

THE ANJUMAN-I-ISLAM: BRIEF PROFILES OF ITS PROMINENT MEMBERS

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Abstract: *The Anjuman-i-Islam was established in 1921 during Khwaja Kamaluddin's visit to Singapore. In fact, Anjuman-i-Islam, was considered as a branch of Khwaja Kamaluddin's own organization, Muslim Mission of Woking, England. Among the objectives of the Anjuman were to disseminate Islamic literature and spread the Islamic teaching; to help the Muslim Mission, Woking, in furthering its cause; and to open a Muslim reading room. The Anjuman had worked tirelessly to rally support from other Muslim organizations and societies throughout Malaya. This Islamic association primarily attracted the educated Muslims especially among the Indian Muslims and the Jawi Peranakan. However, less is known about its prominent leaders. Utilizing printed primary documents, thus, this study provides brief profiles of the prominent members of the Anjuman-i-Islam and their roles in this Islamic association.*

Keywords: *Anjuman-I Islam, Malay-Muslims, Indian-Muslims, British and Caliphate.*

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Introduction

Early 20th century Malaya was characterized by British colonialism, the influx of immigrant communities and the Malay-Muslim's backwardness vis-à-vis the immigrant communities. Therefore, Muslim intelligentsias in Malaya were very concerned with the sorry state of the Muslim *ummah*. Accordingly, they increasingly felt the urgent need to bring about reform within Muslim society to redress the problems facing them. This article provides information on the Muslim organization, primarily associated with Muslims of Indian-origins, known as the *Anjuman-I Islam*. This association was established in Singapore in 1921 as a branch of the Muslim Mission of Woking, England. The association was well received by Indian Muslims in Malaya as well as some educated Malay intelligentsia. After providing precise information about the establishment of this organization, this article provides brief biographies of its seven prominent members namely Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, Dr. Hafeezudin, Dr. Pandak Ahmad, Bashir Ahmad, Ghulam Sarwar, Za'ba and Abdul Majid.

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The Anjuman-i-Islam

The Anjuman-i-Islam was the brainchild of Khwaja Kamaluddin. Khwaja Kamaluddin was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1870. He finished his bachelor's degree in Arts in 1893 and completed another degree in Law in 1897. In terms of working experience, he had previously served as professor of History and Economics at the Islamic College of Lahore. He, then travelled to England in 1912 and settled in Kingston. This association was registered in Singapore on 19 August 1921 as a branch of Muslim Mission of Woking, England. The constitution of the Anjuman states that anyone interested may apply to become a member of the *Anjuman* through its secretary. However, in reality most of its earliest members were Indian Muslims or those of Malay-Indian parentage (Jawi-Peranakan). Among the prominent personalities who joined the association were Hafiz Ghulam Sawar who was then Registrar of Supreme Court, Penang; Dr. S.I.M. Ibrahim (a medical doctor); Mohammad Ismail (Lawyer, Singapore); and Dr. Hafeezudin (a medical doctor). Later on, the influential Malays started to apply for its membership and such names included Za'ba and Majid Zainuddin to name a few.

Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim bin Shaik Ismail

Mohamed Ibrahim was born in Singapore on 9th September 1892. His father's name was Shaik Ismail and his mother was a Bugis. He had two brothers and he was the second of three children. He pursued his higher education at Raffles Institution. He later enrolled into the Government Medical School in Singapore for a five-year course. He joined the Sergeant Bearer Company and Singapore Volunteer Corps in 1913. Subsequently, he succeeded in completing his medical course with Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (LMS) in August 1916 from the King Edward VII College of Medicine. He subsequently served the Straits Settlement Medical Service in Singapore and Malaya. In 1916, he worked in Selangor at the West Country Hospital in Kajang.

Other positions, which he used to hold, were assistant surgeon in charge of the London Asiatic Rubber and Produce Co. Ltd., Malacca in 1918, and also assistant surgeon of the Straits Settlement. He was also put in charge for the inspection of the British steamship called *Sealda*. In short, he served the British government for eight years and later retired and subsequently opened his own clinic (known as Sehat Clinic) in 1924 in Singapore. He had initiated the openings of two madrasahs, at Serangoon Road and Lorong Marican, Upper Serangoon Road. He was also a member of the Muslim Advisory Board since August 1948. In terms of his social activities, he had actively participated in sports such as football, tennis and golf.

He was also said to have actively participated in religious-social based activities. As far as the Muslim community was concerned, he proved to be an able man to the community where he served his fellow Muslim community on various occasions. In 1921, he was the chairman of the Muslim's Public Meeting for Malay representation in the Straits Legislative Council. He was also a member of the Muslim Association in Singapore. Dr. Ibrahim together with his fellow friends had submitted a resolution to the Straits Government to consider more holidays for the Muslims. Dr. Ibrahim had two wives and fifteen children (seven sons and eight daughters). His first wife, Hamidah binti Shaik Baboo, had four children. His second wife, Amena binti Abdul Rahman, had eleven children. He passed away in Medina during the 1962 *Hajj*.

Dr. Hafeezuddin Sirajuddin Moonshi

Another original member of the *Anjuman* was Dr Hafeezuddin Sirajuddin Moonshi. He was originally from India (Surat) where he was born on 28th March 1895. His father was Hakeem Abdul Hamid bin Abdul Wahab, and his father was a prominent Bombay merchant in Arab Street. His father lived in Geylang, Singapore. H.S Moonshi arrived in Singapore during his early age where he subsequently received his secondary education at Raffles Institution. However, he made a return to India in 1905 for a short time before returning to Singapore in 1906 where he continued his studies at Raffles Institution until he passed his Junior Cambridge exam in 1910. Subsequently, he was admitted into the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School in Singapore in 1911.

He graduated with a Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery Diploma in March 1916 from the Kind Edward VII Medical School of Singapore. He held many positions in Singapore. He was appointed as Municipal Commissioner for Singapore from 1921-1923. In 1924, he was re-nominated to hold the position. He was also conferred the Justice of Peace (JP). He had also received a merit of honour of the British Empire, called OBE. In 1916, he started to practice privately at Moonshi Dispensary. It was said to be the first Muslim clinic in Singapore. In terms of personality, he was very kind to both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike. He was also a generous individual. He gave free medical treatments to those in need who could not afford to pay medical bills. He had also been involved in missionary activities in Singapore.

Dr H.S. Moonshi was also one of the trustees of Masjid Khadijah, Geylang Road, Singapore since 1925 and held the same position for the Bencoleen Street Mosque in 1930. He was also one of the individuals responsible for reviving the English magazine called 'Real Islam' in 1930 which served and voiced out the needs and interests of local Muslims. He had two wives and three children altogether. He passed away in Singapore in 1965. As mentioned earlier, he had opened his own clinic following his retirement from the government medical service which operated in 1924. At that time, his clinic and Dr Ibrahim's were considered the two earliest clinics in Singapore. They offered vaccination to Indians who wanted to travel overseas especially to India.

In terms of his social activities, he joined the Malay Volunteer Club and the Indian Association. He had been with the Mohammedan Advisory Board for six years (1918-1924) where he first made his debut in 1918-1919 until he held the post as honorary secretary to the Board from 1920-1924. He was also the director of Altahera and Company in 1917. In May 1941, the Mohammedan Advisory Board consisted of 17 Muslim members chaired by M.V. Del Tufo Esq and Dr. Moonshi served as vice chairman and honorary secretary concurrently. Besides that, he had also held other posts. In 1922 he served as Honorary Secretary of the Prince of Wales's Islamic Ward Committee and he was appointed as Visitor to the Lunatic Asylum in Singapore in 1923.

Dr. Pandak Ahmad

Another important member of the *Anjuman* was Dr. Pandak Ahmad. He was born in Kampung Kledang, Kota Lama Kanan, Kuala Kangsar on 22nd April 1892. His primary education began at the Malay School of Kota Lama Kanan from standard One till Standard Four. Later, he was admitted into the most prestigious Malay school, famously known as Malay College of Kuala Kangsar from Standards 4-7. He stayed there until he completed his Senior Cambridge certificate. In 1910, he entered King Edward VII Medical School for a five-year medical course which was sponsored by the British government. He added one more year to complete the course to recover from beriberi. After spending 6 years of studies, he graduated from the college with a Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (LMS) in 1916. In terms of his services as a medical doctor, he went for housemanship at the General Hospital in Taiping in April 1914.

Later he was sent out to the District Hospital, situated in Kuala Kangsar on March 1917. He later transferred back to Taiping on February 1919. In September 1919, Dr Pandak Ahmad served at the General Hospital in Batu Gajah, Kinta Perak until August 1921. His daughter also mentioned that her father also used to work in Hospital Tanjung Rambutan. In December 1922, he transferred back to Kuala Kangsar once again.

Bashir Ahmad Mallal

Bashir Ahmad was one of the backbones of the *Anjuman*. He was a native of Pakistan. He travelled east and settled down in Singapore during the First World War. In 1918, he worked as a law clerk at the Battenburg and Silva Law Firm. He later founded a law-based journal, famously known as the Malayan Law Journal (MLJ) and Reporter in 1932. This was the successor to the previous law journal called the Straits Law Journal. He was very much into law publications such as *The Criminal Procedure Code of the Straits Settlements, Annotated* (1931) and *Mallal's Criminal Procedure* (1931), *His Supreme Court Practice and digests of Singapore and Malayan* (later Malaysian) case. Bashir Ahmad, did not receive any formal training in law. He was a self-taught law scholar and researcher.

He continued to work as an editor for the MLJ until his last breath on 5th September 1972 at the age of 74. He had six sons and four daughters. After his death, his protégé, Al Mansor Adabi became the editor of MLJ. Justice Wee wrote in his tribute to Bashir Ahmad Mallal that "His death is a great loss to all of us for had it not been for him it would have almost impossible for the legal profession and the judiciary in Singapore to carry out their duties and responsibility adequately". He proved to be one of the key movers for the founding of the Indian Association on 30th March, 1923. He was a Muslim convert and his original name was Ishar Das. There was one certain controversy that happened to Bashir Ahmad when in December 1923, he was sent to India to face a trial for the allegation of kidnapping which was claimed to have been perpetrated earlier while he was in India.

He was, nevertheless, found innocent and returned to Singapore. He resumed his post as the honorary secretary of the Indian Association. Bashir Ahmad had also been monitored closely by the British authority due to his connection with Mas Abdul Hamid from the Netherland East Indies (Indonesia), where the latter was found to have

anti-British and anti-Dutch feelings. Moreover, he was also amongst the earliest members of the *Anjuman-I Islam*. Bashir had also initiated the formation of the Indian Association of Singapore, with the hope that it would be able to dominate and control the direction of the government through elected Indians in the Legislative Association, as there were members who held anti-British sentiments. The Political Intelligence Bureau, commented on the creation of the Singapore Indian Association, saying that it was “the first known attempt to unite Indians, including Hindus and Muslims alike in Malaya”. As a matter of fact, both the Indian Associations of Taiping and Kinta had active Muslim members long before 1923.

Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar

Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar had served the *Anjuman* as the patron of this association. He was born in Lahore, India in the year 1873. His father worked as a tailor. He had four male siblings. He had learned the Qur'an since early age. By the age of eleven, he became a hafiz (a person who is able to memorize all of the *surahs* in the Quran). He later pursued his studies in the field of humanities and arts at the Government College of Lahore, where he completed his studies in the year 1893. In 1894, he later completed his master's degree in Arts at the University of Punjab. He was eager for knowledge and continued his pursuit of knowledge. He studied Philology, Mathematics, and Science (known as Mathematical Tripos) at St John's College in Cambridge University and completed it in 1896.

He completed his studies at the age of twenty-one. He took efforts to learn the Arabic language when he took up advanced Arabic courses at the Imperial Institute of Modern Languages from 1896-1900. In 1896, upon the completion of his studies at Cambridge University, Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar was offered a position in the British colonial civil service in two different localities; one with the British Indian government civil service and the other with the British colonial government of the Straits Settlements. He then took up the latter. Later, he was appointed as a cadet for the Malayan civil service. He held various positions throughout his service in Malaya and amongst them were: Magistrate, Penang Supreme Court, Mufti, Penang, Third Magistrate, Singapore (1920 onwards), and Acting Sheriff and Deputy Registrar of the Supreme Court.

He had also served as Assistant Official Assignee, Penang, Acting District Judge, Penang, Acting Censor, Singapore, Acting Registrar of Companies, Penang and Civil District Judge, Singapore (1923 - 30 December 1928). He had also written a variety of books on Islam. He was considered as one of the first person who had translated the Qur'an into English at the University of Oxford. Among his major publications were (1) *The Word of God and the Wonders of Science* (1923-25); (2) *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an* (1928); (3) *Philosophy of the Qur'an* (1938); and (4) *Mohammad the Holy Prophet* (1937).

Zainal Abidin Ahmad

A famous Malay-Muslim figure and Malay laureate, Za'ba was one of the earliest members of the *Anjuman-I Islam*. His full name was Zainal Abidin Ahmad and he was born in Kampung Bukit Kerdas, Jempol, Batu Kikir, Negri Sembilan on 16th September 1895. He was involved in writing and translation activities for almost forty years. In recognition of his immense contributions to the nation, he was conferred the title 'Pendeta' in 1956 at The Congress of Malayan Language and Literature. He was considered as one of the first Malays to have started and detailed work on the grammatical aspects of the Malay Language. He had also been involved in political and Islamic reformism-based activities.

In his illustrious career, he used to serve as a Malay lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London on 9 September 1947 until he retired in September 1950. In 1953, he worked as a senior lecturer and was also the first Head of Department of Malay Studies at the University of Malaya, Singapore (April 1953-January 1959). He proved to be a very outstanding individual in the field of language and literature. He was the one who put the very fundamental syntax rules for the Malay Language in terms of spelling, grammar and composition and its rhetoric.

He had written books imbued with Islamic elements such as *Falsafah Takdir* (1932), *Pendapatan Perbahasan Ulama pada Kejadian Perbuatan dan Perusahaan Hamba* (1934) and *Asuhan Budi Menerusi Islam* (1958). His second book mentioned earlier was banned in Perak by the concerned authorities. He was the Chairman or Yang Di-Pertuan of the Malay Association of Selangor. He had also been appointed as chairman for the organizing committee of the All-Malaya Malay Congress which was held from 1st March till 4th March 1946. This event led to the birth of UMNO. This congress was held as a protest from all sections of Malay society towards the idea of the Malayan Union. Due to his critical views towards the British colonial government while being a government servant, he was transferred from one place to another.

Za'ba wrote on a wide range of topics and issues in the Malay press. His religious ideas corresponded with Islamic-reformism. While working at the Malay College of Kuala Kangsar, he became acquainted with Khwaja Kamaluddin. In the fields of Malay language and education, Za'ba had written a substantial number of works, which were later published in local journals. Za'ba had also written more in-depth works pertaining to the art of writing in Malay Language with commentaries on its syntax and composition, such as the following: (1) *Ilmu Bahasa Melayu I*, (2) *Ilmu Bahasa Melayu II* (1927), (3) *Rahsia Ejaan Jawi* (1929) and (4) *Ilmu Mengarang Melayu* (1934).

It is well-known that Za'ba was a prominent figure in the development of Malay language and education. While in Sultan Idris Training College (SITC), he was involved directly with the attempts to publish textbooks for Malay schools intended for all subjects. In the field of literature, he was a translator, collector and editor of a variety of literature. Amongst his writings are *Anak raja dengan anak papa*, *Kalung bunga*, and *Recent Malay literature*. There was one particular book written by Za'ba which had been prevented from publication during the colonial period namely *Perangai Bergantung Pada Diri Sendiri*. This work was finally published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, eight years after his passing.

For Za'ba, religion serves as guidance for Muslims to understand and be aware of the rules and regulations (*shari'ah*) as contained in the Qur'an and Hadith. Za'ba played an active role in spreading reformist ideas through writings. In his struggle (*perjuangan*), he was involved in the confrontation against the traditionalist ulama', and as time passed, his pattern of writings slowly changed. A substantial number of his works were in the form of translation or edited works. Za'ba emphasized the following points in his writings, namely, (1) incorrect understanding about Islam amongst the Malays, (2) negligence in behaving in correct manners, in education, (3) easily giving up to fate, (4) having the traits of depending on others. He had also translated a few journals from abroad such as *The Light* (Lahore) and *Islamic Review* (England) besides a few other religious works which had been translated into Arabic language roughly between 1926-1931.

Abdul Majid bin Zainuddin

He was also one of the earliest members of the *Anjuman*. He was born in Pudu, Kuala Lumpur in 1887. His origins could be traced back to the Netherlands East Indies as his parents hailed from Bonjol, Minangkabau. His father ran a provision shop in the Malay quarter of Pudu town. His family was not rich, yet his family appeared to be reasonably well-off. Majid started his formal education at the Pudu Village School, and then in 1895, enrolled into a newly established English institution in Kuala Lumpur, famously known as Victoria Institution (he was one of few Malays who was able to get into this institution). Abdul Majid had also performed quite well throughout his studies. In 1902, he succeeded in passing the Junior Cambridge School Certificate examination, ordinarily the result of seven years of school. At this stage, he mentioned about his intention of furthering his studies. He was thinking of concentrating in medicine at a British university.

His father, like many other Malay peasants of the century, was exceedingly unenthusiastic about Western education. Instead, his father preferred Abdul Majid to leave school and take up a job in the government civil service, while saving up to pursue religious education in Mecca. As he grew up, he proved to be a talented writer, be it in English or Malay. He had written articles which he had submitted to the Malayan press and had also published his own magazines such as *Kemajuan Pengetahuan* [Knowledge Progress] (1925) and *The Modern Light* (1939-1941). In addition, he had also produced a special book on the problems faced by the Malays. This can be seen in the *Malays By One of Them* (1928). He was a contemporary of Za'ba, as both of them shared similar points of view on certain things while differing on other matters as well.

Abdul Majid, like Za'ba, had also aspired to become a medical doctor. However, due to the lack of encouragement by the British, he could not pursue his dream. He entered the colonial education service as a teacher. Abdul Majid was in the teaching profession service for sixteen years (1907-1923). Afterwards, he entered the special branch police service until his retirement in 1941. Za'ba and Abdul Majid had a cordial relationship for several years. Abdul Majid, who since 1907 became a teacher at Malay College Kuala Kangsar, had in fact helped Za'ba to secure a teaching position there to replace him in 1918. When Abdul Majid lived in Matang, Perak, Za'ba often stayed at his friend's house, especially during his teacher training course. These two friends essentially held an ambition to help the Malays achieve progress in their lives.

Abdul Majid was also a strong supporter of the Young Muslim reformist teachings organized by Khwaja Kamaluddin. He and Za'ba were responsible to organise Khwaja Kamaluddin's preaching activities in Taiping and Kuala Kangsar, Perak. Abdul Majid was one of the members of the *Anjuman-I Islam* founded in Singapore. He had also subscribed to the official magazine of the movement under Khwaja Kamaluddin in London, named *Islamic Review* and had also contributed articles to *The Muslim*, the official organ of the *Anjuman-I Islam*. Abdul Majid's involvement with that group had caused him to be labeled by conservative scholars in Malaya as "infidels and Malay Qadiani". Nevertheless, he continued to adhere to the teachings of reformist groups-based in India since his first exposure to it in the early 1920s till the end of his life.

Although they were close friends for six years (1918-1923) and were equally involved in the movement of the Indian reformist group, their friendship turned into a bitter relationship in later years. Early signs of cracks in their relationship could be identified when Abdul Majid had only supported the reformist ideas organized by Khawaja Kamaluddin, but not the local reformist movement popularized under the figures of Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin, Syed Sheikh al-Hadi and Za'ba which were active in Malaya at that time. Abdul Majid was said to have believed that the local reformist group which was inspired by West Asian reformers, was very dangerous because they "could move the populace to fanaticism, like their prototype, the Mullahs in India and Afghanistan". Another contributing factor which was said to have severed their relationship was due to Abdul Majid's career as a special branch police officer in 1924.

The earliest impact that Za'ba felt was when Abdul Majid shut down the establishment of the Malay Literary Association founded by Za'ba. Za'ba also kept his anger towards Abdul Majid because he had made a confidential report, not just against himself, but also the organization that was planned for its establishment and those joined by Za'ba.

In the aspect of education for the Malays, Abdul Majid's thought was no different from the other Malay collaborators and British colonial officials in Malaya. Although he was aware that "their salvation is, of course education" and "he was convinced that education is the only step towards civilization, its best sense" but the British colonial education policy in Malaya in his eyes, was more than adequate and it was good for the Malays. Accordingly, when the British colonial government set up Malay schools in Malaya, there were English Schools including MCKK and teacher training colleges. But he expressed his concern that sometimes there would be "too many English-educated Malays" in Malaya because of the increasing demand from the Malays to get education for their children.

Like Za'ba, Abdul Majid wanted the Malays to work on their own in the development of their education, namely through the participation of the Malays in the Cooperation Company. The obvious difference between them was on the approach. Although Za'ba accepted in principle the concept of the Cooperation Company, but its support was due to the absence of any support from the Malay rulers and the aristocrats. In his call "Rise Up", Abdul Majid had called the Malays to 'rise' to improve their economic setbacks. They were urged to be good at land soonest possible.

He never expressed anti-British feelings in his writing as Za'ba. Moreover, Abdul Majid viewed all of Britain's way of doing things excessively positive. Abdul Majid advised the Malays to become people who were always happy and contented as far as the administration of the government of their country was concerned, because:

[t]hey know full well that if they get rid of the British, they will be worse off under some other Power who would be sure to overrun the country and trample down the Malays the moment they are by themselves.

According to Adnan Haji Nawang (1995), Abdul Majid had voiced out his fear about the setbacks of throwing the British out from the country when he asserted that "remove the white man and his law from the country, Malaya will soon become a perfect pandemonium as it used to be in the old lawless days". This showed that Abdul Majid Zainuddin was in favour of British rule instead of other foreign powers.

Conclusion

This article provides hitherto, neglected information about the prominent members of the Anjuman-i-Islam. The brief profiles of these seven prominent individuals throw much light on their family background, education and careers. Despite their different family, education and career backgrounds, all of them shared the common view that the existing conditions of the Muslims in Malaya needed to be revitalized. It was this common worldview that brought them together under the banner of Anjuman-i-Islam. Furthermore, Anjuman-i-Islam may be categorized as an elitist organization, which attracted only the educated segment of population. Though there are several high-profile members of this association from the Malays; however, the majority of its members were Muslims of Indian origins.

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