

DOCUMENTATION OF MODERN DA'WAH MOSQUE IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to document mosques owned by the da'wah (Tabligh) group in Malaysia from 1950 until present context. This is because Tabligh da'wah movement is considered as the most prominent group in spreading Islamic ideology in Malaysian Muslim society. This study focuses on two prominent Tabligh mosques as case study to show the importance of da'wah ideology in Malaysia (Masjid Seri Petaling and Masjid India). Since this paper formulates new ways to approach mosque design and cultural study, it applies case study research as strategy and combines various paradigms involving (structuralism and interpretivism) as well as adopts methodologies like (semiotics and hermeneutics) to study the contextual of the mosque setting. For data collection, this study uses observation and literature review method. This study is vital as it offers new insights by formulating new design and example of good character of mosque that builds and manages by the group that hold on to the Sunnah and Al-Quran principles. It also adds to new knowledge in architectural field by widening and strengthening the understanding of religious belief and Islamic architecture in the Muslim world.

1.0 Introduction

Mosque is a place where individual or group prostrate oneself towards the Qiblah. In Islamic religion mosque typically is not functioned as place of worship but also serves for multi-function purposes relating to daily Muslim activities (Amira M. & Hasanuddin L., 2008). Many past literatures on mosques however focus on the historical aspect of the mosque design involving the style and typological classification (M. Tajuddin R., Alice S.I., 2008, etc). Even though there are studies done by past scholars which elucidates on the aspect of patronage ideological influence on mosque design focusing on dominant political leaders on modern mosques (Alice S.I. 2008) and ulama perspective on

traditional mosque design (Nangkula, 2012), but there is no studies done explaining on the influence of prominent da'wah group in Malaysia and their mosque design. To fulfil the research gap, this paper will focus on the most prominent da'wah¹ group in Malaysia which is Tabligh movement and will elucidate on how their Islamic ideology influence the architectural design of their mosque from the aspect of form and spatial organization. This da'wah group is chosen due to their traditionalist thinking in spreading the message of Islam who refers much to Quran and As-Sunnah as well as portraying active communal life by utilizing mosque as a dominant centre to spread the teaching of Islam to Malaysian society.

2.0 Historical development of Da'wah group in Malaysia (Traditionalist ideology and Tabligh movement)

The Islamic missionary movement in Malaysia can be categorized in three different groups which are the traditionalist, modernist and reformist with different background of Islamic ideological belief and approaches (Abdul Rahman A., 2007). Amongst these three dominant groups, the traditionalist movement pioneered by the Tabligh is the most dominant one in Malaysia from the early period of its establishment in the 1950's up till now. This Tabligh group adopts traditional methods in spreading their Islamic ideology which much refers to the Sunnah or the practice of the prophet. The development of Tabligh in Malaysia can be divided into three phases which started when Maulana Abdul Malik Madani came to Singapore and Selangor for 'khuruj'. The first phase is known as the entry and participation phase (Ahmad Henry R.A.A., 2010) where the da'wah group much comprises of Indian Muslims from India including those who had long settled in Malaysia. To promote their ideology to

¹ Da'wah (Tabligh) is deliver, invite, invites people to understand Islam or call people towards good and forbid evil (amar is right, and prohibit evil) (Yayasan dakwah islamiah Malaysia, 2009)

local society they establish a centre to locate their Tabligh group in Malaysia (Farish A N,2007). Masjid India is the first mosque considered as Tabligh 'markaz'. Nevertheless, the first phase of development comes to a halt between years 1953 to 1967 due to massive returns of the Indian Muslim to India. Many scholars' outlines that the first phase of Tabligh movement is at a fragile stage since many of their followers comes from low status communities. The 1970's mark the second phase of Tabligh group when it becomes a popular Islamic group in Malaysia, joined by the high status Malay Muslims (A.Fauzi abd.H,2009). This phase shows the spread of the Tabligh to northern parts of Malaysia when they spread their teaching to Penang and convinced Hafiz Yaaqob to join Tabligh. He joined Tabligh setting up 'markaz' at Masjid Benggali and madrasah ManabiulUhum, Bukit Mertajam. Following that, the group then began to spread their teaching to the east part of Malaysia namely in Kelantan and Terengganu and few of 'ijtima' have been organized to strengthen the organisation. Masjid Kubang Kerian then is chosen as early 'markaz' in the eastern region and was later changed to madrasah Dusun Raja. The final phase of this group namely in the 1990's presented some resistance from the ruling government due to individual perspectives who associated this group with the opposition Islamic party. Despite this resistance, the group still remains strong and is well accepted by the society due to its establishment that fully stresses on Islamic practice according to the Sunnah which devoid involvement in politics or worldly matters. In this regard, a centralized markaz was constructed on a wakaf land at Seri Petaling known as Masjid Jamek Seri Petaling(A.Henry R.A.A, 2010).

3.0 Historical development of religious builtform by Tabligh group

History of *Tabligh* movement in Malaysia much centred within the 'markaz' built form. This 'Markaz' is comprised of a mosque, *madrasa*, *musolla*, hall and other religious facilities. For the benefit of this paper, this study will only focuses on the construction of the mosque. The Jemaah Tabligh conducts its activities by promoting the Islamic teaching through da'wah process and invites the public to engage with mosque activities (A.Fauzi abd.H,2009). The Tabligh 'markaz' spreads throughout Malaysia and are located at various zones and districts. This strategic placement of this 'markaz' are vital to ensure that their da'wah movement can be spread throughout the Malaysian region (Ahmad Henry R.A.A.,2010).These zones can be classified into 4 main zones which are the north zone(Penang, North Perak ,Kedah , Perlis), the middle zone(K.Lumpur, Selangor ,south Perak, Negeri Sembilan), the east zone(Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang) and the south zone(Johor Bahru, Melaka, Singapura.).

From the conducted preliminary studies, it is found that role of mosque differs depending on its

ownership like mosque that is originally built by the Tabligh group, managed or inhabited by the group. Nonetheless, the most dominant mosque is located in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor since these two areas are the focal place where the growth of Indian Muslim society is predominantly well established in Malaysia. The most significant mosque that have dominant influence for the Tabligh group in Malaysia are the Masjid India(1950), Masjid Benggali (1970), Masjid Kubang Kerian(1984), Masjid Buluh Gading (1970)and Masjid Seri Petaling(1993). Even though these mosques had been identified as the most significant mosque in the history of the Tabligh movement, some of these mosques however are no longer utilized as their markaz.

4.0 Method of study

This research is conducted based on primary and secondary data collection. Since the research is to investigate the establishment of Tabligh mosque, it will adopt qualitative research by using case study as research strategy. Method for data collection will adopt observation and literature review. Data obtained from these two methods then are reviewed and analysed. The compilation of data will be done through discussion.

5.0 Case study of mosques owned by da'wah (Tabligh) group

For the benefit of this study, two mosque has been chosen as they are the most significant mosques and markaz during the development of Tabligh group in Malaysia. In addition these mosques also play an important role in spreading the da'wah movement in the country. These mosques are the Masjid Seri Petaling and Masjid India.

5.1 Historical background of the two selected mosques

History of Masjid India dates back to 1863 when it was built on a plot of land that has been awarded by the Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Alaeddin Sulaiman Shah to an Indian Muslim traders known as Mohamad Kassim. Mohammad Kassim then built the mosque using collection funds obtained from the Indian Muslim communities who settled in Kuala Lumpur area. The original mosque structure was made of wood, and in later years it was replaced by brick work construction. With the increasing number of Indian Muslim community around Klang Valley, this mosque was upgraded several times for the purpose of accommodating the pilgrims and the activities organized by the mosque. It is estimated that 3,500 pilgrims perform Friday prayers at the mosque, and the preacher will deliver a sermon in Tamil(Aladdin M.,2003). The Masjid India is also recognised by many historians as the oldest mosque in Kuala Lumpur due to its unique historical background. In 1952, due to its

popularity among Muslim Indian community the Jemaat Tabligh group who is also dominated by the same ethnic group managed to convince the mosque committee to join the *Tabligh group*. As a result, Masjid India became the main *markaz of Tabligh* till 1992. Due to the limited land space and restricted mosque size to accommodate the growing numbers of Tabligh members the group then decided to move their markaz to a new mosque located at Seri Petaling which currently known as Masjid Seri Petaling (A. Henry R.A.A, 2010).



Seri Petaling mosque was built in 1985 on 8.4 acres of land with an area that has been approved by the religion of Islam. The cost of this mosque is approximately RM3 million and was built by the Tabligh group. The mosque is the main markaz Tabligh in Malaysia and was formally officiated in 1993. This mosque is well equipped with facilities for the benefits of its members and the Muslim community (Ahmad Henry R.A.A., 2010).

6.0 Discussion

To answer the objective of this paper, the discussion will focus on comparative analysis conducted on the mosque building form involving façade design, detailing (structural element and ornamentation), as well as building setting and scale through preliminary studies.

Mosque built form

Façade is the most dominant element that may reflect the architectural identity of the mosque. Based on the conducted analysis from observation it indicates that the two mosques portray minimal design representation on its building façade. However, the façade of Indian mosque shows common features of Islamic architecture in India like the multi-foil arches (Hasan, P, 1994), with glass opening for day lighting and ventilation. Façade of masjid India however seems to be more decorative compared to masjid Seri Petaling. Seri Petaling had the same architectural style of India, pointed arch layer with glass opening for ventilation. Both façade have influence of Indo-Islamic architecture. It can be said that the simplistic representation of Seri Petaling mosque is due to the later development of the Tabligh group in which they more emphasis on moderateness referring to the practice of the prophet (Farish A N, 2007). The usage of the detailing at the masjid Petaling façade are all functional and not served as decorative purposes Both mosques portrays similar arrangement of opening placed in hierarchal and repetitive manner to maximise the entry of natural lighting and ventilation into the interior building. The Indian mosque however, much

reflects the Mughal architectural style borrowed from India which uses maroon tiles finishes (Hasan, P, 1994) to have an outstanding outlook. Scholars like Shampa M & Mazumdar (2004) describe that this is due to the social political factors occurring in the 1950's as many migrated Indian Muslim brought in their culture including architectural style from India to the Malay states. In other words, the newly migrated people have tendency to have emotional and effecting bonding to



their origin and this is well reflected in their daily life including the built environment. In general, it can be summarised that, both mosques shows element of moderateness in its design form as the Tabligh group professes moderate belief parallel with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Detailing

Both mosques portray more or less similar detailing features. For instance, both mosques have dome structure but differ in numbers and in various sizes. For instance, Masjid India has many minarets and is tipped with multiple domes but Masjid Petaling is only covered with a single dome placed on top of the main prayer hall. The dome structure at Masjid India is onion in shaped and influenced by North Indian style similar to many mosques structure found in India (M. Tajuddin R., 2007). Both mosques are constructed using post and beam structure. Both mosques use medium span structure to accommodate large prayer spaces for the main hall. The Petaling mosque however is designed with sustainable features where the dome structure has mechanical fan to extract heat from the mosque interior. In addition, the Petaling mosque is covered with wooden ceiling panel in the interior prayer hall to reduce hot temperature inside since it absorbs the heat gain.

Setting

Both of the mosques are located in different settings and are influenced by various external factors. Masjid India for example is located in the middle of urban city (Aladdin M., 2003) whilst Seri Petaling mosque is placed in a suburban context within the residential area. The placement of the Masjid India was strategically



located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur due to historical factors. Scholars states that Masjid India was namely influenced by the Indian traders who often passed by the area for trading matters in the city area(Aladdin M.,2003).. To accommodate their needs namely to perform friday prayers they built the mosque for da'wah activities and religious purposes. In contrast to Indian mosque, the placement of the Seri Petaling mosque was decided to be on a piece of land reserved by the government. Nonetheless, the Petaling mosque is located within walking distance from the surrounding residential area and existing communal facilities. In brief, both mosques have strong communal features in which they are built near to communal settlements.

Scale

Both mosques portray proportionate mosque scale that blends in with existing surrounding. According to M.Tajuddin R(2010) if a building is designed in appropriate scale it will show strong relations with human and much functional in terms of building size and depth. The building size and depth moreover will determine the spatial density and building organization (Luluk maschula,2012). From observation, Masjid Seri Petaling is designed with large void area which is double volume at the main prayer hall to accommodate 10,000 worshippers during congregation and dawah activities. Even though the mosque has a large interior space it has large scale of openings to allow natural lighting into the main hall. From the mosque planning layout, all the scale of interior spaces are arranged appropriately in hierarchical manner according to the functions and needs of the Jemaah Tabligh. Masjid india on the other hand, undergone various phases of construction to meet the needs of the surrounding community. This mosque was built in terraces to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims. This is due to the constraint of land in urban areas that limits the enlargement of mosque size and spaces. In sum, both Tabligh mosque are humble in scale and did not dominates the surrounding area. The scale of openings and architectural elements are proportionate in size with no overwhelming decorative elements.

7.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, both Tabligh mosques have moderate architectural style and features that relevant to the teachings of prophet which emphasis on humility, moderateness and devoid of wastefulness. Even though there maybe differences in terms of mosques setting but it due to contextual setting during the construction of the mosque.

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