

# The Dialogue between Qadian Ahmadiyya and *Persatuan Islam* in 1933

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**Abstract**— This article discusses the debate between the Qadian Ahmadiyya and *Persatuan Islam (Persis)*, one of the modernist Islamic organizations that started since 1923, based in Bandung. The teaching of Qadian Ahmadiyya was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) in Qadian, India. The teaching entered the Dutch Indies since 1925. Qadian Ahmadiyya was brought by Ahmadiyya Ulama, Maulana Rahmat Ali. The teaching of Ahmadiyya, was opposed by Islamic organizations in the Indies, especially *Persis*. There was a polemic between Ahmadiyya and *Persis* in 1932, both parties finally decided to hold an open debate held in Batavia and Bandung in 1933. The topics of debate were the death of the Prophet Isa AS, the presence of another Prophet after the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claim as Imam Mahdi. Representatives of all Islamic organizations, Dutch East Indies government, and other parties attended the open debate in Bandung and in Batavia. There were official notes whose contents were signed by both parties. The open debate took place peacefully that all participants were able to judge for themselves what was true according to their views. In recent years, we often witnessed conflicts on behalf of ethnic, racial, religious, and inter-group. Differences in theological issues were often resolved by force. This study showed that dissent could be resolved in an intellectual way, such as open debate. This research used historical method in the form of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography in order to produce accurate data according to intended objectives. This research highlighted that in the past, dissent was resolved without resorting to violence. Open debate can be a solution to differences of opinion in sensitive matters.

**Keywords**— *Qadian Ahmadiyya, Persis, polemic, public debate, Dutch East Indies*

## I. INTRODUCTION

How was a religious conflict handled in the past? The history offers an interesting example, an open debate between Islam Union or *Persatuan Islam (Persis)* and the Qadian Ahmadiyya, which took place in 1933. This event, despite being quite horrendous in its time, is now little known. However, since the beginning Indonesia has never been separated from continuous interaction with various cultures and religions, each of which gives a relatively significant colour. Therefore, inter-religious relations in Indonesia are often dynamic and fluctuating so that they often lead to conflicts. These conflicts are sometimes momentary, but some of them and become serious that physical violence may happen [1].

Among many conflicts, Muslim violence against Ahmadis has recently increased dramatically and has become a complicated problem because it was accompanied by physical violence as happened in Bogor, Sukabumi, Mataram, etc. In the past, the period of the Dutch East Indies, the rejection of Ahmadiyya was rampant and was seen in a number of polemics in the mass media and small debates between Islamic leaders or organizations and Ahmadiyya to culminate in an open debate between *Persis* versus Qadian Ahmadiyya in Batavia in 1933.

The fact that an important theological difference between two rival parties was resolved in an open debate, was an interesting phenomenon in Indonesian history. This shows that there was a time, that in our country a crucial difference in religion did not result in explosions of riots, destruction, and persecution, but resolved intellectually in an open debate attended by various Islamic organizations, the press, observers, and interested Muslims circles [2].

## II. METHOD

This paper used a four-steps historical research method, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography [3]. This paper made *Officieel Verslag* debate between *Persis* and Qadian Ahmadiyya in 1933 as the main source of discussion. In addition, the authors made use of historical sources for the establishment of Qadian Ahmadiyya and its entry into the Dutch East Indies to an open debate with *Persis*.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The introduction of Indonesia with Ahmadiyya was accidental history. It began when three students from Sumatra *Thawalib* School Abubakar Ayyub, Zaini Dahlan, and Nuruddin wanted to continue their studies at Al-Azhar University, Egypt. However, their teacher, Zainuddin Labai El-Yunusiyah and Shaykh Ibrahim Musa Parabek, suggested that they leave for India because there was a widespread Islamic modernization movement [4]. In India, they knew the teaching of Ahmadiyya and then pledged to enter Ahmadiyya [4]. A number of students from Sumatra followed. They also asked Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, the *Khalifah* of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at who had just returned from Wembley's Parliament of Living Religions - an interfaith dialogue organized by the British government in 1924 - to visit their country. Mahmud Ahmad

then sent Maulana Rahmat Ali, HAOT to represent him to the Dutch East Indies. After buying a dictionary of Malay and learning Malay from the Dutch East Indies students, Rahmat Ali left for Tapaktuan, Aceh in 1925, then to West Sumatra [5].

In 1926, Haji Rasul founded the Muhammadiyah branch in West Sumatra. The rapid development of Muhammadiyah in West Sumatra made Rahmat Ali decide to move his mission to Java because Hajji Rasul's resistance to Ahmadiyya in West Sumatra was very high and he predicted that in Java *Zending* and missionary activities were very intense [6]. He left for Batavia in 1931. On the way to Batavia, he had established a branch of Ahmadiyya in South Sumatra. Batavia was then chosen to be the centre of the Ahmadiyya movement. In Batavia, Rahmat Ali hooked up followers by opening an Arabic language course. As the study of Islam and Ahmadiyya was held some students were interested and devoted to the teaching of Ahmadiyya [7].

Ahmadiyya then developed in Bogor because of the illicit status of pig. At that time Rahmat Ali was invited to explain the illicit status of pig. By using the book of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's Philosophy of Islamic Teachings, Rahmat Ali used to explain about the prohibition of pigs rationally that attracted the study participants to be followers of Ahmadiyya. Since 1932 the Ahmadiyya Jama'at has emerged in Bogor.

The rapid development of Ahmadiyya teachings also faced resistance from various circles, especially Persis. Many Persis figures, such as Ahmad Hasan, wrote articles attacking Ahmadiyya teachings. This had driven Persis cadres to establish *Pembela Islam*. *Pembela Islam* initiated by Ahmad Hassan was formally founded in 1929. This committee was originally intended to respond to a *zending* named A.C. Christoffel's lecture, about Muhammad as a Prophet that was considered to discredit the Prophet Muhammad SAW himself. The committee also intended to answer the accusations of nationalists who assumed that some teachings of Islam, for example polygamy, were obsolete and demeaning to women. To answer these allegations, *Pembela Islam* published a magazine in 1929 [8]. Although this magazine belonged to the *Pembela Islam*, it was regarded as the official Persis magazine. *Pembela Islam* then issued a lot of polemics and debates with missionaries, as well as with the Seventh-day Adventist Church [9], the national movement, Ahmadiyya, Ba'alwi groups, and traditionalist Muslim groups. The magazine also had the *Soal-Djawab* column, a question and answer rubric between Ahmad Hassan with readers of *Pembela Islam*.

In 1932, Ahmad Hassan wrote *Risalah Ahmadiyya* and *Membantah beberapa I'tiqad Ahmadiyya* in *Pembela Islam* which made Ahmadiyya angry, so that they responded by establishing *Sinar Islam* magazine which later became the official magazine of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at. In 1933, Ahmad Hassan again attacked Ahmadiyya in the *Risalah Mirzaiyah*. There were various objections denied during 1932-1933 between the *Pembela Islam* magazine and *Sinar Islam* magazine until finally the two sides agreed to hold an open debate in Bandung and then continued in Batavia [10].

The open debates in Bandung were held 14, 15, and 16 April 1933 at the Societeit Ons Genoegen Building, Naripanweg,

discussing the issue of "The life or death of Prophet Isa AS." Ahmadiyya was represented by Maulana Rahmat Ali, HAOT, Maulana Abubakar Ayyub, and Maulana Mohammad Sidik, while representatives from Persis were Ahmad Hasan and Mohammad Syafi'i from the *Sarekat Islam Indonesia* Party. This fierce debate apparently did not satisfy both parties so both of them agreed to hold the next debate in Batavia. The Open Debate in Batavia took place at Gang Kenari, Batavia, 28 to 30 September 1933. Ahmadiis were represented by Maulana Rahmat Ali, HAOT and Maulana Abubakar Ayyub, while Persis was represented by Ahmad Hasan. Both parties agreed to choose R. Muhammad Muhyidin as *voorzitter* (moderator and referee) to handle open debate between Qadian Ahmadiyya and Persis. This exactly attracted the Dutch East Indies colonial government evidenced by the sending of the head of the *Kantoor voor Inlandsche Zaken* (office of indigenous affairs) G.F. Pijper to witness the debate, both in Bandung and in Batavia. Open debate was attended by Islamic organizations, including Bandung Islamic Union, Garut Islamic Union, Leles Islamic Union, Al-Irsyad Bogor, Al-Irsyad Meester Comelis, Al-Islamiyah Master Comelis, Indonesian Muslim Youth, Qadian Ahmadiyya Cepu Branch, Qadian Ahmadiyya Bogor Branch, Qadian Ahmadiyya Padang Branch, Tanjung Priuk Islamic Education, Annadil-Islam Batavia, An Nadil-Islam Pekojan Batavia, Cirebon Islamic College, Nahdatul Ulama Menes-Banten, PPMI Batavia Centrum, Tirtayasa, Mas Bogor, Salamatul Insan Tanah Abang, Pemuda Indonesia-Jakarta, and Hoofdbestuur Al Irsyad. While the mass media were present and covered among others: *Sipatahunan*, *Sumangat*, *Sikap*, *Adil*, *Siang Po*, *Jawa Barat*, *Bintang Timur*, *Pemandangan*, *Senjata Pemuda*, *Keng Po*, *Ceto Welo-welo*, and *Sin Po* [8]. The colonial government sent a complete police team to ensure the safety of the debate in both Bandung and Batavia from the beginning to the end.

This part of the debate in Bandung was not discussed in detail because it basically also became the theme of the debate in Batavia. The theme of the debate in Batavia was more complete because it covered three themes, namely the death of the Prophet Isa, another prophet after the Prophet Muhammad, and the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

Public enthusiasm for the open debate in Batavia was much higher than the previous debate held in Bandung. Around 2000 people attended the debate in Batavia twice as much as the previous debate in Bandung. Islamic organizations and representatives of the press who attended the debate in Batavia were more than those present at the previous debate in Bandung.

The three-day debate was divided into three themes. The first day discussed the issue of the life or death of Prophet Isa AS (just like the debate in Bandung). The second day discussed the issue of existence of a prophet after the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and the third day discussed Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claims as Imam Mahdi, Messiah, Avatar, Maitreya Buddha, and Mujaddid.

On September 28, 1933, at 20.00 p.m. the debate was opened by Ahmad Sarido, representing the *Munazarah* Committee. After he had ended his quite long speech and Abdur Razak was invited to read the Qur'anic verse, R. Mohammad Muhyidin as a *voorzitter* announced a number of regulations and sanctions

related to the three-day debate he led. The audience was prohibited from cheering on one of the debating camps, and not to comment or give insulting gestures.

How the debate run was explained by Abubakar Ayyub. As Mr. Voorzitter had explained that what would be discussed this evening, was the arrival of the prophet after the Prophet Muhammad SAW. We Ahmadiyya believed that Muhammad SAW was *Chatamannabiyyin*, as mentioned in the verse he read briefly. According to our belief, after the Prophet Muhammad SAW, a new prophet could also come, but did not have a new Sharia or a new religion. However, according to the beliefs of the *Pembela Islam*, there were no more prophets after the Prophet Muhammad SAW either that those who had the Sharia or who did not have Sharia [11].

The explanation above was immediately followed by a series of explanations about the definition of prophets in Arabic from various books. From the explanation of the prophet, his argument arrived at the rationalization of the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet who did not carry the Sharia. The Prophet Muhammad SAW was the last prophet who brought the Sharia, while Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a prophet who did not carry a new Sharia instead practiced Islamic Sharia as brought by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The explanation was then followed by the arguments from the Qur'an and Hadith, including the following:

"I also need to explain here; what kind of prophet and apostle are there? According to the Qur'anic description, the prophet and the apostle were divided into two, those who have his own sharia or religion; those who do not have their own sharia, only work to run the Sharia of the previous prophet" [11].

After the presentation of Abubakar Ayyub was over, the *voorzitter* invited Ahmad Hassan to explain his views. He put forward the Qur'anic verses and various hadiths indicating that the Prophet Muhammad SAW was the last prophet and there were no other prophets afterwards. Every time he showed a hadith, He also showed a number of hadiths that sounded similar enthusiasm, so that in the *Officieel Verslag Debat* there was only one or two hadiths and the rest was that He mentioned several hadiths of the same content. After presenting a number of Qur'anic texts and many hadiths, He then closed the presentation as follows:

"According to the lightness of the Qur'an and Hadith, as I have explained earlier, there was not a single statement which indicated that there could be one prophet even though one did not carry the Sharia. Even according to his thought, the ummah of this age did not need to obey to the prophet. They needed to be led by their prophets, because the book was not written and not transcribed as the Qur'an" [11].

This Qur'an or Islamic religion came in the beginning of time which could be preserved from lost, because there were papers and so forth to spread it, especially there was the word of Allah which was true. We were really tired of bringing down the Qur'an and we will keep it (*Q. Al-Hijr. 9*). Because of that, there was no need for the prophets to lead this ummah as the prophets of *Bani Israil* (Jews), even the mastermind in this age was a great

danger among Muslims. Look, Mirza claimed that he was a prophet and wanted to unite the Ummah, he said, so that his arrival did not become a union, but it made a split, as we saw where? Where, especially in his own community, there were fragments, namely Lahore and Qadian Ahmadiyya, the one with the other, hostile" [11].

In contrast to the first night's debate with the theme of the death of Prophet Isa AS, it was in the second night of Ahmad Hassan's debate that he was freer to use the sharpness of logic and a series of syllogisms when arguing in addition to showing various verses of the Qur'an and hadith. Meanwhile, Abubakar Ayyub from the Qadian Ahmadiyya defended more and was not as casual as the night before when he stated that Isa AS had died. One of Ahmad Hassan's discretion was seen in the following quote.

"Dear brothers and sisters and honourable *voorzitter*. I was given a turn to refute the statements put forward by Mr. Abubakar Ayyub about the present of another prophet after our prophet Muhammad SAW" [11].

In the beginning of his speech, the master explained the meaning of the words of the prophet, apostle, and the nature of his character, and the meaning of the revelation and to whom who came. It was because there was no business he did not refute. What he refuted from the master's speech was the existence of a prophet or perhaps there was a prophet after the prophet Muhammad SAW.

When describing the possibility of having a prophet after Muhammad SAW, the Qadian Ahmadiyya also quoted the hadith regarding the coming of Prophet Isa later, as a reinforcement of his argument. Whereas in the previous night's debate the possibility of the Prophet Isa's descent into the world was strongly rejected by the Qadian Ahmadiyya. However, the Qadian Ahmadiyya then rectified the paradox and attributed it to Ahmad Hassan. This was done by Abubakar Ayyub of the Qadian Ahmadiyya by demonstrating the paradox of the thought of the *Pembela Islam* who believed that Prophet Isa AS was still alive, but still acknowledged that the Prophet Muhammad SAW was the last prophet. The following is the excerpt of the argument:

"*Pembela Islam* believed that Prophet Isa would come at the end of time. So, wasn't there a prophet after Prophet Muhammad SAW died? Both parties agreed that there will not be a new prophet after Prophet Muhammad SAW. However, they differed in the prophet who would come earlier. *Pembela Islam* said Prophet Isa, who would come earlier, the Ahmadiyya said, it would be a new Prophet Isa, because old was dead" [11].

In last night's debate, when discussing Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claim as a *Messiah, Imam Mahdi, Mujaddid*, Ahmad Hasan used Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's writings as material by showing quite a number of contradictions in his statements [12]. The atmosphere of the debate became more intense when Ahmad Hassan quoted statements from his several books and read them in before the audience. Most of the excerpts of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's statements and Ahmad Hassan's comments were taken from *Risalah Mirzaiyah* and *Some Beberapa I'tiqad*

*Ahmadiyah*, which in fact underlay the Qadiyan Ahmadiyya polemics with Persis.

In its rebuttal, the Qadiyan Ahmadiyya denied most of Ahmad Hassan's writings and said his statements were incorrect. Rahmat Ali also repeatedly said that what Ahmad Hassan quoted from Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was slander. The atmosphere became intensified but it also turned out to be considered relaxed and even funny. Here's a little picture:

*Tuan Pembela Islam* said, that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote to Rashid Ridha that he would die earlier than he would be. However, apparently Rashid Ridha was alive, Mirza was dead. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad did not write like this but he wrote, explaining that Rashid Ridha could not write and discuss his books. This was what Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had written to *Al-Manar*, not a matter of death and life, it was because Islam is rotating. According to *Pembela Islam* agreement, if it was not true, he would give £500, Mr. Voorzitter! asked £500. While Rahmat Ali showed his book to Voorzitter), he said, "give now £500." Ahmad Hasan said that he read it in *Almanar*, not in Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's book. Then Rahmat Ali continued the conversation" [11].

More or less the same events occurred many times. *Pembela Islam* wrote that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad said Allah SWT had very many legs and arms. This was a lie, a fake, a slanderous lie, Actually Mirza Ghulam Ahmad did not write such thing. In the *Mirzaiyah* treatise that these words were taken from the book of *Taudihul Maram*. That book was in Rahmat Ali's hand and was shown to Mr. Voorzitter and *Pembela Islam* explaining where it was written.

Mr. Hassan wondered in what language it was written; and Rahmat said that it was in Urdu. Then he continued his explanation [11]. Answering the accusation of defamation, Ahmad Hassan in his answer stated that all quotations of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad were taken from *Al-Manar*. He also stated that before writing *Mirzaiyah*, he had contacted the Ahmadiyya of Batavia to order Mirza Ghulam's books in order to be able to quote accurately but they never responded. Finally, Ahmad Hassan wrote letters to both Lahore and Qadian Ahmadiyya, but neither of them responded. Here was Ahmad Hassan's argument.

"In the end, I did not accept the Ahmadiyya's refutation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Mirzaiyah* Minutes because before I wrote the treatise, I told and asked to buy books, but they did not care. It was true because the books were written in Urdu that I didn't know. God willing, I would learn the language seriously" [11].

After the exposition from Ahmad Hassan ended, the debate was closed on September 30, 1933. The closing speech was given by Mr. Sulaiman representing the *Munazarah Committee* followed by the *voorzitter jury* speech, Iskandar Brata. Then the event was completely closed with the speech of Muhammad Muhyiddin as *voorzitter*.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The debate did not reach agreement on who was right and who was wrong. Visitors were welcome to choose the truth according to their respective versions. Similarly, the media could report the debate and other related events according to the media's frame. The two sides finally agreed to issue the official debate minutes published on October 12, 1933. The two parties which debated the issue before the moderator, the representative, the jury, and attendants signed the official debate minute as the evidence of the debate. After it had been signed, each party issued the official printed minutes using their respective publishers. There was no difference between *Persis'* and Qadian Ahmadiyya's version. Both of them were exactly the same.

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