20962 - Ruling on playing pool billiards and the loser paying for the table rental

the question

We play pool billiards sometimes for fun, and play loser pays, meaning whomever loses has to pay the fee for the table rental? Is this halal?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Anyone who looks at the state of youth today will see that most of them are not serious and have no interest in acquiring beneficial knowledge or seeking halaal provision. They waste their time with things that are not useful, which causes psychological and physical problems.

One of the salaf passed by some people who were playing and said: “I wish that time could be bought with money, then I would buy these people’s time!”

Yes, for those great men, the hours of the day were not enough for research, study and serious work; they used to sleep and eat less so that they would not be wasting time.

Now we see the youth, unfortunately, wasting the best years of their life with play and leisure. We do not want our young brothers to regard as forbidden the kinds of leisure and play that Allaah has permitted them, but we wish that this would not be the thing with which they are preoccupied night and day, and that they would look for a game that will benefit them mentally and physically and help them develop their skills.

Secondly:

Playing pool billiards in clubs is not permissible, not because the game itself is haraam, rather

because these clubs involve many haraam things such as swearing, neglecting prayer and gambling, and playing in them involves keeping quiet about evil with no need to stay in these places.

As for playing this game in places where no evil things are present, there is nothing wrong with that, but that is subject to conditions, for example:

1.There should be no betting.

2.There should be no swearing, name-calling, mockery or hatred.

3.It should not lead to missing obligatory duties such as prayer, seeking knowledge, and looking after one's family, teaching them and disciplining them.

We have mentioned above that most of the fuqaha', including Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, regarded chess as haraam, and that those who allowed it did so only if these conditions are met. When we think about youth and the way they play, we will see that these conditions are hardly ever met.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said concerning chess – and his words may be applied to pool billiards and other games that young people play today –:

… What is meant is that when chess distracts people from their duties, whether inwardly or outwardly, then it is haraam according to scholarly consensus. The fact that it distracts people from fulfilling their duties properly is so obvious as to need no explanation. The same applies if it distracts people from duties other than prayer, such as taking care of oneself or one's family, or enjoining that which is good and forbidding that which is evil, or upholding the ties of kinship, or honouring one's parents, or fulfilling one's duties with regard to public office, etc.

It rarely happens that a person involves himself with these games and they do not distract him from some duty. It should be noted that there is scholarly consensus on the prohibition in such cases. Similarly if the game involves something that is haraam or leads to something haraam, then it is haraam according to scholarly consensus, such as if it involves lying, false oaths, cheating, or

wrongdoing or helping in wrongdoing. That is haraam according to the consensus of the Muslims, even if it is in a race or contest, so how about if it is chess or dice and the like?

The same applies if it involves some other kind of evil, such as getting involved in something that may lead to immorality, or cooperating in aggression etc, or if the game attracts too many people which leads to neglecting an obligatory duty or doing something haraam. This kind of game and others like it are things that the Muslims are agreed are haraam.

Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 32/218

Secondly:

With regard to the loser being the one who has to pay the table rent, this is a kind of gambling, which is haraam because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al-Ansaab, and Al-Azlaam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytaan's (Satan's) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.

Shaytaan (Satan) wants only to excite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allaah and from As-Salaah (the prayer). So, will you not then abstain?"

[al-Maa'idah 5:90-91]

The basic principle is that the rental of this game – if it is free of haraam elements – should be paid by all the players. But the players agree that the loser will pay for himself and others, and the winners will not have to pay anything, this is what is called sabaq (prize money, winnings) and it is like betting on the game. This is not permissible according to sharee'ah, except where that has been narrated in a text in cases having to do with developing skills that are useful for jihad, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "There is no sabaq except in archery, horse-racing and camel-racing." Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 1700; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

That applies only to archery competitions and horse and camel racing, and the scholars drew analogies to other skills that are useful in jihad. Some also allowed competitions having to do with Islamic knowledge, because that is supporting Islam, like jihad with the sword, if not more so.

The scholars of the Standing Committee were asked about playing Foosball (table soccer) and the ruling on the loser paying for the game. They said:

If the game mentioned involves images or figures for playing with and the loser pays the cost of using the game, then this is haraam for a number of reasons:

1 – This game is a kind of idle entertainment that causes the player to waste his free time and to miss neglect many of his worldly and religious interests. Playing this game may become a habit and a means that leads to worse things than that, such as forms of gambling. Everything that is like that is falsehood and is haraam according to sharee'ah.

2 – Making and keeping images and figures is a major sin, because of the saheeh ahaadeeth in which Allaah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) warn those who do that of Hell and a painful torment.

3 – It is haraam for the loser to pay the cost of using the game, because this is extravagance and a waste of money by spending it on idle entertainment. Rental of the game is an invalid transaction and the owner's earnings in this case are haraam and earning money by invalid means. So this is a major sin and a form of gambling, which is haraam.

Fataawa Islamiyyah, 4/439

And Allaah knows best.