

Mosques and social change: the case of Malindi, Kenya

Harith, Swaleh Kadara

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Abstract:

This thesis addresses a key Islamic institution, the mosque, and its role in social change in a Muslim community. The study examines whether the mosque is capable of addressing concerns of different Muslim groups (men and women) in the contemporary period. In answering this research question, study of mosques in Malindi in the Coast province of Kenya was undertaken. A mosque is not only a place of worship for Muslims but is also, where religious matters are discussed. Mosques could be small or big in size. The small ones often referred to as (masjid) are used for the performance of the five daily prayers. The bigger ones (jamaah) host the Friday prayers (sabat jum'aa) in addition to the compulsory daily prayers. This study explores the role mosques play in promoting social change in the society. Information for the research has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. From the secondary sources which have formed part of the bibliography, libraries have been used, archives visited, journals and periodicals reviewed. Primary sources involved interviews, questionnaires and participant observation method particularly for rituals and religious celebrations. The study examined several objectives such as dynamics of mosque construction and mosque traditions, development of Muslim leadership, the role of education in development, relationship between the Muslim community and the state and the role of the community in development. The research concluded that mosques in Malindi promote social change through implementation of relevant projects and programmes. These programmes focused on education, medical services and general development of the community. The study established that religious personalities such as Sheikh AI- Amin bin Ali Mazrui, Sheikh Ali Shee and Sheikh Khalid Balala were instrumental in promoting social change among Muslims in Kenya. Moreover, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) was significant in promoting and modernizing Muslim education in Kenya through an early childhood Programme, popularly known as the 'Madrasah Resource Center'. The study recommends that mosques should be more democratic and open to ideas in order to address community needs as well as individual concerns. Furthermore, they should be user-friendly through innovative programmes that will attract youth, women and other categories of the population. That way, mosques will have a greater role to play in the community and lives of individuals.