the luxury development around the Haram; ensuring that the sacred is protected from becoming an exclusive reserve for the rich and also, avoid erasing its history owing to expansion.

Ultimately, Al-Masjid al-Haram is a manifestation of the true teachings of Islam: humility before Allah, equality of man, Muslim brotherhood, remembrance of important events, and taking care of others as an act of devotion. It is a place of prayer and a school that teaches us about public ethics. It is a place that needs to be prepared, protected and made hospitable for the pilgrims.

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