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The Salman Mosque: Achmad Noe'man's Critique of Indonesian Conventional Mosque Architecture

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Abstract. The Salman Mosque, designed by Achmad Noe'man, was a striking Islamic architectural design in the 1960s when it was built. Unlike the conventional mosques, particularly in Indonesia, it has no dome. Instead, the roof was made of prestressed concrete and resembles a canoe. Using data drawn from field observations, this paper explores the architectural characteristics of the Salman Mosque as a product of Modern architecture. It argues that the domeless mosque, the simple minaret, the wooden wall panels and floor, the women's balcony, and the roof demonstrate architectural modernism, as opposed to the conventional mosque typology that flourished in Indonesia at the time. This paper further argues that the Salman Mosque is Noe'man's critique of the Indonesian conventional mosque architecture. It concludes that the architectural features of the Salman Mosque reflects Noe'man's modern vision of Islam and Islamic architecture.

1. Introduction

Completed in 1964, the Salman Mosque was an outstanding architectural masterpiece of Achmad Noe'man. Being domeless, it was strikingly different from the existing Indonesian mosques. A number of studies have extensively explored both the Salman Mosque and Noe'man's visions on Islamic architecture. Ekomadyo discusses Noe'man's vision of mosque architecture and argues that Noe'man is a modernist, as demonstrated in his architecture[1]. The architectural design reflects the Islamic concepts, as applied on the selection of the building form and materials[2]. Meanwhile, Dhewiyanti and Budi focus on the design of the mosque as the pioneer of a campus mosque in Indonesia [3]. Despite the studies on Noeman's architecture and the Salman Mosque, there is very little we know about its connection to the Indonesian mosque architecture and its history as a whole.

Discussing the Salman Mosque's architecture, this article focuses not merely on how its design reflects Noe'man's interpretation of modern Islam, but also on how the mosque has served as his critique of the Indonesian conventional mosque architecture. It further argues that Noe'man's understanding of the modern Islam has contributed to his conception of what a mosque architecture is, while critiquing the ubiquitous perception among Muslims of what a mosque should look like.

2. Method

In researching the Salman Mosque, we used a qualitative approach. This approach was selected to allow us to look at the mosque in depth. Data on the mosque architecture was collected using field observation of the mosque architecture. It was documented in architectural drawings.

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Figure 1. The Inscription of Salman Mosque History

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Description

The Salman Mosque is located on Jalan Ganesha Bandung, West Java. The site is located on the east campus of ITB and beside ganesha park. The mosque's inscription mentions that the planning and design of the Salman Mosque was completed in 1962 (Fig 1). The existence of the mosque as a center of worship for Muslims is required at that time, because at the first time all religious activities including prayers held in the West Hall which is not able to accommodate more pilgrims. With an image created by Achmad Noe'man, the lecturers, students, and communities seeking support to build the mosque, one awarded by the President when he received envoys from Bandung in the national palace. Other support provided by the vice president of Bung Hatta, former Prime Minister Muhammad Natsir, General A.H. Nasution, the Ambassador of other countries and other community leaders. In 2002 the central government and the Government of Bandung revitalized the Ganesha Park and its surrounding areas, including making a pedestrian ways along the east park, and paving the Ganesha ways.

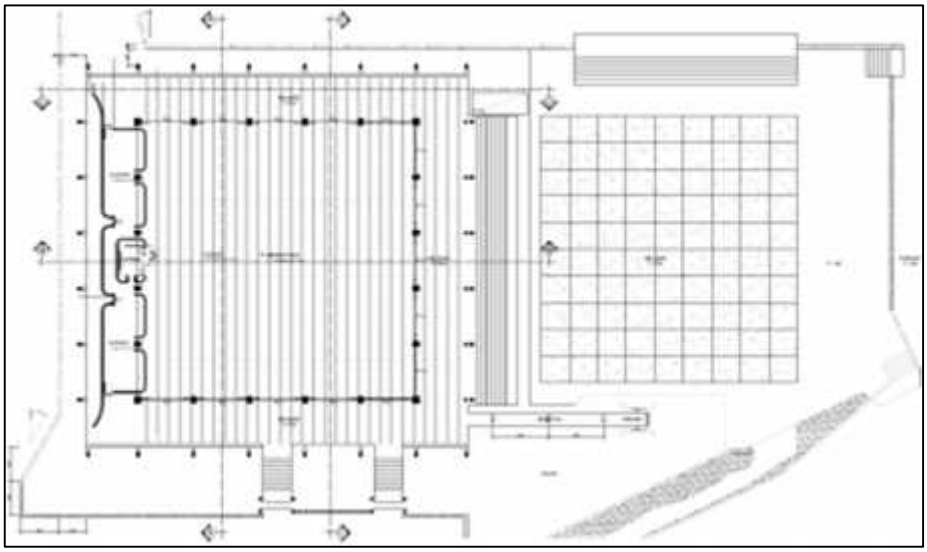


Figure 2. Floor Plan of the Salman Mosque

The size of the plan is 25 x 25 meters, it is very effective and efficient to use as the main hall to pray because all part of plan can be used. This relates to idom of modern architecture that form follows function, square shape make the main hall does not need any border (Fig 2).

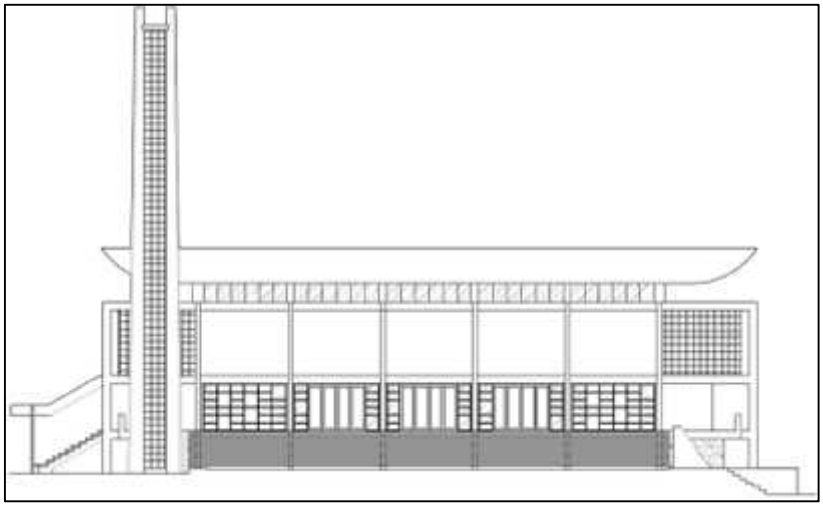


Figure 3. East Façade of the Salman Mosque

The building looks like a platonic solid form, a shape that show one of the characteristics of modern architecture (Fig 3). The column structures were exposed to show the impression of not massive buildings. The minaret was designed in harmony with the building, the materials made of *krawangan,* minimalist design without any ornament, and a simple shape. Although the existence of the minaret is not found in Islam, Achmad Noe'man has a very rational thinking that the existence of the minaret serves to expand the sound of *adzan* [2].

3.1. The Indonesian Conventional Mosque Architecture

The existence of a conventional mosque at that time have a relation to assimilation of Hindu-Buddhist culture, it is a tolerance of islam when entered in Indonesia, it mean the conventional approach of architecture mosque is with assimilation of Hindu-Buddisht architecture. This can be seen in some part of the conventional mosque at that time. For example use of three lever roof with the top point above is the same as Bali mero.

Until the late 19th century, Indonesian mosques were constructed in a vernacular style with Hindu-Buddhist multi-tiered pyramidal roof. Wood was selected as the material that can respond well to the local condition. The persistence of indigenous buildings had to take into account the local profusion of natural resources and variable climates, resulting in exuberant and diverse architectural styles. Elements associated with Islamic architecture elsewhere, such as the dome and geometric ornament, are not recognized in this tradition. Multi-tiered roofs are the most suitable for tropical weather against heavy rain and humidity. Additionally, the *soko guru* supports the uppermost roof, separating it from the double-layered outer roof, to admit light and to allow ventilation of the prayer hall [4].

The main character of convensional mosque have a square plan with the building standing on a raised massive floor covered by a multilevel roof that ends in a point. There are four main posts supporting the upper roof. The mosque proper is either surrounded or extended in the front by a roofed veranda calles *serambi*. A mosque and its serambi are encircled respectively by water, open space, and an enclosing wall [5].

In Javanese context, heaven and wholeness have been represented by the one-point pyramidal roof, which suggests a strong central power commanding its four quarters. In the interior of convensional mosque usually use a caligraphy of quran or an ornament. Of those aforementioned features, the square plan, multi level floor, and walled enclosure can be found in the strcuture of remaining Hindu-Javanese temples [6].

Later Indonesian Mosques begin to include domes on their roof. The domes are widely embraced as a mandatory element of a mosque. Even in the case of traditional mosques a small dome, most of them were made of aluminum, was added to the top of the roof or the top of minarate.

3.2. The Salman Mosque as a Critique of the Indonesian Conventional Mosque Architecture

When it was constructed in 1964, the architecture of the Salman Mosque was unusual. The Indonesian mosques at that time dominantly followed the traditional mosque style as modelled in the Demak Great Mosque.

In the early 1960s Indonesia, mosque architecture dominantly featured *atap tajug tumpang tiga* (three-tiered pyramidal roof). Newer mosques used domes, either on their main roof or as an additional feature on the pre-existing minaret. Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, who commissioned the Indonesia's state mosque Istiqlal, clearly stated that he did not want to build a mosque that resembled the Demak Great Mosque (1482) or the Banten Great Mosque (1570). His perception of "modern" architecture features the dome, as opposed to the traditional three-tiered pyramidal roof, and marble and concrete, instead of woods [4]. This was reflected in the architecture of the Istiqlal Mosque (the competition was held in 1955, the construction began in 1961 and was completed in 1978), designed by F. Silaban. Comprising a five-storey domed prayer hall with an area of 36,980 sq. m and a domed entrance gallery of 5,000 sq.m, the Istiqlal Mosque was a state-endorsed "modern" mosque architecture. Silaban decided to express the image of a modern architecture, which Sukarno utilized as a tool to make an impression of a modern nation [5]. It was mainly constructed using white concrete walls and columns, marble floors, and white enormous concrete domes.

The Salman Mosque was erected several years upon the initiation of the Istiqlal Mosque construction. The name "Salman", dedicated to Prophet Muhammad's companion Salman Al Farisi, was President Sukarno's idea, which was granted during the construction team's visit to the Presidential Palace in 1964 [3]. The use of concrete and marble confirms Sukarno's modernity as found in the Istiqlal Mosque as well. However, the absence of a dome in the mosque clearly demonstrates Noe'man's radical challenge against both Sukarno's interpretation of modernity and the widely embraced idea of a mosque, which

should include a dome. His architecture was said to be influenced by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and other Modern architects [1]. Like these architects who stood against ornaments, he believed that beauty comes out of simplicity.

4. Conclusion

Achmad Noe'man's Salman Mosque appeared uniquely in its establishment in 1962. It have no dome and dominantly is made of concrete. It follows Sukarno's guidelines of modernity while challenging the use of dome, which was endorsed by the first Indonesian president in the Istiqlal Mosque.

The Salman Mosque rejects the ubiquitous features found in conventional Indonesian mosques. It uses neither a dome nor a three-tiered pyramidal roof. Neither has it a calligraphy on the wall. The use of pre-stressed concrete to change a three-tired pyramidal roof is more effective, because it allows the absence of columns, resulting in the maximum space of the prayer hall without the breaking of *shaf*. The honesty of the design was applied in the use of wooden wall panels and floors. The beauty is projected by the natural appearance of the materials.

The architecture of the Salman Mosque reflects Achmad Noe'man's understanding of the modern architecture, which he believes is in line with the modern Islamic vision. He believes that a mosque has to prioritize its function first as a place of worship. Therefore, ornaments are not needed.

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