

Founding of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, March – May 1914

Main points from a Talk by Dr Zahid Aziz at Darus Salaam, Wembley, U.K. on 2nd March 2014 to commemorate the centenary of its establishment

1. Muslim spiritual orders founded by saints existed all over the Indian subcontinent, long before the Ahmadiyya Movement. Usually these were centred around the tomb of the saint. Three flaws had developed in previous movements and sects:
 - a. The headship and control of the movements had passed into the hands of the descendants of the saints. These descendants were capitalising on the repute of the saint to receive homage from the public as well as donations which they used for personal ends.
 - b. These heads of spiritual orders were revered and regarded as holy by their followers because of their descent. They took people into their discipleship and the disciples obeyed them unquestioningly, looking upon them as the gateway to God.
 - c. Leaders of various sects denounced other sects as unbelievers.
2. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad set up a system of running the Ahmadiyya movement after him which avoided these pitfalls.
3. Two and a half years before his death he published his Will in December 1905 and laid down how the movement would be run after him.
 - a. Instead of one spiritual leader who would have all members as his personal disciples, he wrote that after him any forty Ahmadis could choose a venerable person from among them as being fit and suitable to bring newcomers into the Movement by taking *bai'at* from them in the name of Hazrat Mirza sahib.
 - b. Separately from this, for the management and administration of the movement he created a committee known as *Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya*. He appointed 14 persons to this committee. This committee immediately started operating during his life. He gave in writing that, while during his life he could override a decision of this Anjuman (which he never did), after his life its decisions, arrived at by majority of opinion, would be final and binding.

- c. The President of this Anjuman was Maulana Nur-ud-Din, Secretary Maulana Muhammad Ali, and legal advisor Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din. The other eleven members were also prominent Ahmadis. Of the fourteen members, nine were unrelated to him. (Out of the five related to him, two were related only as being fathers-in-law of his children.)
4. Due to the influence of prevailing tradition, some members of his family did not like this arrangement and started to try weakening the Anjuman under various pretexts with a view to establishing a hereditary successorship. They did not succeed during the remaining lifetime of Hazrat Mirza sahib.
5. After Hazrat Mirza sahib's death in May 1908, Maulana Nur-ud-Din was unanimously chosen by the community as its Head. He said with pride that it was a great achievement of Hazrat Mirza sahib and his miracle that, despite the existence of his close relatives, "the entire community took the pledge at the hand of an outsider" who is not in the least related to Hazrat Mirza sahib.
6. The Anjuman itself, and also Maulana Muhammad Ali and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din as individuals, now held an extremely prominent position in the Ahmadiyya Movement. This was much to the displeasure and annoyance of the family members.
7. First they tried to create a rift between Maulana Nur-ud-Din and the Anjuman, and urged Maulana Nur-ud-Din to take all power himself and become an autocratic *khalifa*. Along with this, they planned for Mirza Mahmud Ahmad to succeed Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head after him.
8. Although at first they had some success in creating doubts in Maulana Nur-ud-Din's mind about Maulana Muhammad Ali and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, but they failed to convince him to take power away from the Anjuman. Instead, he declared that it is those 14 members whom Hazrat Mirza sahib appointed to the Anjuman, who are collectively the *Khalifa*, and their decisions are final and binding and also legally valid. But they have unanimously accepted one man as their Head.
9. In 1911 Mirza Mahmud Ahmad (aged 22) created a group within the Jamaat called *Ansarullah*, in fact he called it an Anjuman, to pave the way for him to become the next Head. When creating this group, he described in an article a dream that he saw: there was a big palace a part of which was being demolished and workmen were baking new bricks. He says he was told in the dream that this palace was the Ahmadiyya Jamaat, and a part of it was being demolished to throw out the old bricks and to extend it with new bricks. By "old bricks" he was hinting at people such as

Maulana Muhammad Ali who had long worked in the Movement since Mirza Mahmud Ahmad was a child.

10. At the same time Mirza Mahmud Ahmad wrote an article declaring all other Muslims, except those who had joined the Ahmadiyya Jamaat, as being *kafir* and expelled from Islam. He himself says about this article: “I wrote that as we believed the Promised Messiah to be one of the prophets of God, we could not possibly regard his deniers as Muslims” and that “such people as had failed to recognise the Promised Messiah as a *Rasul* even if they called him a righteous person with their tongues, were yet veritable *Kafirs*”.
11. Making Hazrat Mirza sahib a prophet, and calling all other Muslims as *kafir*, was part of the aim to create a *khilafat* system in which the *khalifa* is regarded as the real and true head of all Muslims in the world, and he is not just the head of a group of Muslims. Another reason for declaring other Muslims as *kafir* was to dent the growing popularity of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din among Muslims, and the acclaim he was winning for the whole movement, by his lectures on Islam all over India.
12. Mirza Mahmud Ahmad and his group’s fear was that Maulana Muhammad Ali and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din were acquiring such fame and renown, both inside and outside the Movement, that one of them might be chosen as the next head of the Movement.
13. Shortly before his death, Hazrat Maulana Nur-ud-Din asked Maulana Muhammad Ali to write an article to refute Mirza Mahmud Ahmad’s standpoint that other Muslims are *kafir*. A month before his death, he said in the presence of a large number of people, including Mirza Mahmud Ahmad, that Mirza Mahmud Ahmad had not understood the Islamic teaching that no Muslim can be called *kafir*.
14. Maulana Nur-ud-Din died on 13 March 1914, while saying his *Juma* prayers.
15. What happened after that is described by Maulana Muhammad Ali. He had talks with Mirza Mahmud Ahmad:

“I said to him that as the community is openly split into two on the question of *Kufr* (unbelief) and Islam, so we have to think about the future and devise some way of keeping the community united. ... I could not accept a man as spiritual guide who calls Muslims as *kafir*, and by the same token the other party cannot take *bai’at* on the hand of a man who according to them is in error on such an important issue.”

16. He continues: “I made efforts to persuade Mirza Mahmud Ahmad to reach an agreement, so that a split in the *Jama'at* could be prevented. However, he did not accept any of my proposals. One of my proposals was that both sides should present their arguments before a gathering of the leading men of the *Jama'at*, and whichever side is considered to be right by the majority, its view should be adopted as the belief of the *Jama'at*, and the community should remain as one. But Mirza Mahmud Ahmad was insistent, in regard to our belief that all those who profess the *Kalima* are Muslims, whatever sect they may belong to, that although we could hold this belief within our hearts but we would not be allowed to express it openly. This was impossible for us to accept.”
17. How Mirza Mahmud Ahmad was chosen as *khalifa* at a meeting the next day (14 March 1914) was as follows. First the will of Maulana Nur-ud-Din was read out, which said that his successor “should treat the older members with tolerance, forbearance and kindness”. Then, as prearranged by the Ansarullah party, voices were raised calling out for Mirza Mahmud Ahmad to be made *khalifa*. A senior most Ahmadi, Syed Muhammad Ahsan of Amroha, then proposed his name. Maulana Muhammad Ali writes: “I rose up to mention the discussion that had taken place between me and Mirza Mahmud Ahmad but some men began to shout that they would not listen”. They shouted: “Sit down, sit down”. Thus Maulana Muhammad Ali was not given a hearing at this meeting.
18. Someone who was present writes: “After this, although the body of Hazrat *Khalifat-ul-Masih* lay unburied, yet slogans of congratulations to Mirza Mahmud Ahmad on becoming *khalifa* were being raised and loud shouting [i.e. cheering] broke out like that of a common mob. ... After that, some supporters of the *khilafat* took up position at the arrival port in the town while others started roaming around the town, forcing people to sign [to accept him as *khalifa*].”
19. Note that the senior most Ahmadi who proposed Mirza Mahmud Ahmad’s name, Maulana Syed Muhammad Ahsan, realised his error within two years. He announced in a statement in 1916:
- “...at that time, in order to preserve unity, I considered it advisable that all of us should take the pledge at the hand of Mirza Mahmud Ahmad sahib. I did not know then that his beliefs had undergone corruption. ... I declare that, because of his insistence on his wrong beliefs, he is no longer considered by me to be fit to be the *khalifa* or head of the *Jama'at* of the Promised Messiah”.

20. Coming back to the events of March 1914, Maulana Muhammad Ali had lived in Qadian since 1900. The prominent people among those who supported his standpoint were connected with the city of Lahore. They held meetings in Lahore during March to consider what to do. They passed a set of proposals which were sent to Mirza Mahmud Ahmad in Qadian, which were basically that they were prepared to accept Mirza Mahmud Ahmad as head of the Movement subject to two conditions: (1) He must abide by the decisions of Sadr Anjuman as being final and binding, and (2) existing Ahmadis should not be required to take the pledge at his hand. However, Mirza Mahmud Ahmad refused to discuss these proposals.

21. By now it had also become impossible for Maulana Muhammad Ali to continue living in Qadian, as he was subjected to harassment and threats of violence by supporters of Mirza Mahmud Ahmad. He had to flee from Qadian for his life around 20th April.

22. It was under these circumstances that the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore came into existence. Maulana Muhammad Ali said in an announcement at the time:

“...considering that the doctrine of calling other Muslims as *kafir* poses a danger to the work of the propagation of Islam and the progress of the Movement, ... it has been deemed advisable that ... an Anjuman be created in Lahore for the purpose of the propagation of Islam.”

23. The first meeting of its Council of Trustees was held on 3 May 1914. Maulana Muhammad Ali was elected as the Head (*amir*) of the community and President, and other office-holders were appointed. In all 59 members were elected as trustees.

Maulana Muhammad Ali recalled many years later:

“A handful of men laid the foundations of a *Jama'at* in Lahore. But we had no building, no missionary, no office, and no money.”

“When we created the new Anjuman its budget for the first year was only Rs. 7000 whereas before this the budget of the whole *Jama'at* was Rs. 200,000. We were also bereft of everything.”

24. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was an Indian Muslim scholar and journalist, who later became famous as a political leader and government minister in India. In his newspaper, *Al-Hilal*, dated 25 March 1914, he commented as follows about these events:

“For some time, there had been two parties in this Movement over the question of *takfir*. One party believed that non-Ahmadis are Muslims even though they may not believe in Mirza sahib's claims. The other party, how-

ever, declared openly and clearly that those people who do not believe in Mirza sahib are *kafir* absolutely — *inna li-llahi wa inna ilai-hi raji'un*. The head of the latter party is Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, and this faction has now made him *khalifa* but the first group does not accept this. The writing published in this connection by Maulana Muhammad Ali, and the wonderful and admirable courage he has shown in expressing these views while staying in Qadian, where the heads of the other party live, **is truly an event which shall always be regarded as a memorable event of this year.**"

25. Thus the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore came into being for the propagation of Islam with the key beliefs that: (1) all those who profess the *Kalima* of Islam are Muslims and cannot be declared as outside the fold of Islam, and (2) no prophet can come after the Holy Prophet Muhammad, neither a new one nor an old one.
26. The group which remained based at Qadian under Mirza Mahmud Ahmad's headship themselves had to flee Qadian for their lives in 1947 when the partition of India took place. This put paid to their criticism and taunt that Maulana Muhammad Ali and his associates had abandoned Qadian and set up headquarters elsewhere, since they themselves had to leave Qadian and set up new headquarters in Rabwah. Then in 1984 their leadership had to flee from Rabwah and came to the UK.
27. Maulana Muhammad Ali and his associates left Qadian for the sake of a principle taught by Islam, that a Muslim cannot be called a *kafir* or unbeliever. This principle is to the benefit of all Muslims. They did not leave for the sake of a personal or sectarian gain, but for the maintenance of inter-Muslim harmony.
28. Over the years the Qadiani group has had to shy away from their doctrine that other Muslims are "not Muslims" but are "veritable kafirs". Today almost every member of their *Jama 'at*, from the *Khalifa* downwards, says that anyone who recites the *Kalima* is a Muslim. Unfortunately, this change has come about under pressure from their anti-Ahmadiyya opponents. It is not a whole-hearted change, and is not reflected in their actual practice, but is mere words.
29. Anyhow, these events have proved that the Lahore Ahmadiyya founding members were right in their brave and principled stand.
30. We pray to Allah for the Lahore Ahmadiyya pioneers that He bless their efforts, accept their sacrifices, reward them greatly, grant them forgiveness, make their names shine ever-lastingly in the history of Islam, and give us the opportunity, with all our weakness and faults, to carry forward their work!