

# The Function of *Surau* in Minangkabau Culture

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**Abstract**—The purpose of the present study is to describe the complexity of the *surau* function in Minangkabau culture society. The subjects of the research were students, alumni, Sheikh who served as teachers and *surau* managers, and key informants consisting of intellectuals, *alim ulama*, *ninik-mamak*, government, and parents. Participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis were used to collect the data. The data were analyzed using the model proposed by Miles and Huberman that consisted of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The findings reveal that the function of *surau* in Minangkabau is not only as a place to study religion but also learn custom, tradition, and *silat*. Thus, it can be concluded that *surau* played a major role in every aspect of Minangkabau.

**Keywords**—function of *surau*; Minangkabau culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

In general, *surau* is understood as a place of worship and a place to carry out all other religious activities such as celebrating New Year for Moslem or *Muharrom*, *Majlis Ta'lim* or studying and discussing Islam which guided by the instructor, and etc. However, the *surau* in Minangkabau is different from the *surau* in several neighboring countries, for example in Malaysia. *Surau* in Malaysia has functions more like a house of worship and studies religion [1]. It is similar to the *musholla* known in Indonesia. Whereas in Minangkabau, *surau* is not only limited to a place of worship, prayer and recitation. *Surau* has been used as a training place to prepare the next generation. In *surau* they are trained and prepared to become individuals who are ready to bear the burden and trust in the future.

Since the beginning of its development, *surau* has given birth to many national figures who contributed to the independence of this nation. They were Mohammad Hatta, the first independence proclamation and the first Deputy President of the Republic of Indonesia. Then, H. Agussalim, a diplomatic figure, and Sutan Syahrir, an intellectual, pioneer and revolutionary for Indonesian independence. After Indonesian independence, he became a politician and the first prime minister in Indonesia. They all have learned at *Surau*. It can be concluded that *surau* has been successfully prepared Minangkabau people to succeed

In the beginning, *surau* in Minangkabau was used as a place to discuss, gather and meet with the aim of overcoming social problems in the community. This has been around a long time before Islam came. This has also become a tradition for

people there. This activity comes from the cultural roots of the community itself. Then after Islam came, its function was further developed as a place of worship and learning of Islam. In other words, it can be said that *surau* has become a center of education for people in Minangkabau.

Meanwhile, *surau* in Minangkabau culture context has succeeded in bridging the religious and social interests of its people. These two things are strategic contributions of *surau* in the lives of Minangkabau people. This fact makes *surau* an inseparable part of people's lives. *Surau* became the main identity and even identified with the integration of custom and tradition (*adat*) with religion. So religion does not destroy and oppress customs [2], that religion can be used by individuals, groups, and communities in various ways; it can function to oppress or free, to entertain or kill. In the process of lifelong education, this is an effort to improve human welfare and sustainable development [3].

Since *surau* has a great function to develop the people in Minangkabau, it is essential to conduct the research in order to describe the function of *surau* concerning to culture of Minangkabau. And this is also necessary to reveal the existence of *surau* as a local genius that has succeeded in developing in accordance with the dynamics that occur in the development of its community.

A number of studies on *surau* have been discussed by previous researchers. Tunus discussed the concept of traditional education of *surau* Sheikh Burhanuddin Ulakan in West Sumatera, Indonesia [4]. Furthermore, Musparidi conducted a study about the integration of the educational values of *surau* in the transformation of citizenship to develop students character [5]. More specifically, this study discussed the values of *surau* education that can develop the character of students. This study takes place in one of the Boarding Schools in Padang, Indonesia.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study used naturalistic qualitative research. The study was conducted in Padang Pariaman, West Sumatera. The subject of the study were students who get education and training from the *surau*, former students, sheikhs, and the key informants were congregants of *surau*, the people around *surau*, scholars of Islam, Moslem religious teacher, *ninik mamak* (custom leaders) known as "*tigo tungku sajarangan*" and the government. The technique of choosing sample is snowball sampling. The data collection method used

interviews, observations, and documentation. Then, the data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model [6]. The analysis process in this study was carried out in four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Meaning and Function of Surau

*Surau* is the building of the Minangkabau cultural heritage before the arrival of Islam. Usually, *surau* is built in the highest place or at least higher than other buildings. It is believed that in 1356 Raja Adityawarman established the *Surau Buddha* complex around Bukit Gombak. At that time *Surau* was used as a cultural building and customs, which was also used as a place for Hindu-Buddhist rituals. *Surau* is a place to learn customs and traditions, deliberation, and discuss matters that can provide ideal solutions to social problems that occur in the community. Thus it can be understood that before the arrival of Islam, *surau* had used important social structures in Minangkabau society.

When Islam came to Minangkabau, the preachers invited and asked the people persuasively to learn Islam and be part of them at that time. Historically, they did not directly shift the building of *surau* become Islamic holy buildings namely masjid. The original building was still admitted. They tried to change the function and meaning of *surau* to as defined in Islam. After that, it often found in some areas mosque was built nearby *surau* or vice versa. Particularly, it can be found in Pariaman, West Sumatera. We can see Masjid next to *surau*, and the distance both of them is only two meters.

Regarding the custom and traditional system, *surau* was established by a particular community as a complementary building of the *Rumah Gadang* or larger house (traditional house for Minang people). *Rumah Gadang* is a place for descendant's residence. It usually also built on matrilineal land, *ulayat* land (land used communally) provided by the *nagari* (customary territory in Minangkabau) or donated land given by the villagers. But not every *Rumah Gadang* has it, because the existing *surau* can still accommodate young people to spend the night, travelers and merchants if they pass through the village's *surau* and stay overnight on their way. Thus the young people who live and spend the night in *surau* can find out information that is happening outside their village, as well as the situation of life in the overseas. So *surau* has multiple functions because it is an information center and a place for youth socialization.

It can be said that *surau* cannot be separated from traditional units in Minangkabau. More specifically, it can be explained that the *Rumah Gadang* and *Surau* are both customary units in the Minangkabau culture. *Rumah Gadang* plays a major role as a family system tradition. Meanwhile, *surau* was also built as part of religious and community education. As a result, *surau* became part of the community in West Sumatera. This led to the emergence of a policy requiring *surau* to be placed next to the *Rumah Gadang*.

#### B. Classification of Surau and Its Function

In general, there are two categories of *surau* in Minangkabau after the arrival of Islam

- *Surau ketek* (small *surau*) is a *surau* that can accommodate 20 students. Based on the type, *surau ketek* can be divided into two. The first is *surau* which was founded by tribes. This *surau* is similar to the *surau* family (*surau* was built by a large family who lived in *Rumah Gadang*). In other places, it is also called a *langgar* or mosque. This *surau* usually only has one teacher who has the task of being a teacher and priest. *Surau ketek* is the most frequently present in Minangkabau. This type of *surau* has a strong root and position in society, which is known to function as a place to learn to read the *Qur'an*.
- The second type is the *surau ketek* which was established around *surau gadang* which is used as a residence by students who study with a sheikh. This *surau* can be found at the Sheikh Burhanuddin mosque in Ulakan Pariaman, Sheikh Abdurrahman Batuhampar Payakumbuh mosque, the *surau* complex of the Tarbiyah Islamiyah Candung Bukittinggi, the *surau* Tuanku Koto Tuo complex in Koto Tuo Agam, the *surau* Jaho complex in Padang Panjang and the *surau gadang* complex which also organizes education the same as in the Sheikh Burhanuddin mosque
- *Surau Gadang* is a *surau* that can accommodate 80 to 100 students, or more. This *surau* was intentionally built as a place of religious education in the broadest sense. In other words, *surau gadang* does not only function as a place of worship and learning as it applies in *surau ketek*, but more important is that this mosque functions as an activity center or center for religious education activities, where Islam is taught more widely in each aspect to students.

### IV. DISCUSSION

This present study aimed to explore the functions of *Surau* in Minangkabau Culture. *Surau* is a cultural heritage building of Minangkabau people before the arrival of Islam which was built on the highest place. In addition, *surau* is used as a cultural and traditional building and a Hindu-Buddhist ritual. And *surau* is utilized as a place to study customs, tradition and deliberation. *Surau* can be used to learn the custom and tradition.

Basically, there was no change in the function of *surau* in Minangkabau after the entry of Islam. It is still used as a gathering place, meeting, and place to sleep for adult boys, widows, and parents. This function is related to the customary provisions, that men do not have rooms in their own parents' houses (*Rumah Gadang*). *Rumah Gadang* and all its contents for women. This is inseparable from the matrilineal system adopted by the Minangkabau people. Men do not have rooms at home, after *baligh* or adults they will automatically sleep at *surau*. Even if they go home just to eat, and at night they are practically not at home.

It can be emphasized that the function of *surau* before and after Islam came not much different. In the past, people came to *surau* to learn Hindu and Buddhist rituals. While after Islam was present in Minangkabau, they studied the *Qur'an* and other basic knowledge of Islam. However, its function as a place of housing for young people has not changed. Even so, its function was later expanded to become a place to teach and develop Islamic teachings, such as being a place of prayer, a place to learn to read the *Qur'an*, and others. Because *surau* is a center of Islamic education, Minangkabau Muslim boys must experience it to fulfill the basic requirements to become a true Minangkabau and Muslim. They must stay in *surau* to study Islam.

Basically, Islam came to Minangkabau to make every aspect of the community more perfect. It does not conflict with the customs and traditions that have been applied in Minangkabau. In fact, between customs, traditions, and religions have a close relationship, they cannot be separated for Minangkabau people. They are united. This is in accordance with the Minangkabau statement "*adat basandi Syara*", *Syara basandi kitabullah*, which means adat based on religion and religion based on the *Qur'an*. It can be concluded that Minangkabau is Islam. Therefore, customs and religion become the identity of the Minang people. This group's identity is important to know and understand themselves as part of a community group [7].

There are similarities in the principles of traditional teaching with the teachings carried by religion. These principles strengthen traditional teachings with religious and *sharia* teachings. Islam came to make Minangkabau customs and culture perfect, especially in matters of belief (*tauhid*), about the pillars of faith, the pillars of Islam.

In terms of Minangkabau cultural philosophy, *surau* has a very important role in the social structure of society. *Surau* is not only considered a religious institution, but has a function as a transformation of cultural and religious values in society. The form of *surau* function can be seen from the activities carried out. In *surau* not only learn to read the *Qur'an*, but also silat, speeches, lectures, and others. Until now the role of *surau* as the initial and basic institution for Minangkabau children to study the *Qur'an* was maintained [8]. Even *surau* can function in sustainable community empowerment [9].

The role of *surau* is very prominent for the Minangkabau people. Starting from boys, men, widows to old men must stay there to study Islam, customs, traditions, and silat or martial arts. More specifically, the *surau* function based on Minangkabau culture can be explained as follows:

First, *surau* has a function as a place of religious education. Religious education teaches the principles of Islam or *Aqedah* (*tauhid*), noble character and its application in life. Furthermore, religious education also focuses on teaching Islam that is easily understood and practiced. Like learning the *Qur'an*, which consists of introducing letters *hijaiyah*, *tajwid*, interpretation of the *Qur'an*, the art of reading the *Qur'an*. In certain *surau* teaches *tasauif*, *mantik*, *syaraf* and others moreover, in *surau*, Minangkabau youths can learn how to read and write the *Qur'an*, religious knowledge that teaches about *Aqedah*, *shari'ah*, and morals. According to the customs

prevailing in Minangkabau, young people before marriage lived in *surau*, naturally all Minangkabau people at that time were good at reading and writing the *Qur'an* and basically knew religion in its natural form and knowledge. Thus the *surau* institution has liberated Minangkabau from illiteracy and has succeeded in creating scholars. Therefore, in the past there were many intellectuals and diplomats, statesmen, politicians and religious scholars. Among them are H. Agusssalim, M. Yamin, Hamka, M. Hatta, M. Natsir and others.

Second, *surau* serves as a place for traditional and traditional education. Customs and traditions are studied in *surau*. Learners learn everything related to the traditions in Minangkabau in particular. For example, they learn the habits and traditions of how to say or how to communicate in a good way. In Minangkabau culture it is known as "*kato mandaki jo kato manurun, kato malereng jo kato mandata*", which is called "*kato nan ampek*". This means that Minangkabau people must know how to talk or communicate with other people in a good way. Whether he talks to people as old as him, or older than him, all these things can be obtained at *surau*.

Third, *surau* is used to learn martial arts. *Surau* not only facilitates students to study religion but also has to teach people martial arts (*silat*) [10]. For Minangkabau *Silat* is a must for them. This will strengthen their character as Minangkabau people. Besides that, *silat* also makes them healthier and stronger. They practice day and night. Therefore, every young and old man must sleep in *surau*.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that *surau* in Minangkabau culture functions as a place to carry out religious education activities, a place to learn traditional and cultural values, and as a place to learn martial arts for the younger generation. Thus, it can be said that *surau* plays a major role in every aspect of the Minangkabau. In addition, education in *surau* makes Minangkabau people have good knowledge in their religion, customs and traditions. A good character as a human is also shaped.

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