

THE INTELLECTUAL CONFLICT BETWEEN AHMADIYYA
AND ITS OPPONENTS IN PRE-WAR MALAYA*

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The nature of theological thought in pre-war Malaya reflects a restatement of some of the aspects of older theological doctrines as well as represents an attempt to relate them to the prevailing state of mind among the Malays. The contemplation of the realm of metaphysics was very much influenced by external factors, including the writings on theology of the classical and modern periods. Modern influences include the works of both Egyptian and Indian scholars. It was from India that some English-educated Malays received a new and convincing message, or at least that was what they thought. Most probably this was because of certain usage of the English language and the methods of thinking. These educated few were in fact looking for a rationally convincing intellectual instrument with which they could use in rescuing the "crumbling House of Islam."¹

By the second decade of the 20th century, English education began to play an increasingly important role in fulfilling the needs of the colonial administrative system. The development afforded the young intellectuals an opportunity to explore a wide range of 'new knowledge.' Western-style education gave them something which they had never before experienced. They no longer felt like "a frog under the coconut shell." Nevertheless, they could not

*This article is a revised part of my dissertation submitted to the Columbia University, New York, in 1985. The term "Ahmadiyya" here is not to be confused with the term "*tariqa* (mystic path) *Ahmadiyya*" which was practised in many parts in Malaya during the pre-war period. In this article the word "Ahmadiyya" is referred to certain religious doctrines attributed to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian.

¹Haji Abd al-Majid bin Zain al-Din regarded *The Islamic Review* (published in England from 1914 by Khwaja Kamal al-Din, one of the leaders of the Lahore branch of the Ahmadiyya movement) as "not only instructive in its Islamic message but also constructive to the crumbling House of Islam." See William R. Roff (ed.), *The Wandering Thoughts of a Dying Man, the Life and Times of Haji Abdul Majid bin Zainuddin* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 13, n. 20 and p. 131. Hereafter cited as *The Wandering Thoughts*.

detach themselves entirely from the isolated culture in which they were brought up and psychologically moulded. It appeared that religion, at least in the early stage of their lives, deeply influenced their mind and attitude. The new education became a testing ground for them. If religious tenets and practices were to be matched with the secondary school level of education which was responsible for moulding a new mental framework for giving a new range to knowledge there must be some form of intellectual interaction which could still accommodate past beliefs and practices within the context of the new knowledge. With the new scenario, they might become highly secularized; religion that is to say, was not a part of the worldly affairs but only dealt with belief and spiritual life. They could otherwise be restive intellectuals, at least in the early stage of their lives; or finally, in their own opinion, could transform themselves into 'highly cultured' people, who were able to use their new knowledge, an analytical tool, to explain their belief and practice.

A point to be observed about Malay intellectual history is the appearance of this last category, namely the English-educated Malays with religious background that still influenced their mind and behaviour. The problem facing them was that they could neither give up their religion nor initially explain their belief and religious practice in the light of the embryonic Western education which they received. They seemed to be in a dilemma which was reflected by a restive mentality. Apparently, their curiosity, aided by the use of English Language, had stimulated intellectual awakening. In the exploratory process, they had found some new rationality which helped explain their own belief and practice. Without giving much consideration to the serious, and far-reaching implications of the newly-found rationality, on Islam, they eagerly grasped them. This is evidenced by the emergence of the Ahmadiyya in intellectual movement in Malaya.

One of the leading Malay intellectuals influenced by this movement was Zain al-'Abidin bin Ahmad better known as Za'ba. He was born in Kampong Batu Kikir, Negeri Sembilan, Malaya, in 1895, and began to learn Arabic when he was a student of a vernacular school at Linggi in 1907-09. In 1910 Za'ba joined St. Paul's Institution, Seremban. After passing the Senior Cambridge examination he left it in 1915. He was appointed teacher of Malay Language at the English College, Johore Bahru, in 1916 and was later transferred to the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, Perak, in 1918, as a teacher and translator of Malay Language. In 1923 Za'ba was transferred to the Education Department of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, in Kuala Lumpur, as a translator; but a year later he became a translator at the Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjong Malim, Perak, until 1939; then he was transferred to the Information Department,

Singapore. During the Japanese occupation (1941-45) Za'ba served with the Radio of Singapore. He was involved in politics after the War until 1947 when he left for London as a lecturer of Malay language at the University of London. After three years in London Za'ba returned to Malaya and in 1953 he was appointed senior lecturer in the Department of Malay Studies, University of Malaya (Singapore). He was with the university until 1959 after which he withdrew from active service. He died in 1973.²

It is interesting to note that as early as 1917 Za'ba had shown an interest in Khwaja Kamal al-Din,³ the leading figure in the Ahmadiyya movement. Kamal al-Din's periodical *The Islamic Review*, had attracted the minds of some English-educated Malays, even though the Khwaja himself could not escape the scrutiny of those who was skeptical about his faith. Writing in the *Lembaga Melayu*, in 1920, a person named Hasan Ahmad of Singapore was the first to raise the issue and describe him as a loyal follower of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.⁴ In defending Kamal al-Din, Za'ba, on the request of certain Singaporean reformists,⁵ wrote a long article, which probably was not published by the *Lembaga Melayu* though a draft of it is extant.⁶ Za'ba lined up a good defence and attack, but in the process exposed his true feelings towards the Mirza by mentioning the title al-Masih al-Mau'ud (Promised Messiah) and by relating it to the Mirza.⁷ If his article was not published, it

²See Baharuddin Zainal, et. al. (compilers), *Wajah Biografi Seratus Penulis* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1981), pp. 437-38; Mohd. Taib Osman and Hamdan Hassan, *Bingkisan Kenangan untuk Pendita* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1978), p. xix.

³Originally from India, Kamal al-Din, went to England in 1912 as a Muslim missionary, and in 1914 established his headquarters at Woking, Surrey, from whence he published *The Islamic Review*. See Roff (ed.), *The Wandering Thoughts*, p. 13, no. 20.

⁴Hasan Ahmad wrote an article, "Siapa Dia Khwaja Kamaluddin?" published in *Lembaga Melayu*, 11-18-1920. See Adnan Haji Mohd. Nawang, "Za'ba dan Ajaran Khwaja Kamaluddin," in Khoo Kay Kim and Mohd. Fadzil Othman (eds.), *Pendidikan Di Malaysia Dahulu dan Sekarang*, (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1981), p. 80 and n. 37.

⁵The reformists (in Malay *kaum muda*) are generally referred to those who, influenced by the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh, advocated *ijtihad* (informed independent judgement in Islamic law) based on the Quran and *Hadith vis-a-vis taqlid* (adherence to religious views of Muslim scholars).

⁶Adnan Haji Mohd. Nawang, *op. cit.*, pp. 81ff.

⁷Za'ba mentioned the title three times in his unpublished article. See *Ibid.*, pp. 85-87. In one of his books the Mirza wrote: "... I have been informed of the Messiah who was to appear at the end of the thirteenth century. (God has told me) that he had already kept in view the era (of Messiah's appearance) in giving this name (to me); and that name is Mirza Ghu-

must have been for some reason. He was most probably aware that he would be heading for an intellectual disaster, if not religious 'excommunication,' if he continued to adhere to the movement's ideology.

A prominent Muslim scholar and reformist, Shaikh Tahir Jalal al-Ddin, seems to have influenced Za'ba also. However, the extent to which the former played a role in changing the latter's mind is not clear, but two things are obvious. Firstly, there is no reference to the support, for the Ahmadiyya intellectual movement by Za'ba in the 1930s. And, secondly, Tahir, while actively combating the movement through the 1920s, cooperated intellectually with Za'ba, for example, in supervising and rectifying the latter's translation work from Arabic into Malay.

Tahir was born in 1869 at Ampek Ankek, Sumatra, Indonesia. He was sent to Mecca at the age of 12 to live with his first cousin, the famous scholar, Shaikh Ahmad Khatib. He studied for 12 years in Mecca (with a brief visit back to Sumatra and Malaya). Early in 1893 he went to Cairo to study astronomy at al-Azhar. During the four years at Cairo, he was introduced to the teachings of the reformist Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and formed a close friendship with the latter's student, Muhammad Rashid Rida. He contributed some articles to Rida's *al-Manar*. After completing the astronomy course at al-Azhar, Tahir spent two years teaching in Mecca before returning to Malaya/Indonesia in 1899. Until 1905 he spent much of his time travelling between Malaya, Riau-Lingga, Sumatra, and the Middle East, as a religious teacher and scholar. Though married and divorced several times previously, he finally married a Malay girl from Perak in 1901 and in 1906 settled permanently in Malaya. Apart from being a religious officer in Perak and Johore, Tahir together with another reformist, Sayyid Shaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi published *al-Imam* in 1906 to propagate reformist ideas.

He was also associated with al-Hadi in publishing *Saudara* (1926-41) and editing it for sometime after al-Hadi's death in 1934. He died in 1957.⁸

In 1930 Tahir became the most outspoken figure in Malaya who engaged in intensive intellectual battle against the Ahmadiyya

lam Ahmad Qadiani...." See *Izala-i-Awham*, III Edition (1902), p. 90 quoted by S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Qadianism A Critical Study* (tr. by Zafar Ishaq Ansari) (Lucknow: Islamic Research and Publications, 1974), p. 54. For the proclamation of prophethood by the Mirza, see Ch. 3, pp. 57-71.

⁸See W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), pp. 60-61; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 33-35.

movement. His book, *Ini Perisai Orang Beriman Pengisai Madhab Orang Qadian*,⁹ clearly showed his wrath against the Ahmadiyya religious beliefs. The book also directly referred to events in the 1920s, during which Za'ba was a strong supporter of the movement. It seems that Tahir's book was stimulated by an article published in *Lembaga Melayu* by a person calling himself "Abi al-Murtada al-Mu'tazili."¹⁰ "The use of a false name," he wrote, "was enough to indicate the false idea." He complained that if the idea were true the writer would have used his real name, but instead, his purpose was to sow discord among peaceful people. 'Abi al-Murtada,' according to Tahir, had raised his voice in order to assist the mission of the Qadianists and had praised them and condemned the 'ulama' (scholars). Tahir felt the writer did not know about Qadianism and drew his information from stories. He considered the article very disgusting and the work of a "cowardly, misguided," and "two-faced man."¹¹

Tahir was furious at the claim made by Mirza Mahmud Ahmad¹² who advanced the idea that to be a prophet was the aim of every Muslim; that only the Islamic religion showed the way to revelation; and the venerated one (al-dhat al-Mu'azzam) had appeared in Qadian and there revealed himself as the prophet and messenger of God.¹³

Tahir did not distinguish between the Qadian and Lahore parties in his attack on the Ahmadiyya movement and he focused

⁹ Singapore: Setia Press, 1930. Hereafter cited as *Ini Perisai*. In early 1930 an article, "Qaum Ahmadiyya Qadiani Penyesat Agama" by an anonymous person was published in *Semangat Islam* (1-1-1930, pp. 59-61), condemning Mirza Ghulam Ahmad for claiming prophethood and welcoming Tahir's article. *Ini Perisai* was originally published in *Semangat Islam* between 2-1-1930 and 8-1-1930, when Tahir was in Singapore.

¹⁰ The literal meaning of the name is "the Father of Murtada the isolationist." Za'ba's well known *nom-de-plume* is "patriot" and one of his sons was named Murtada who was most probably born before Za'ba was transferred to Tanjung Malim in 1924. See Abdullah Hussain and Khalid Hussain, *Pendita Za'ba dalam kenangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1974), pp. 42-43.

¹¹ Tahir, *Ini Perisai*, p. 3.

¹² According to Tahir in the *Risala Ahmadiyya yang Kedua*, p. 90, Maulavi Hakim Nur al-Din succeeded Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and was the first caliph and Mirza Mahmud Ahmad was the second caliph. Tahir got information about Qadianism from Mirza Mahmud Ahmad's book which was translated from English into Arabic and published in Cairo. Tahir gave no details of the book. See Tahir, *Ini Perisai*, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

his attention on Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, about whom he raised several questions. Firstly, the Mirza claimed that he was the promised Messiah in the Last Days. In relation to this claim, the Mirza and his followers interpreted the verse, "Show us the straight way; the way of those on whom Thou has bestowed Thy grace,"¹⁴ as an indication what prophethood could be sought. This was, according to Tahir, in conflict with the understanding of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Secondly, it was not true, Tahir argued, that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was Jesus, son of Mary; and it was not possible for a sane man to believe in the Mirza descending from heaven to Qadian. Thirdly, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad abolished the holy war (jihad) from the earth and replaced it with general peace.¹⁵ Tahir made an attempt to prove that the claim of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad resembled polytheism and contained a mixture of Quranic expressions:

Earth and skies are with you as they are with me. You have the honour beside me. I have selected you for myself. You are beside me. . . The time has come that you are helped and are known to mankind. You are beside me near my throne. You are beside me as my son.¹⁶

According to Tahir, this expression was beyond Muslim belief; only those who were "haunted by ghosts and satan" could make it.¹⁷

In observing the assertive character of the Ahmadiyya adherents, particularly in the early stages of the movement, one should be aware of the condition of Malay society at the time. Its backwardness, it was observed, became one of the main ills for Malay intellectuals to attempt to remedy, but not by rejecting Islam. Politically subjugated, economically emasculated, suffering from cultural stagnation and isolation, and, it was said, religiously full of *bid'a* (innovation), the Malay masses affected considerable sympathy from young Malay intellectuals. The scapegoats, not without valid reasons, were non-Malay immigrants rather than the British; and the traditional practice of Islam rather than the '*ulama*' of the early period. Tahir observed that these conditions drew an intellectual response from the English-educated whose zeal surprised him. In his response, he reminded Muslims about

¹⁴Quran, Fatiha:6-7.

¹⁵Tahir, *Ini Perisai*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 21.

the propaganda calling men and women to work for progress some by means of religion, others by following the West and rejecting religion, and still other by adopting Qadianism.¹⁸

Tahir had very little respect for the English-educated intellectuals who disagreed with his theological doctrines. The ideas of the Ahmadiyya movement were disgusting to him. He thought the supporters of the movement frenzied in their thinking because they changed and interpreted the Quran in such a way as to fit their needs and inclinations.¹⁹ The intellectuals who supported the Ahmadiyya movement appear to have held the conviction that Islam had degenerated into a passive religion; that its original vigour had been eroded through the passage of time; and that there must be some persons or reformers who could explain the actual nature of Islam or retransform it into a dynamic force. If they were looking for a *mujaddid* (renewer) it was simply because they were desperately trying to rescue the Malays and to put Islam on the same level of 'rationality' with the Western thinking to which they had been exposed. They therefore grasped at the idea of a 'saviour' and proclaimed their find as capable of saving the Muslim world.

Tahir had tried to overcome this. He made an attempt to explain Islam theologically in relation to the conditions of the Malays. The cause of Malay backwardness, he asserted, did not originate from Islam. Muslims therefore did not need a *mujaddid* who would bring them progress and technical skill.²⁰ For him, a renewer who claimed to have received a revelation would be the *dajjal* (imposter) referred to in the *Hadith* (Tradition); "The day of resurrection will not come until the advent of imposter, liars . . . all claiming that they are messengers of Allah."²¹ Without distinguishing between the Lahore branch of the Ahmadiyya movement and Qadianism, he reached his own conclusion. Firstly, the Muslim community would be tested by imposters who claimed that they were prophets and messengers of God. Any Muslim who believed them would have no excuse for his error except when he perceived the reality. Secondly, the sign of these imposters was the incompatibility of their claims with the Muslim faith and with the behaviour of the Companions of the Prophet. Anyone who

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37 and 39.

claimed to be a prophet and messenger after the Prophet Muhammad and interpreted the Quran and *Hadith* in a way that fitted their own purposes was an imposter.²² For Tahir, of all previous imposters, none could match Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in terms of the ability to "mislead and deceive Muslims."²³

Tahir responded to the Ahmadiyya movement not only in Malaya but also in parts of Indonesia, particularly Sumatra. He wrote against a booklet, *Izhar al-Haqq*, published in Padang, Sumatra, which claimed that the evidence of the truth of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as Mahdi was a *Hadith*, "Indeed our Mahdi has two signs. . . Firstly, the eclipse of the moon will occur in (the) early night of Ramadan,²⁴ and, secondly, an eclipse of the sun (will occur) in the middle of it."²⁵ Tahir warned Muslims about *Hadiths* of this kind, because they were ambiguous or contradictory and because in the history of *Hadith* there were some people – like the supporters of the various governments – who invented many *Hadiths* in order to gain support in their power struggle. He questioned the alleged Prophet's use of the word 'our' which was not proper for him, and said that the eclipse did not occur according to the so-called *Hadith*.²⁶ He argued that what the Prophet actually said would accordingly happen, and that only God knows the reality of things.²⁷

Tahir's intellectual battle was not without its response from the supporters of the Ahmadiyya movement. Around 1933 a tract entitled, *Risala Ahmadiyya yang Kedua, Siapakah Mirza Ghulam Ahmad*,²⁸ was published, singling out two persons as targets of

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁴ *Ramadan* is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.

²⁵ Tahir, *Ini Perisai*, pp. 49–50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50ff.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁸ Petani: Indian Islamic Mission, Siam, n.d. Hereafter cited as *Risala Ahmadiyya*. The book was printed at Jelutung Press, Penang. It was of excerpts from several English book and journals published by the Ahmadiyya movement of Lahore. The translation was done by Per Pro Ahmadiyya Lahore. Za'ba noted that this *Risala Ahmadiyya*, under two *nom-de-plumes*, one of which was believed to be that of the Penang Muhammad Yusuf bin Sultan Maidin, defended the excommunicated Mirza and his movement against the attacks and accusations of Malayan 'ulama'. Not much is known about the life of Yusuf. According to Za'ba, Yusuf, a Penang Malay of South Indian extraction and was a Chief Clerk in the local Education Office, was intellectually active in the 1920s and 1930s. See Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba)

attack, Tahir and Muhammad Hasan of Bandung, Indonesia.²⁹ The latter was the most outspoken opponent of the Ahmadiyya movement in Indonesia.

The book made several claims about Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. It regarded him as the holy spirit and said that though he lived like an ordinary human being he was in the light of God.³⁰ What Tahir quotes in *Ini Perisai* was repeated in the *Risala Ahmadiyya*; that the Mirza had had his place at the throne³¹ ('arsh). According to the Muslim belief, the Mirza's claim was in contradiction with its theological doctrines. The claim that the Mirza received inspiration from, had right knowledge about, and had met with God³² was very perplexing. The *Risala Ahmadiyya* tried to convince readers that for the first time in Islamic history the Mirza, basing his claim on the Quran, analyzed Islamic teachings in such a way that they would not conflict with the law of nature. This was because Islamic teachings were the teachings of God, while the law of nature was His creation, and thus both had to be compatible.³³

There was a clear attempt to portray the Mirza as the most outstanding reformer, far above others such as Muhammad 'Abduh, and capable of establishing a strong movement and encountering its enemies. The book considered Tahir as a great enemy who used forged stories about the Mirza in order to stop young English-educated Malays from reading the English translation of the Quran by Muhammad 'Ali'. However, it was argued that the people who read the translation would know Tahir's trick.³⁴ The book also had a low regard for Muhammad Hasan whose knowledge of Arabic, it said, was only the product of the Madrasa al-Saqaf of Singapore. Besides, Muhammad Hassan was ignorant of the English language. He was also accused of "using Javanese

"Modern Developments of Malay Literature," *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 19, pt. 1 (February 1941), reprinted in Abdullah Hussain and Khalid Hussain (eds.), *Pendita Za'ba dalam Kenangan*, pp. 268–269. Muhammad Yusuf's father's name was spelled inconsistently as Sultan Muhy al-Din and Sultan Maidin.

²⁹Per Pro Ahmadiyya, *Risala Ahmadiyya*, p. 78.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 11; of. Tahir, *Ini Perisai*, pp. 19–20.

³²Per Pro Ahmadiyya, *Risala Ahmadiyya*, p. 36.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 78.

as his tools" to prevent the spread of the Ahmadiyya movement in Java.³⁵

Strong recrimination was directed by Saif al-Din against Muhammad Hasan³⁶ arguing that a claim to be a messenger of God could not be regarded as infidelity or apostasy.³⁷ He asserted that if Muhammad Hasan was said to be inspired by God and to be enjoined to publish *Majallat al-Fatwa* in order to correct the Muslim faith, he could not be regarded as doing something wrong.³⁸ Concerning Muhammad Hasan's criticism that the Mirza was very obedient to the British government, he asked whether it was wrong, from the Islamic point of view, to obey a government that protected Muslims.³⁹ In defending the Mirza, Saif al-Din did not miss the opportunity to allude to "the changing of Islamic Law." He said it was Muhammad Hasan, not the Mirza who changed Islamic law by making a new rule that pork was clean.⁴⁰ He made it clear, however, that he was discussing the Lahore branch of the Ahmadiyya movement, and that the Qadian group was known to be wrong and out of *ahl al-sunna wal-jama'a*.⁴¹

Apparently the leaders of the Ahmadiyya movement in Malaya believed that there was nothing wrong in the teachings of the Mirza. They tried to explain to the Malays the Universal Validity of teachings such as to love all creatures of God, to do good to mankind, and to avoid doing anything wrong.⁴² Despite the fact that they made glowing claims about the doctrines of their movement, they could not escape being excommunicated. For this reason many of them hid behind their *noms-de-plumes*.

Za'ba noted that Muhammad Yusuf bin Sultan Maiden⁴³ was believed to be one of the authors of *Risala Ahmadiyya*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ He contributed a chapter, "Lagi akan dikenal oleh al-'Alam al-Islami siapa dia Mirza Ghulam Ahmad" (pp. 96-109), to the *Risalah Ahmadiyya*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 97 and 100.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104. In Malaya the *ahl al-sunna wal-jama'a* are usually known as the followers of any one of the four well-known schools of law in Islam.

⁴² *Risalah Ahmadiyya*, pp. 80-83.

⁴³ See n. 28 above.

Strangely, if so, the same Yusuf did not include the Mirza as an important reformer in his book, *Kejatohan Qaum-Qaum Islam dan Pergerakan Baharu*.⁴⁴ He devoted separated chapters to many important reformers such as Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad 'Abduh, and others. Apparently he either tried to avoid being attacked, or to conceal his real views. Nevertheless, he was carefully observed by Tahir. For example, in the last chapter of his book Muhammad Yusuf strongly recommended that Muslims read Muhammad 'Ali's translation of the Quran;⁴⁵ this was strongly criticized by Tahir.⁴⁶

In 1931, Tahir and Yusuf were engaged in a bitter and open polemic, provoked by a writer named M. Ibrahim Jamal who quoted Yusuf's recommendation: ". . . no other translation is better than the translation by Maulavi Muhammad 'Ali of Lahore."⁴⁷ Jamal, apart from comparing the contradictory ideas of Tahir and Yusuf, was no less critical of the latter and presented his own position thus: "The recommendation by Muhammad Yusuf . . . to study the translation of Maulavi Muhammad 'Ali has no value, especially because he ('Ali) was a student of the Mirza . . . who claimed to be the Mahdi, that is, the Prophet Jesus who descended into this world . . ."⁴⁸ Yusuf reacted in a manner that exposed his real attitude towards the Mirza. He did not aim his main attack at Jamal, to whom he had made a first response by publishing an article, "Translation of the Quran by Muhammad 'Ali of Lahore (An Answer to M. Ibrahim Jamal)," but directed his strongest criticism at Tahir's *Ini Perisai*.⁴⁹ He said that Tahir was in error in interpreting the *anna* (when) in the verse "How can I have a son and man has not yet touched me?"⁵⁰

⁴⁴Penang: Jelutung Press, 1931. Hereafter cited as *Kejatohan*.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 165–67.

⁴⁶Tahir, *Ini Perisai*, pp. 33f.

⁴⁷Muhammad Yusuf bin Sultan Muhy al-Din, quoted by M. Ibrahim Jamal, *Saudara*, 2–14–1931, p. 8.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Saudara*, 2–28–1931, p. 6.

⁵⁰Quran, Al Imran:47. In Maulana Muhammad Ali's *The Holy Qur'an Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary* (Lahore: The Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 1965), p. 143 the verse referred to is 46 not 47. There was confusion in the polemic because there is another verse of similar nature: "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me," Maryam: 20. The Quran uses the words *waled* (son) and *Ghulam* (son) in the two verses respectively. The translation of the second verse is based on Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an Text, Translation and Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: The Islamic Center, n.d.), p. 771.

It is curious that Yusuf did not try to defend himself on the main issue put forward by his opponents, namely that the Mirza was not a Muslim because he claimed he was a prophet. He defended Muhammad 'Ali, but not the Mirza. This created an intellectual problem for him in explaining his admiration of Muhammad 'Ali's translation of the Quran, which included, in the foreword, a mention of the Mirza.⁵¹ Concerning the translation, he asked, "Is it reasonable to throw away a book of a servant of Allah, who left us this most beneficial work . . . because he included the name of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad among his teachers."⁵²

The conflict of ideas between Tahir and Yusuf involved personal attacks on each other, such as accusations of poor knowledge of English or Arabic. Both of them used harsh language. Yusuf tried to implicate other prominent figures on his behalf in the conflict, such as Sayyid Shaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi, and Shaikh 'Abd Allah al-Maghribi. He asked them, he said, their views about Muhammad 'Ali's translation several times, but he did not say whether or not they supported the translation. He concluded his attack on Tahir with a statement:

. . . and this translation will also help the writer to face the danger posed by Shaikh Tahir. . . , to expose all tricks and deception made by those who claim to be scholars and who want to enslave the common people. This is the reason why our scholars here and in India are always looking for ways and means to discredit the author so that his translation will not be of use to educated Muslims. . . Now I challenge Shaikh to prove any error. . . in the translation. . . but he should not mix up Muhammad 'Ali's endeavour with that of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He should remember not to create nonsense as in the past, and he should find a person who really knows English and Malay equally well. Do not use your erroneous translation from English into Malay as a means to show Muhammad 'Ali's error. . .⁵³

From the previous observation, one thing becomes apparent: the Ahmadiyya supporters always avoided answering the charge made by their opponents, that the Mirza claimed to be a prophet. The most they could have replied was that he did not say he was

⁵¹In fact Muhammad Ali wrote in the "Preface" as follows: "And lastly, the greatest religious leader of the present time, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, has inspired me with all that is best in this work. I have drunk deep at the fountain of knowledge which this great Reformer – Mujaddid of the present century and founder of the Ahmadiyyah Movement – has made to flow." See Maulana Muhammad Ali, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

⁵²*Saudara*, 2 – 28 – 1931, p. 6.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 4 – 18 – 1931, p. 6.

a prophet, but that was what he actually did in his last speech at Lahore before his death in 1908.⁵⁴ In relation to this, Tahir evidently did not challenge the Ahmadiyya supporters to a public debate. The only challenge was made by an anti-Ahmadiyya in the newspaper, *Majlis*⁵⁵ but no response was heard. Despite the fact that the Ahmadiyya supporters avoided discussion about the Mirza, their opponents did not concentrate their attack on his alleged claim to be a prophet. It appeared that the claim was the weakest point of defence for the Ahmadiyya supporters, and their opponents in Indonesia and in other parts of the Muslim world were aware of this. Escalation of the intellectual battle was evident particularly in India, Egypt and Indonesia. There were intense public debates in Bandung, Batavia and Medan Deli in 1933 and 1934.⁵⁶ These intellectual confrontations continued to expose the character of Ahmadiyya doctrines and the nature of their defence. The Muslims in general were left to make up their own minds.

These circumstances were not irrelevant to the changing ideational atmosphere in Malaya. By the second half of the 1930s, intellectual argument had given way to more cautious manouvers. Yusuf seems to have passed into oblivion by the late 1930s,⁵⁷ but this did not mean that the ideas he had expressed ceased to exist, especially among the English-educated Malays. This was manifested in the monthly, *The Modern Light*, founded by Haji 'Abd al-Majid bin Zain al-Din.

Majid was born in 1887 in Kuala Lumpur. He began his formal education at Pudu Village and then joined the Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur, in 1895 and passed the Cambridge Junior Certificate examinations in 1902. Subsequently he became a clerk for the Selangor government. In 1905 Majid joined the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar (a Malay residential school preserved for the sons of the Malay nobility and aristocracy), graduated two years later, and was at once employed as the school's first Malay teacher. He was promoted in 1918 to be the first Malay Assistant Inspector of Schools (with headquarters in Telok Anson, Perak) with the administrative and inspectorial responsibility for all vernacular schools in a particular administrative area. But in 1919

⁵⁴ Per Pro Ahmadiyya, *Risala Ahmadiyya*, p. 89.

⁵⁵ 12 – 12 – 1933, p. 1.

⁵⁶ See editorial, "Taupan Ahmadiyya," *Majlis*, 6 – 14 – 1934, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Abdullah Hussain and Khalid Hussain, *Pendita Za'ba dalam Kenangan*, p. 269.

he was sent for a year to act as principal of the Malay Teachers' Training College at Matang, Perak, and returned to his post after 18 more months. Majid's career as an educationist charted a new course in 1924 when he was appointed Malayan Pilgrimage Officer (travelling to Jedda, with the first ship, every year and returning seven months later with the last) which he held for the next 16 years. He spent his annual five months in Malaya as a liaison officer to the Political Intelligence Bureau of the Straits Settlements Police while nominally (until 1931) a member of the Education Service. In 1935 he interrogated the president of the non-political and literary organization *Sahabat Pena* (Friends of the Pen), but later that year was himself appointed its adviser. Majid's religious inclination led to his involvement in the Ahmadiyya movement. This was clearly evident by the fact that his journal, *The Modern Light* (his son, Latif, was its nominal editor) defended Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of Qadianism, by not considering him a prophet; for this, he was given the name "a Malay Qadiani", a title which troubled him.⁵⁸

The journal appeared to be very bold. Its discussions of Islam were direct and assertive but avoided dealing with the Ahmadiyya. However, its interest in the movement did not escape the public notice. It was provoked finally to state its theological stand, which it did when confirming its support for Mirza but denying that he was "the Messiah, as he claimed."⁵⁹ The journal further denied that "belief in (the) Ulama forms an article of faith," a clear reference to the 'ulama' who claimed that Mirza was an infidel.⁶⁰ *The Modern Light* boldly asserted that "each and every man is free to interpret the Quran according to his own intelligence, that is to say, those parts of the Quran that refer to the allegories, metaphors, and parables given by God."⁶¹ This assertion was made with the objective of interpreting the Quran in line with the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya. If the Ahmadiyya were accused of making "a new religion, by telling the world that Jesus had died,"⁶² based on its own interpretation of the Quran, then *The Modern Light* would respond by pointing out that they were not the first to say so, because one of the four recognized *imams*

⁵⁸ See W. R. Roff (ed.), *The Wandering Thoughts*, pp. vii – iv and 135.

⁵⁹ Editorial Notes, "A New Religion," *The Modern Light*, Zulhijjah, 29, 1359/1940, p. 391.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

(leaders) of the four orthodox schools of law (*madhabib*) said the same. *The Modern Light* seemed proud of its "courage" in interpreting the Quran "according to the light of modern advancement in the knowledge of Man," and in differing from "the absurdity of the old interpretation." It also added that God alone would decide whether it was right or wrong.⁶³ But it did not admit that its interpretation was in accordance with the doctrines of the Ahmadiyya movement.

On the basis of its own interpretation of the tests, *The Modern Light* supported the belief that Jesus had died, and its argument appeared to be comparatively powerful. Death, it argued, was natural for anyone, and although the Quran did not refer to the death of the prophet, their death had been accepted as fact. From this general premise it suggested that if Jesus were to have departed from the rule, it would be reasonable to expect that the Quran would make special mention of this. Thus, it argued, if Jesus were not killed or crucified, could it mean that the Prophet Abraham did not die because he did not die after being put into the fire. Concerning the belief that Jesus continued to enjoy an extraordinary life in Heaven, it argued that the Quran would surely have made reference to this, without which "we are somewhat constrained to believe that the story is only a product of the imagination of the old interpreters and Commentators."⁶⁴

The Ahmadiyya intellectual activity in pre-war Malaya did not create a lasting impact upon the Muslim mind in general. A handful of energetic English-educated, who adhered to the Ahmadiyya doctrines, had to face increasing resistance from their opponents. In fact the Ahmadiyya supporters could not erode traditional religious belief, for they were always on the defensive position. Some of them showed enthusiasm⁶⁵ initially but very few withstood the challenge from their opponents. Za'ba evidently was no longer involved in the movement in the 1930s and Yusuf seems to have passed into oblivion before the end of 1930s. Only Majid did actively engage in intellectual battle before his death in 1943. A remnant of Ahmadiyya supporters continued to exist

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See "The Question of the Death of Jesus," *Ibid.*, Muharram and Safar, 1360/1941, pp. 494-96.

⁶⁵ When Khwaja Kamal al-Din visited Malaya in 1921 he was warmly welcomed particularly in Perak and Penang by prominent people including Majid, Za'ba, Yusuf, Dr. Mohd. Ghaus, Sayyed Abu al-Hasan and others. See Adnan Haji Mohd. Nawang, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

after the war, but they were not able to challenge openly the powerful religious establishment which, with the support of the Malay sultans and other political institutions, had the power to excommunicate them.