

Understanding the Definition of Mosque and Surau or Musolla, and the Rulings Concerning the Status of Surau or Musolla Areas as Mosques

Ahmad Muzzafaz Mahadi¹, Mohd Asyran Safwan Kamaruzaman², Mohd Haidhar Kamarzaman³, Mohd Kamel Mat Salleh⁴, Mohd Sobri Elias⁵

^{1,2,4}Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Negeri Sembilan

³Research Centre for Theology and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

⁵Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Surau or Musolla in the present time plays a main role in religious activities for the Muslim community just like a mosque. Besides being a place to gather for performing congregational prayers, some surau or musolla are also established for Friday prayers. As a result, some of them perform worship that is specific to a mosque, which is i'tikaf and tahiyatul masjid, in a surau or musolla under the assumption that it is legally considered as a mosque. Thus, this study aims to explain the definition of mosque and surau or musolla according to the Shafi'i school of thought, which is practiced by Muslims in Malaysia, and to state the methods mentioned by the Shafi'i jurists on how to legally consider a musolla or surau as a mosque. Qualitative methodology is used in this study by analyzing texts from authoritative Shafi'i jurisprudence books related to areas that are legally considered as mosques. The findings of this study show that there are differences between the definitions of mosques and surau, as well as their roles in worship activities. This refers to the customary definition of mosques and surau, which is understood by the local Muslim community. However, from a legal perspective, an area called a surau can be legally considered as a mosque by dedicating (waqf) that area as a mosque. Therefore, anyone who enters that area is allowed to perform tahiyatul masjid prayer and then perform i'tikaf in it.

Keywords: Mosque, Surau, Musolla, Tahiyatul Masjid, I'tikaf

INTRODUCTION

Mosque is one of from the symbols of Islam that becomes the main place carried out acts of worship of Muslims. Mosque plays a main role influencing society in the middle of their development. Institution of mosque that is made as the foundation of faith increase not only becomes a place to listen and to learn knowledge only but also a field of social development and civilization during society. (Roslan 2008). So due to the nobility of the mosque and its importance, Islamic cities since early have been filled with mosque buildings whether built by government or the public. (Tamuri 2021). Increase in number of population in cities especially men leads to the need to build surau-s and musolla-s to accommodate and support the function of the mosque as a place for congregational prayer especially Friday prayer. (Shah & Syed 2019).

Surau or musolla that is built not necessarily requires land that has been endowed or gazetted. (Shahir, 2015) but also built inside commercial buildings or on land owned by someone or a developer of the area. Its role is also not only as a place for Muslims to gather during festive occasions but has also taken the role of a mosque entirely. So from the aspect of its function, surau is like a mosque which functions as a gathering place for the Muslim community to perform congregational prayers, discuss, learn Quranic recitation and its interpretation, do dhikr to Allah and hold religious lectures. (Hafiza et al., 2019).

According to Dzulkifli (2015) surau is like a mosque where it is also endowed for public use but does not establish the symbolic Friday prayer as in a mosque. Whereas from a legal perspective, there are several acts of worship that cannot be performed except in a mosque, namely the tahiyatul masjid prayer and i'tikaf because these two acts of worship are specific to a place that is legally considered a mosque only. (Al-Ansari, 2001).

Therefore, this paper will provide a clear explanation to determine how a surau is granted the same legal status as a mosque and how a surau is not granted the same legal status as a mosque.

Definition of Mosque

Masjid from linguistically originates from word *sajada* which is prostration and place that is done prostration from limbs body human is named masjid (Fayyumi, 2010). Whereas masjid according to term shariah means what that is endowed by endower as masjid not as place rest or school (asy-Syarqawi, 2013). Whether is established in it Friday Congregational Prayer or not, according to shariah term in madhhab Shafi'i, place that is endowed as masjid is ruled as masjid. As for masjid that is established in it Friday is named as jami' (Jamal, 1996). This can be understood in books fiqh Shafi'i when they discuss about place that can be done I'tikaf in it

Among books those is Fath al-Wahhab by Shaykh Zakariya al-Ansari (2017) he states that place that can be done i'tikaf is masjid and not valid in other than it even if is provided that place for prayer and jami' more primary than all masjid that not jami' because many number congregation in it. This so that he not needs to go out from it to perform Friday Congregational Prayer and go out from disagreement that obligates I'tikaf in jami'

As for land that is not endowed as a mosque, such as land that is owned or rented, even if it is named as a mosque, then it is not ruled as a mosque. This can be understood from the books of fiqh of the Shafi'i madhhab such as *I'lam al-Sajid bi Ahkam al-Masajid*, that the waqf must be pronounced for land or building that is endowed as a mosque. He also mentions a disagreement within the Shafi'i madhhab if someone says, "I make this area a mosque," without stating the waqf wording. *Hasyiyah al-Bujayrimi on Fath al-Wahhab*, written by Shaykh Sulaiman bin Muhammad al-Bujayrimi (2011), states that I'tikaf is not valid in a mosque whose land is owned by someone or rented. The same matter is stated by Jamal (1996) in his gloss on *Sharh al-Minhaj*, that i'tikaf is not valid in a mosque whose land is rented. In agreement with this is what is mentioned by al-Haitami (2000) in his book *al-Minhaj al-Qayyim*, commentary on *al-Muqaddimah al-Hadramiyah*:

ولا في مسجد أرضه مستأجرة

Translation: *Not valid in a mosque whose land is rented.*

Likewise, al-Ansari (2001) in his book *Asna al-Matalib* says that i'tikaf is not valid on land that is rented. This is because, according to them, among the pillars of i'tikaf is that the place of i'tikaf must be a mosque, and it is not valid to do it outside of a mosque. It is narrated from A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of the Messenger of Allah, that the Messenger of Allah did not perform i'tikaf except in a mosque, and this matter is agreed upon by the scholars (Jamal, 1996).

Then it is understood here that land which is owned or rented is not ruled as a mosque even if it is named a mosque. This is because what is ruled as a mosque is what is endowed as a mosque, whether it is land or a building. Therefore, what is stated by al-Zarkashi (1996) in *I'lam al-Sajid*, that in terms of shariah, every place on the face of the earth is a mosque based on the saying of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ:

جعلت لي الأرض مسجدا¹

Translation: *The surface of the earth has been made for me as a mosque.*

This is about the speciality of this ummah compared to the previous ummahs. The people before would pray only in places where they were certain of its purity. As for the ummah of Muhammad, they can perform prayer anywhere on the surface of the earth except in a place that they are certain is impure. Therefore, the definition given by al-Zarkashi is not for the purpose of ruling a place as a mosque, because he already mentioned earlier that what is ruled as a mosque is what is endowed by the owner as a mosque.

¹ Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Ismail, Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Prayer (Kitab al-Salat), Chapter: Chapters on Mosques, Hadith No: 427.

This is further strengthened by the statement of al-Ghazali (1995) in his fatwa, stating that the prayer place built for Eid prayer outside the state area is not ruled as a mosque in the issue of i'tikāf and the presence of a person in major ritual impurity in it and other rulings, because mosque is what is prepared for performing obligatory prayers continuously in it. Even to preserve the sanctity of the mosque, it is not permitted for a person in major impurity and a menstruating woman to enter and remain long in the mosque that is endowed without specification of the part of land endowed as a mosque (al-Bujayrimi, 2011). Based on the fatwa of the Selangor Mufti Department that was gazetted on 30 August 2021, it has been stated that women who are menstruating and in postnatal bleeding are not permitted to remain seated in the mosque even solely for learning purposes. This matter was also decided by the 49th Muzakarah of the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia, which convened on 19 September 2000, that women in the state of menstruation are prohibited from being or sitting in the mosque even for the purpose of learning and religious programs.

Worship Acts Specifically Performed in the Mosque

There are certain acts of worship specifically designated to be performed in the mosque. Al-Ansari (2001) mentioned in his book Asna al-Matalib:

والطواف والاعتكاف تحيته إلا للمسجد العبادات من شيء يفتقر ولا

Translation: *No act of worship specifically requires a mosque except Tahiyatul Masjid, I'tikaf, and Tawaf.*

Hence, all these worship acts can only be performed in a mosque and are invalid if performed elsewhere. (Al-Ansari, 2014).

1. I'tikaf

It is unanimously agreed (ijma') that I'tikaf is invalid if performed outside a mosque. (Al-Ansari, 2001). Allah Almighty says in Surah al-Baqarah verse 187:

أَلَمْ تَسْجُدْ لِرَبِّكَ فِي الْعِصْيَانِ وَأَنْتَ مُرْتَابِعٌ بِأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَبْتَغُونَ ۚ وَمَا تَدْعُوهُ إِلَّا لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْفَاسِقِينَ

Translation: *And do not have relations with your wives while you are observing I'tikaf in the mosques*

Since the verse specifically mentions mosques, the specification of mosques indicates that being in a mosque is a condition for the validity of I'tikaf. This is because the prohibition of intimate relations applies specifically during I'tikaf, which is valid only in the mosque. (Ar-Ramli, 1994; Jamal, 1996).

2. Tahiyatul Masjid

Tahiyatul Masjid is a recommended (sunnah) prayer performed by someone entering a mosque who is in a state of ritual purity (free from hadath) and intends to sit therein. (Al-Ansari, 2017). Its ruling is sunnah by consensus (ijma'). (An-Nawawi, 2001). This is based on the hadith of Abu Qatadah narrated by al-Bukhari (2016), where the Prophet ﷺ said:

ركعتين يصلي حتى يجلس فلا المسجد أحدكم دخل إذا

Translation: *When one of you enters the mosque, let him not sit down until he prays two rak'ahs*

Therefore, it is only performed in the mosque as a form of honoring it since, according to Islamic jurisprudence (Shariah), tahiyah (greeting) refers to acts performed to honor something. (Ad-Dimyati, 1995).

3. Tawaf

As for Tawaf, it is specifically performed at al-Masjid al-Haram and nowhere else. Tawaf serves as Tahiyatul Bait (greeting for the Ka'bah), thus one begins with Tawaf upon entering al-Masjid al-Haram. (Al-Haitami, 2000). Al-Harari (2022), in discussing the conditions for Tawaf, stated that Tawaf must be performed within the

mosque, even if it takes place on the mosque's roof, higher than the Ka'bah, or separated from the Ka'bah by a barrier. The mosque referred to is not restricted to the original boundaries existing during the Prophet's time but includes the expanded boundaries existing currently or at the time of performing Tawaf. (Jamal, 1996). Thus, if the mosque area expands through land waqf (endowment) adjacent to it, such expansions are considered part of al-Masjid al-Haram, provided they remain within the sacred precinct (haram). (Al-Bujairimi, 2011).

Definition of Surau or Musolla

Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka defines surau as a building used for Islamic worship but smaller than a mosque. In Arabic, it is called musolla, meaning a place for prayer or supplication (Fayyumi, 2010). According to al-Mu'jam al-Wasit, musolla refers to a prayer place or anything made to pray upon, such as a mat or similar.

Samih Ali (2020) explains that the word musolla has several meanings:

1. A specific prayer spot within a mosque

For example, the imam's prayer area, referenced in Surah al-Baqarah verse 125:

مُصَلًّىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَقَامٍ مِّنْ أَتَىٰ وَاتَّخَذُ وَابًا ۖ وَأَمَّا لَدِ اللَّهِ نَاسٌ مَّتَابِعَةٌ ۚ لَّيْسَ لَنَا جَعْلٌ وَلَا دَلِيلٌ

Translation: *And when We made the House a place of return and safety for the people, and take the Maqam of Ibrahim as a musolla*

A hadith from Sahl bin Saad as-Sa'idi mentions:

الشاة² ممر الجدار وبين وسلم عليه الله صلى الله رسول صلى بين كان

Translation: *Between the musolla of the Prophet and the wall was merely the space of a sheep's path*

2. A gathering place for Eid prayers

This is based on the hadith of Ummu 'Atiyyah narrated by al-Bukhari, stating the Prophet ﷺ instructed women, including menstruating ones, to attend the musolla for Eid prayers but remain separate from praying Muslims.

3. A designated prayer spot within a home

This as narrated by al-Bukhari concerning 'Itban bin Malik, a blind companion who requested the Prophet ﷺ to pray at a specific place in his home, making it a musolla for blessings.

However, Imam al-Nawawi (2001), in al-Majmu', defined musolla as:

قَطَعَ وَيَهِي الْمَذْهَبِ عَلَى وَالْحَائِضِ يُبَاحُ عَلَى فِيهِ الْمُكْتَبُ يَحْرُمُ لَا يَمَسُّجٍ ۚ لَيْسَ الَّذِي وَغَيْرِهِ لِلْعِيدِ الْمُتَّخَذُ الْمُصَلَّى الْجُمُحُورُ

Translation: *Musolla used for Eid prayers and others, not designated as a mosque, does not prohibit the junub or menstruating woman from staying therein according to Shafi'i's madhhab, and this is the view established by the majority*

Thus, surau or musolla does not hold the status of a mosque in Islamic jurisprudence since a prayer area need not be specifically endowed as a mosque. The Prophet ﷺ allowed menstruating women to attend musolla for Eid prayers but prohibited their entry into mosques, as narrated by Abu Daud (1996):

² Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Ismail. n.d. Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Prayer (Kitab al-Salat), Chapter: Chapters on Mosques, Hadith No: 474.

إني لا أحل المسجد لحائض ولا جنب³

Translation: Indeed, I do not permit menstruating women and junub individuals to enter the mosque

Table 1: Comparison Between Mosque and Surau/Musolla

Mosque	Surau / Musolla
Land or building endowed as a mosque	Land or building prepared for people to pray on it without endowment as a mosque
Recommended to perform tahiyyatul masjid and i'tikaf when inside it	I'tikaf and tahiyyatul masjid are not valid in it
It is prohibited for a person in major impurity and menstruating or postpartum woman to remain in it	Person in major impurity and menstruating or postpartum woman are not prohibited from staying inside; rather, encouraged to gather for Eid sermons
Buying and selling is prohibited inside it	Buying and selling is not prohibited inside it

Ruling on Designating a Musolla as a Mosque

Regarding areas known as mosques but built on land not endowed (waqf) as a mosque, such as mosques constructed on rented or privately owned land, can they be legally considered mosques? Jamal (1996), in his commentary on Sharh Minhaj, stated that rented land could be converted into a mosque if a raised platform (dakkah or mastabah) is constructed on it and endowed as a mosque.

This follows the opinion of Shafi'i scholars who assert that it is valid to endow either the upper or lower part separately. Al-Haitami (2000), explaining one condition for valid I'tikaf, clarified that if land is rented and a raised structure is built upon it and endowed as a mosque, then performing I'tikaf therein is valid. Al-Banjari (2019) similarly stated that if a raised platform or construction is made on land and endowed as a mosque, the structure alone (excluding the land) is treated as a mosque.

Al-Ansari (2001) indicated that rented land, when a raised structure (mastabah) is built on it and endowed as a mosque, acquires the ruling of a mosque. However, Imam az-Zarkashi's view that I'tikaf is valid in a mosque built on rented land without a raised platform is not adopted within the Shafi'i school, as highlighted by Sheikh Zakariya al-Ansari in Asna al-Matalib.



Example of Mastabah

³ As-Sijistani, Abu Dawud Sulaiman ibn al-Ash'ath. 1996. Sunan Abi Dawud; Book of Purification; Chapter on the One in a State of Major Ritual Impurity (Junub) Entering the Mosque, Hadith No: 232.



Example of Dakkah

Implications for Surau or Musolla Designated as Mosques

A surau or musolla area designated as a mosque acquires all the legal rulings applicable to mosques. Therefore, worship activities specifically mandated to be performed in a mosque may also be performed in such surau or musolla since they are legally considered mosques. Consequently, activities such as I'tikaf and Tahiyatul Masjid prayers are permissible therein, just as they would be in a traditional mosque.

Moreover, it becomes prohibited for individuals in certain states—such as those experiencing menstruation (haid) or in a state of major ritual impurity (junub)—to remain in the area. (An-Nawawi, 2013). This ruling is derived from the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ narrated by Abu Daud (1996):

إني لا أحل المسجد لحائض ولا جنب⁴

Translation: *Indeed, I do not permit menstruating women and junub individuals to enter the mosque*

An exception to this ruling applies to non-Muslim individuals in a state of junub, who may remain inside the mosque for extended periods if their presence serves a beneficial purpose, provided they have the permission of Muslims. (Al-Harari, 2022). Nonetheless, to maintain the sanctity of the mosque, it is generally prohibited for junub individuals and menstruating women to enter or remain for an extended time in areas endowed as mosques. (Al-Bujairimi, 2011).

However, it is permitted for a junub individual to cross through the mosque, entering from one door and exiting from another, without any dislike (makruh), as mentioned by Al-Banjari (2019). This ruling aligns with Allah's statement in Surah an-Nisa' verse 43:

نَ غَسِّلُوا حَتَّى سَيِّئِ لَّ عَابِرِي إِيَّا جُنُبًا وَلَا

Translation: *And do not approach prayer places (mosques) while you are in a state of junub, except when passing through, until you have purified yourselves*

Contrarily, it is prohibited for women experiencing menstruation (haid) or post-partum bleeding (nifas) to cross mosque areas if there is a risk of contamination. (Al-Hadrami, 2020). If a woman is certain there is no risk of contaminating the mosque, she may cross the area from one door to another, although it remains disliked (makruh), as noted by Ar-Ramli (1994) in his book Ghayah al-Bayan sharh Zubad Ibni Raslan. As-Sa'dai explains that the prohibition is not merely related to cleanliness issues but rather the inherent state of ritual impurity of menstruating or post-partum women. (Fatimah, 2011)

^{4 4} As-Sijistani, Abu Dawud Sulaiman ibn al-Ash'ath. 1996. Sunan Abi Dawud; Book of Purification; Chapter on the One in a State of Major Ritual Impurity (Junub) Entering the Mosque. Hadith No: 232.

CONCLUSION

It is understood here that a musolla or surau built on privately owned land or within a building can be designated as a mosque and thus acquire all the legal rulings applicable to mosques. Therefore, a musolla constructed on land owned by developers or general waqf (endowment) intended for Muslim use can have its building endowed as a mosque, even if the land itself is not endowed as such. Similarly, for a musolla located inside a building, a fixed platform or flooring can be installed and endowed as a mosque. This endowed area then legally becomes a mosque and inherits all mosque rulings. Anyone entering and remaining within the area designated as a mosque can perform Tahiyatul Masjid prayers and subsequently intend to perform I'tikaf after their prayers.

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