

# RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN INDONESIA

## A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF AHMADIYYA MOVEMENT

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**Abstract:** The study attempts to investigate the various issues related to the phenomenon of religious expression in contemporary Indonesian society with particular focus on the study of the Ahmadiyya movement and its impact on the society. Ahmadiyya movement is considered against Islamic beliefs especially due to its teaching that its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a Prophet and the *Tadzkirah* is a holy book next to the *Qur'ān*. The study discusses complex interplay between Indonesian 'Ulamā Council (MUI) with its *fatwā* on the prohibition of Ahmadiyya sect, its proponent, the Radical Conservative Islamist group (RCI) and its opponent the Liberal Islamist group (LIG). RCI groups have pushed for imposition of *Sharī'ah* to solve Indonesia's multi-dimensional problems. On the other hand, liberal Islamic groups are promoting a liberal-inclusive approach to Islam in society. This situation has put the government in a dilemma as to the most appropriate move to take in dealing with the matter. Moreover, soon after the issuance of the *fatwā*, a series of attacks on the compounds, buildings and properties of Ahmadiyya centres have taken place. The attacks seemed to suggest to the ordinary people that the *fatwā* is crucial and timely and they are responsible to implement it. In this context, it is pertinent to investigate in greater detail the central issue in question i.e. the teaching of Ahmadiyya itself, how do its followers understand Islam, how was the "meaning" of Islam developed by the Ahmadiyya founder and his disciples and what are the local socio-cultural factors that might have further influenced their understanding and practice of Islam. In addition, the study also looks at how such an understanding is seen by the above 'authorities' and 'powers' within the context of Indonesian socio-cultural milieu as well as the implications of such religious understanding and practice on people. This study adopts a qualitative research approach involving both fieldwork and library research. For the former, it uses mainly interview and participant observation as tools for generating primary data from

the research site. The study revealed that there are several factors that seem to have influenced the respondents' decision to join the movement and their understanding of Islam. Among all factors, one element appears to be the most outstanding, that is, some respondents came from families with religious Islamic background and orientation. Their meaning of Islam also seems to be influenced mainly by their own experiences. It is found that there are similar patterns of experience among the respondents which have shaped their meaning of Islam. The study ends with some suggestions and recommendations in its concluding chapter.

**Keywords:** Ahmadiyya, expression, Islam, meaning

### I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a plural society comprising more than 17,000 islands, 400 ethnic groups, as well as various customs, religions and beliefs. Currently, the total population of Indonesia is around 225 million with Muslims being the majority of the Indonesian populace (87.5%) followed by Protestants (7%), Catholics (2.5%), Hindus (1.5%), Buddhists (0.5%) and other believers like animists (1%) .

Although the majority of the Indonesian populace are Muslims, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Indonesia's stated ideology is not Islam but *Pancasila* or the Five Principles. The first principle of Pancasila is "*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*" (Belief in One Supreme God).<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Indonesia's founding fathers agreed that Indonesia is neither a secular nor a theocratic state. Consequently, the Indonesian constitution, *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945* (The 1945 Constitution), is not to be based on *Sharī'ah*. History also shows that earlier attempts at imposing *Sharī'ah* within the state constitution had failed since

<sup>1</sup> The State ideology Pancasila refers to the five principles, (1) Believe in One Supreme God, (2) Humanity, (3) Unity of Indonesia, (4) Democracy and (5) Social Justice.

Indonesian independence in 1945 and the subsequent years.

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 with its ensuing euphoric introduction of democracy has given fresh air to the debate of the compatibility of Islam and democracy in Indonesia. The emergence of many nationalist and religious parties has somehow surprised foreign observers that Indonesia, at least at the surface level, appeared to have been able to finally adjust itself to the dynamics of democracy. This has also been marked by the vibrant press freedom which saw how high-ranking officials have been painfully adjusting themselves to the new atmosphere where accountability is a buzzword [4].

One important phenomenon arising from this development was the emergence of religious-based movements. The two remarkable religious groups that emerged during this era were the Radical Conservative Islamist group (RCI) and Liberal Islamist group (LIG). RCI is highly inclined to the religio-political thoughts of the Middle East, especially the ideology of radical *salafism*. This can be observed in the ideology of such organizations as *Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia*, *Hizbut Tahrir*, *Lasykar Hizbullah*, *Lasykar Jundullah*, *Darul Islam*, *Lasykar Jihad*, *Ikhwanul Muslimin Hammas* and the like. These groups have pushed for the imposition of *Shari'ah* to solve Indonesia's multi-dimensional problems. Some scholars believe that RCI groups adopt literal interpretations of *Shari'ah* which are strict and exclusive.

On the other hand, the establishment of LIG was to counter balance the spread of RCI ideas and movements which tend to promote a strict legal-exclusivist approach to Islam in society. Contrary to RCI, the LIG is committed to develop liberal-inclusivist approach to Islam [5].

The differences of interpretation between Liberal Islamist and Fundamental Islamist thoughts have created opposing debates on many aspects in the discourse on Islam. One example of this can be represented by the legal ruling or *fatwā* of the Indonesian 'Ulamā Council (MUI) on Ahmadiyya movement in 2005 prohibiting its operation in Indonesia. In other words, MUI was against the teachings of the minority Ahmadiyya sect deemed deviant by the religious authorities of the country. Despite the *fatwā*, members of the Ahmadiyya movement continued to preach and practice their beliefs.

The Ahmadiyya sect was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Indian state of Punjab. It is now estimated to have more than 10 million followers worldwide. Unlike the mainstream

Islam, Ahmadiyya according to MUI, teaches that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who died in 1908 in India is another prophet of Islam whose mission is to establish a movement that would revitalize the religion [30].

As a result of this prohibition, Ahmadiyya sect was condemned and attacked by Muslim hardliners in Parung, Bogor on July 15, 2005 followed by further assaults on the other Ahmadiyya branches in Jakarta, Cirebon, Kuningan, Garut and Tasikmalaya. In Parung, thousands of people, in the name of *Gerakan Ummat Islam Indonesia* or the Indonesian Islamic Community Movement (GUUI) staged a demonstration at the Al Mubarak campus condemning the movement. They used sticks and stones to attack the Al Mubarak and demanded the closure of the campus and immediate expulsion of the Ahmadiis from the campus. Shouting *Allāhu Akbar*, GUII members, raided the campus and threatened the Ahmadiists. Other attacks that took place include the ones on December 11, 2007, in the village of Sumbawa Besar where stones were thrown at the properties owned by the Ahmadiyya members and then in the village of Pangauban where the Mosque of the Ahmadiyya Community was burned down.

Around midnight of December 22, 2007, approximately 50 persons wearing masks attacked the Ahmadiyya mosque at Sadasari Village in the West Java Province of Indonesia. During the attack, the roofs were destroyed, windows shattered, doors burned and five Ahmadiists' houses were destroyed [3].

In the morning of April 28, 2008, a mosque and a school in an Ahmadiyya complex in Sukabumi, West Java, were torched by a 300-strong mob, which were whipped into frenzy by a group that called itself the *Jamaah Al Mubāligh* in Communication Forum. It was reported that as they attacked they shouted: "Kill! Kill! Kill!" while burning down a mosque belonging to the movement. The Ahmadiyya followers had to vacate the complex and although none was hurt, a member of the police force, who arrived late and undermanned, was injured. The police made a number of arrests and had charged five people in relation to the arson [26].

With this series of attacks, members of the Ahmadiyya movements were forced to leave their homes. For the last few months the situation in Indonesia has been getting worse due to anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment. Thousands of radical and conservative Muslims have organized a rally in Jakarta for several days to force the government to ban Ahmadiyya movement in Indonesia.

On Sunday, June 1, 2008, approximately 75 members of the National Alliance for the Freedom of Faith and

Religion (AKKBB) who were rallying in support of Jamaah Ahmadiyya were injured after being attacked by *Komando Laskar Islam* which consisted of several groups including Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), *Laskar Mujahidin* and *Brigade Hizbullah*. The Jakarta police arrested more than 30 members of the FPI for their alleged involvement in the violence toward AKKBB peaceful assembly at the National Monument in Central Jakarta. FPI has been urging the government to ban Ahmadiyya movement due to its deviation from the mainstream Islamic teachings especially for believing that its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a prophet [17].

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Against the above backdrop, it can be said that one of the most important developments relating to Islam in contemporary Indonesia is the power of the MUI, the country's highest authority on Islam and the influence of its *fatwā* on people's sentiment. One of the eleven new *fatwā* issued on 28 July 2005 by MUI relates to the prohibition of Ahmadiyya sect. According to this *fatwā*, the Ahmadiyya teachings are against Islam especially due to its teaching that its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a prophet and the *Tadhkirah* is a holy book next to the *Qur'ān*. In fact in 1980, MUI already issued a *fatwā* on Ahmadiyya. Soon after the issuance of the *fatwā*, a series of attacks on the compounds, buildings and properties of Ahmadiyya centres have been taking place. The attacks seemed to suggest that to the ordinary people the *fatwā* is crucial and they are responsible to implement it. From the outset, *Jemaat Ahmadiyya* too seems to believe that *kalimah shahadat* is taught by the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. They also believe that Muhammad is *khātam al-anbiyā'* or the final prophet. However, they at the same time also believe that Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a teacher, a *murshid*, a bearer of good news and warnings, a bearer of *mubashshirat*, a founder and a leader of *Ahmadiyya* whose mission is to strengthen *da'wah* and propagate Islam brought earlier by the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.

They also declared that there is no book other than the *Qur'ān*. The *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* of Muhammad are their sources of Islamic teachings. Book of *Tadhkirah* which is used by Ahmadiyya followers is not a holy book similar to the *Qur'ān*, but it is a record of spiritual experiences of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad compiled into a book and called *Tadhkirah* by his followers in 1935, that was 27 years after his death.

Despite these apparent claims, MUI still regarded Ahmadiyya movement as a deviant sect. In response, however, the Religious Minister Maftuh Basyuni said that banning Ahmadiyya was "not a solution" [11].

Meanwhile, the liberal Islamic groups argued that followers of Ahmadiyya should be protected under Indonesia's constitution because it guarantees the right to religious freedom. While liberal Islamic groups have urged the state to protect the Ahmadiyya members, the conservative insisted on the government to ban the movement as soon as possible claiming that their beliefs are contradictory to the basic tenets of Islam.

It is against this background that this research is proposed i.e. to attempt to investigate the various issues related to the phenomenon of religious expression in contemporary Indonesian society with particular focus on the study of Ahmadiyya movement at Parung and its impact on the society. The allegation of its deviation will not only be examined against the original teachings of Islam as taught by the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, but also against the mainstream religious dominance as defined by the prevailing Sunni school of thought in the country as well as against the socio-cultural norms, values and ethos considered acceptable to the Indonesia's general Muslim populace.

The complex interplay between MUI's *fatwā* on Ahmadiyya on the one hand and liberal Islam has also put the government in dilemma as to the most appropriate move to take in dealing with the matter. In this context, it is pertinent to investigate in greater detail the central issue in question i.e. the teaching of Ahmadiyya itself, how do its followers understand Islam and how such an understanding is seen by the above 'authorities' and 'powers' within the context of Indonesian socio-cultural milieu as well as the implications of such religious situation on people.

## III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Thus, the main objectives of the study are:

1. To gain an understanding of the "meaning of Islam" according to members of Ahmadiyya sect in Parung.
2. To understand the processes involved in developing the meaning of Islam by Ahmadiyya founder and his disciples and to analyze local socio-cultural factors that might have further influenced their understanding and practice of Islam.
3. To analyze the impact of Ahmadiyya movement on Indonesian society.
4. To analyze related issues from sociological and Islamic perspectives and to produce a research report on the subject under study that might be useful for developing relevant public policies.

#### IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions have been set to be answered:

1. How did Ahmadiyya movement come to and spread in Indonesia and Parung in particular?
2. How do members of the Ahmadiyya sect in Parung understand and practice Islam and to what extent such an understanding was influenced by the local socio-cultural elements?
3. What are the implications of Ahmadiyya presence in Parung on the Indonesian political, social and religious life especially in West Java region?

#### V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the classical era, Islamic teachings have been the subject of various interpretations. After the Prophet passed away, Muslims were only left with the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* as guidance for their life. In the absence of the Prophet, the interpretation of both sources became more divergent. Hirsch [16] argued that interpretation by the reader of the text will not be similar to that intended by the original author. This is due partly to the different social background and level of knowledge between the author and the interpreters. Every text will be given a meaning by the reader according of social background and culture in their society. So, according Hirsch, there is no true meaning from the texts which is similar with the meaning of the author. Umberto Eco [9] in addition said that the readers have an important role in the way to interpret the text. In addition to the socio-cultural environments and experience, Eco said that the nature of language also opens for multiple interpretations. Some like Robert Hefner [15] thus believe that the idea of one Islam is not possible; hence it is not perplexing to find different labels of Islam like fundamentalist Islam, moderate Islam, revivalist Islam, modernist Islam, and liberal Islam being given to Islam today.

According to Victor W. Turner, the meaning is not explicitly accepted by the individual, but turns into the process of thinking based on the individual's experiences. Thus, in order to understand the meaning of someone's attitude is to understand his or her experiences. Experience is the things that happen in all situations in the individual's life. Experiences consist of the process of thinking and feeling. Although experiences are obtained from the process of thinking and feeling, experiences are not only mere cognitive structure. Yet, experiences also involve emotion and determination.

Edward M Bruner explains that meaning comes when we meet up our experiences into our feeling, desire, and thoughts in facing our life. The meaning itself is

not in outside of experience of our life, rather it exists inside our knowledge and form relationship between the past, present, and future. Experience and meaning subsist at present, the past is memories, a reproduction, and the future is connected by the hope and ability. The present and past are together connected by the unity of meaning. Bruner reminds us that although some individuals have common experiences in one situation, they still have different meanings.

According Dilthey, to know someone's meaning to something, we can find out by interpretation of expression. Expression is articulation, formulation, and representation of a human's experiences. An expression is conversion from an experience. When we face some situations, we form actions based on our experiences that were previously the same, and make our action appropriate to the future. This action is an expression that afterwards will result in a new experience, and then form again of expression and it always repeats [29].

According Blumer [7], human's action on an object is based on their meaning of its object. The meaning of an object is very affected by social interaction between individuals. The meaning of an object is formed by the process of interaction, and it is used in individual action in facing an object. Blumer said that individuals interpret the other's action and then based on his meaning on other's action, he makes an action.

In this sense, Ahmadiyya teachings at the outset may be seen as one of the many interpretations of the original teachings brought by Muhammad s.a.w. But socially and culturally speaking, Ahmadiyya movement in Indonesia emerged in contrast to the mainstream Islam which is practiced by the majority of Indonesian Muslims. For example, Ahmadiyya followers believe that prophethood is not a monopoly of any particular people. The basis of their belief is said to be among others, a *Qur'ānic* verse which reads "a messenger was sent to all nations" and also a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w which states that "124,000 prophets were sent by God prior to my advent" [24].

#### VI. METHODOLOGY

##### Research Orientation and Instruments

This study adopts a qualitative research approach involving both fieldwork and library research. For the former, it uses mainly interview and observation as tools for generating primary data from the research site, namely the Parung branch of the Ahmadiyya movement and the latter involves consultation of and reference to main documents and written materials. Qualitative research generally involves interpretive,

naturalistic examination of things in their natural settings in order to make sense of and understand the phenomena based on the subjects' own understanding and experiences [14]. Interviews were conducted mainly with the respondents from among the selected leaders and followers of the movement at the selected branch.

#### Subjects, Data Collection and Data Analysis

Due to the sensitivity of the subject under investigation, the choice of respondents is based mainly on their willingness and convenience to participate. Some respondents occupied structural positions in the branch's organization and are of different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds and professions. The data collected is transcribed and analyzed along with other relevant materials such as observation and conversation notes, photographs and memos in order to produce direct and indirect representations of what was investigated. In other words, the research tries to identify the patterns of 'ideas' and 'realities' from the analysis of interview transcripts and observations notes.

The data and information collected in this study are then analyzed and commented upon using selected sociological perspectives such as theory of experience, symbolic interactionist and other relevant theories. By using theory of experience, for instance, the researcher is able to understand the type of situations that might have most probably explained the nature of the influence of various social and cultural factors on the movement's religious meanings, expressions and preferences.

Meanwhile, library research among others is used for developing theoretical framework, generating sociological insights on social and religious phenomena as well as examining secondary data related to Ahmadiyya movement.

#### Description of the Research Site

The research site, namely the Ahmadiyya branch in Parung, consists of several buildings on an eight-hectare land with its own mosque, 23 houses for lecturers, *ansōrullah*, *lajnah imailah*, *khudam* Ahmadiyya, dormitory and canteen. The total number of Ahmadiyya members in Parung is approximately 500. Interviews were conducted with 9 persons. Some respondents occupied key positions in the organization. To obtain authentic responses, most interviews were conducted in informal conditions and natural settings. Interviews were conducted by appointments, visit to the office, mosque, houses and classes as well as meeting at Parung.

#### General Research Outcome

While the study provides useful information and facts about the Ahmadiyya movement in Parung, it would not be used to make conclusive generalizations about the movement in Indonesia other than perhaps to shed some light or provide general insights on it.

### VII. THE HISTORY OF AHMADIYYA MOVEMENT

According to Fathoni, Ahmadiyya was born as a protest against the deterioration of Muslims in the late nineteenth centuries. Ahmadiyya is thus originally the sect which aimed to make people becoming more interested in the Islamic faith [10].

Ahmadiyya was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who was educated in law and worked in the civil service under the British government, but later started devoting himself to the cause of Islam in 1887. His earliest writings aimed towards revitalization of Islam within modern framework. As early as 1882, he claimed to be a *mujaddid* or renewer of Islam and by 1891, he made several claims that he was also an avatar of Krishna, Jesus who returned to earth and a prophet who was sent without a book of scripture. For the latter claim, he always insisted that he was a follower of the teachings of Muhammad. His aim was thus only to return Islam to its proper position by means of prophetic revelatory authority within a messianic-eschatological context [28].

One of the most controversial doctrines of the Ahmadiyya is its belief that Jesus did not die or was uplifted. Rather, he migrated to Kashmir and was buried in Srinagar where his tomb was discovered recently. This teaching has become a focal point in its propaganda although it is rejected by Muslims and Christians alike [6].

There are some divisions of Ahmadiyya movement among them are the Qadian and the Lahore sects. The Ahmadiyya Qadian strictly followed the above teaching. According to Schimmel, Qadian has a concrete plan or program for its progress but their members' social exclusiveness has made them unpopular among the larger Muslim community. It is well organized with the members paying its monthly dues and the organization is governed by a central advisory council. Its educational system is quite strict and well organized. Its outward Islamic ideas are puritanic as reflected in its defense of *pardah* and polygamy practices.

More than a year after the death of Mirza Ghulam, a man named H. Hakim Nuruddin was appointed as the first caliph (*calīfah*) of Ahmadiyya. The spirit of brotherhood, togetherness and solidarity among Ahmadiyya members was strong at this time.

Ahmadiyya also began to experience rapid development and became more known to a wider Muslim community [1].

However, after the death of this first caliph, the seed of cleavage started to grow. There were three factors that caused the split in Ahmadiyya. They are related mainly to the question of caliph, the faith of Mirza Ghulam and prophethood respectively. In 1914, that is six years after his death, Ahmadiyya Lahore (Pakistan) was established by some leading followers of Mirza Ghulam. Internal problems and changes had altered the original aim and beliefs of the movement as set by its founder. As a result, a new movement headed by Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951), known as the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore* was established to continue and preserve the original mission of its founder. Its members claimed to be Muslims who presented Islam as tolerant, rational, progressive, compassionate, peace loving yet highly spiritual. The movement declared that it followed the teachings of the *Qur'ān* as demonstrated by the practice of Muhammad [32].

While Ahmadiyya Qadian taught that the system of *calīfah* was still needed, as had been taught by Mirza Ghulam and thus, the *calīfah* system should prevail in the future, Ahmadiyya Lahore, on the other hand, believed that the system of *calīfah* was no longer needed. Muslims only need the position of *amīr*. However, this is not to be strictly obeyed because it has limited occupation.

Another issue of disagreement among the two Ahmadiyya sects is about the faith in Mirza Ghulam. Ahmadiyya Qadian holds that having faith in Mirza Ghulam is an obligation that must be obeyed. Anyone who does not believe is considered *kafir*. Ahmadiyya Lahore, however, believed that belief in Mirza Ghulam is not an obligation. All those who profess *kalimah shahadah* are naturally Muslims.

The other issue that causes disunity among members of this movement is about the prophethood of Mirza Ghulam. Ahmadiyya Qadian holds that prophethood is still open even after the Prophet of Muhammad s.a.w. Whereas Ahmadiyya Lahore believes that prophethood is already closed after the Prophet of Muhammad s.a.w and therefore does not recognize Mirza Ghulam as a prophet [31].

From the above discussion, we can conclude that Ahmadiyya movement splits into two streams: Ahmadiyya Qadian, which considers Mirza Ghulam not only as *mujaddid* but also as a prophet and Ahmadiyya Lahore, which disagrees with the beliefs of the former. The position of Mirza Ghulam to the latter is only as *mujaddid*, *al-Mahdi* and *Masih Mas'ud*.

In the beginning, Ahmadiyya movement was only active around Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. However, today Ahmadiyya movement has also spread to various other countries.

Ahmadiyya sect has built many mosques in various cities in the United States, such as at Dayton, Washington and Chicago. Similarly, mosques were also built in various other countries like Canada, Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Spain besides in the Middle East, such as in Afghanistan and Iran. In other countries like Fiji, Suriname, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Philippines and Japan its mosques can also be found. In Africa, Ahmadiyya has also built health and education facilities such as in Negeria, Ghana, Uganda, Siera Leon, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and Mauritius [22].

Since 1994, the Ahmadiyya movement has its own global television channel which is broadcast 24 hours. The channel is called Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA). MTA is a unique television station and the first Muslim television channel in the world which is operated by volunteers. MTA broadcasts its programmes in various languages and thus they can be enjoyed by audiences of many countries. Ahmadiyya says that the main objective of MTA is to spread *Tawhīd Ilahi*, the values of the *Qur'ān* and the truth of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w to all mankind [2].

However, debates over Mirza Ghulam's status have divided both his followers and the Muslim community at large including the extent and the validity of his teachings especially on the status and finality of Muhammad's prophethood and revelation, the doctrine that is considered central to Islam. Although the members of Ahmadiyya proclaimed that they are Muslims, in some countries like Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, they have been declared as deviant movement and thus raising concern over their religious status and missionary activities [25].

### VIII. AHMADIYYA MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA

In its development, Ahmadiyya Qadian and Lahore have stretched their wings to other countries including Indonesia. Ahmadiyya Lahore was the first to come to Indonesia through its famous *mubāligh* by the name Prof. Dr. Maulana Kwadja Kamaluddin in 1920. He was *imām* of the mosque in Woking, Surrey, London and a journal editor of Islamic Review that was circulated in London. In Indonesia, Maulana conducted various *da'wah* activities in several cities in the country [23].

The Ahmadiyya Qadian movement is said to have begun to proselytize in Indonesia in 1925 when

several Indonesian students returned from movement's training centres in Punjab, India. These students were accompanied by Rahmat Ali, the India's representative of the movement, who carried out vigorous missionary activities in Indonesia with the help of these students. Their initial activities were limited to Sumatera particularly the Minangkabau area. However, they were opposed by Muslim religious scholars of the region, although they managed to gain a small number of followers. The initial response to Ahmadiyya advances by the Indonesian Sunni community was however not very strong and therefore it did little to mobilize the community against the movement [12].

Later, as they became increasingly familiar with the Ahmadiyya arguments, manner and approach, the religious scholars of the West Sumatera eventually developed more effective arguments in countering Rahmat Ali's propaganda and this was able to slow down the rate of conversion of Muslims to the new sect.

In 1925, Rahmat Ali expanded his campaign to include Java and in the ensuing years intensified his religious propaganda and debates over religious beliefs with several Muslim groups. Among other primary Ahmadiyya missionaries in this effort include Mirza Wali Baig and Maulana Ahmad who had previously been active in South Africa. In Java, the campaign was challenged by three Muslim groups: the Muhammadiyah, the *Jong Islamieten Bond* and the *Persatuan Islam*. Initially, some Muhammadiyah groups found the Ahmadiyya message to be appealing. In fact, some of its members had joined the organization. However, after deep scrutiny of the doctrines of the movement, particularly on its claim that its founder was a prophet, Muhammadiyah leaders concluded that the movement's teachings were contrary to Islam. Since those who joined the movement remained convinced of the Ahmadiyya's legitimacy and thus broke with the Muhammadiyah, they consequently founded the *Gerakan Ahmadiyya Indonesia Lahore* - GAI or Ahmadiyya Movement in Indonesia.

At the same time, Ahmadiyya leaders approached the *Jong Islamieten* which preferred dedication to the standard practices of Islam without directly confronting the Ahmadiyya movement. In its subsequent publications, it made distinction between the Lahore section of the Ahmadiyya, which regarded Mirza Ghulam as a "renovator" and its Qadian section which regarded its founder as a prophet.

Representatives of the Lahore Section were even given space in the light *Jong Islamieten's* publications to express their views whereas the

Qadian branch was not given the same opportunity. Finally, the Ahmadiyya was challenged to engage in public debate by *Persatuan Islam* and two sessions were thus arranged in 1933; one in Bandung and the other in Jakarta. The debates drew sizeable crowds including Dutch officials in Jakarta. After the debate, the conclusion made by the *Persatuan Islam* was the same as that of the Muslim scholars of Sumatera and the leaders of the Muhammadiyah that is Ahmadiyya Qadian's teachings fell outside of the standard teachings of Islam. As a result, the Muslim magazine and newspaper coverage of the group was understandably hostile toward this Indian originated group. As a result of this reaction, the Ahmadiyya groups in Indonesia remained relatively small and isolated throughout the time [13].

In 1984, the MUI *fatwā* was issued which ruled Ahmadiyya activities as deviant because they were incompatible with Islam. This prohibition was then reinforced with the re-issuance of the *fatwā* in 2005.

Activities of Ahmadiyya in Parung are quite structured. Among them include recitation of the *Qur'ān* sessions and regular discussion on various religious issues. Programmes for men and women were conducted separately. *Ansōrullah* is the recitation and discussion of religion programme for fathers, *lajnah inailah* for mothers, *nasirat Ahmadiyya* for girls and *qudam Ahmadiyya* for the adults. There is also a recitation and discussion of religious programme held for young boys called *abna or atfal* and another for young girls called the *nasirat or banat*.

Among the first to be built in this place were a mosque, cafeteria, houses for the teachers and building of *lajnah inailah*. Since then, many facilities were gradually added until it became like a modern educational institution.

During its establishment, Ahmadiyya in Parung had at once about 30 members. Now, the number has reached 400. Many of them live in Parung due to practical reasons such as employment, education and marriage.

Currently, the number of students in Ahmadiyya Parung is about 324 and the number of Ahmadiyya members who have been active in the organization is around 416. The individual income of Ahmadiyya members varies depending on one's employment type and status. At any rate, they are required to set aside 1/16 of their income called *candah 'aam* as contribution to the movement.

The level of education among most Ahmadiyya members is quite high. Majority, approximately 96 members or 29.62 percent were educated in *jami'ah*

followed by upper secondary school with approximately 23.14 percent. *Jami'ah* refers to educational institution (same level with bachelor degree) which produces *mubaligh* or missionaries. However, they may have other duties such as lecturer, journalist, staff at MTA, etc.

THE ELECTION OF THE CHAIRMAN AND OTHER MEMBER OF THE ORGANIZATION IS CONDUCTED IN APRIL ONCE EVERY 3 YEARS. THE CANDIDATES ARE ELECTED DIRECTLY BY THE MEMBERS OF AHMADIYYA IN PARUNG.[21].

#### IX. THE VIEWS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES ON AHMADIYYA TEACHING

There are major differences between the teachings of Islam and that of Ahmadiyya especially on the status of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the Prophet. Mainstream Islamic teachings clearly teach that there are no more Prophets after the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. as indicated by the Prophet's tradition.

The Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs and the MUI as well as major Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama consider that Ahmadiyya teachings have deviated from the true teachings of Islam. Ahmadiyya movement to them is a misguided and misleading movement that has created confusions and disunited Muslims.

Some teachings of the Ahmadiyya movement considered deviant are that:

1. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a prophet who received revelation from God. Contrary to the above teaching, Islam teaches that the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w is the final messenger and prophet .
2. He had spoken directly with the God.
3. The *Tadhkirah* contains Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's revelations.
4. Ahmadiyya members must perform *bai'ah* (oath) to Ahmadiyya leaders.
5. Those outside the movement do not practice the commands of God and follow the Prophet Muhammad.
6. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had received his revelation in his dream and met with Prophet Muhammad s.a.w personally and physically [8].

Ministry of Religious Affairs has thoroughly examined the contents of the *Tadhkirah* and discovered their non-compliance with the *Sharī'ah* and thus decided that:

1. The contents of the *Tadhkirah* have distorted the interpretation of the *Qur'ānic* verses on prophethood.

2. The *Tadhkirah* cites some verses of the *Qur'ān* and adds statements from Mirza Ghulam in order to provide "justification" for his status.
3. The *Tadhkirah* manipulates *Qur'ānic* verses by mixing them up with certain verses only and does not take the complete verses or contexts. This is done to show that Ahmadiyya teachings and the followers of Mirza Ghulam are the true ones in Islam.
4. The *Tadhkirah* also presents a series of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's teachings on the superiority of the followers of Ahmadiyya over other Muslims in hereafter.

As a result of this scrutiny, the Ministry of Religious Affairs concluded that the *Tadhkirah* can trigger internal conflict among Muslims [20].

However, the more liberal Islamic groups have urged the state to protect the Ahmadiyya members on the ground that every citizen has right to be protected under the Indonesia's constitution. It also guarantees people's rights to religious freedom.

According to them, Ahmadiyya movement is a legal organization in Indonesia based on the decree of Minister of Justice (SK Menteri Kehakiman) No. JA 5/23/13, dated 13 March 1953 and was also recognized as a social organization based on *surat Direktorat Hubungan Kelembagaan Politik* No. 75//D.I./VI/2003. The above legal admissions were based on Article 29 paragraph 1 and 2 of the 1945 Constitution which respectively state that "the state is based upon the belief in the One, Supreme God" and "the state guarantees the freedom of every resident to profess and practice his/her own religion and belief". On the above grounds, the Department of Religious Affairs and the MUI are, according to liberal Islamic groups, obliged to protect Ahmadiyya members.

These groups also claimed that the decree of MUI's National Deliberative Council No. 05/Kep/Munas/MUI/1980 declaring Ahmadiyya as a "non Islamic group, deviant and misled" movement had led to violence against its members who, they claimed, also believe in the pillars of Islam and pillars of Faith like other Muslims.

They argued that even if the creeds of Ahmadiyya are different, its members have the right "to profess and practice their own religion and belief". Moreover, they said, Ahmadiyya's preaching has never insulted or attacked other schools of Islamic thought. In fact, they have set up humanitarian programs called "Humanity First" to help people regardless of their religion [27].



## X. THE IMPLICATIONS OF AHMADIYYA PRESENCE IN INDONESIA

Ahmadiyya movement which came to Indonesia in 1922 with the interpretation of Islam that is different from that of the mainstream Muslims especially on 'aqidah issues were generally rejected by most Indonesian Muslims. Nonetheless, some of them have been influenced by its teachings.

Many religious organizations have studied the movement and recommended to the authority to forbid its teachings and activities. The Indonesian government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs and MUI responded by declaring Ahmadiyya teachings as deviating from Islam and thus prohibiting the spread of its teachings in Indonesia.

Ahmadiyya movement was thus not welcomed especially in such areas as North Sumatera, Medan, Cianjur, Kuningan, West Nusa Tenggara, Central Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, West Kalimantan, Surabaya, Bogor Parung, Riau, Palembang, Padang and Jakarta. People's rejection was of different intensity depending on the level of exclusivity of the movement as well as its intensity of its teachings [19].

People's opposition to Ahmadiyya's teachings took place in a number of forms and ways ranging from diplomatic negotiations to destruction of the movement's facilities such as missionary centres, mosques and houses like the ones that happened in Central Java, West Java and Riau. The government under the administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono seemed to be in dilemma in dealing with this matter.

Many believed that the government's actions were influenced by the demand of various organizations to abrogate Ahmadiyya. Before the government issued a Joint Decree or *Surat Keputusan Bersama* (SKB) that is between the Minister of Religion, Minister of Home Affairs and Attorney General in 2008, there were massive demonstrations in the capital and various regions. The government seemed to try to strike a balance between the demand of Islamic groups that urged it to ban Ahmadiyya and that of those who called for the protection of the rights of Ahmadiyya belief.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the decision of government, there is no dissolution or freezing of Ahmadiyya. Only when the Ahmadiyya violates SKB, the government is entitled to freeze or disband Ahmadiyya. There are 7 points of SKB, including, first, members of the public are warned and ordered not to declare, suggest or attempt to gain public support for an interpretation of a religion that is held in Indonesia or to conduct religious activities that resemble the religious activities of that religion which are deviant from the principal teachings of that religion. Second, the followers, members and/or leading members of the Indonesian Ahmadiyya

Some groups were of the opinion that at least two *fatāwā* had encouraged the current violence in the name of Islam. First, the *fatwā* on Ahmadiyya as mentioned above and second, *fatwā* on the prohibition of liberalism, secularism and pluralism. These *fatāwā* of MUI, according to them, had potentials to trigger act of intolerance among people and institutions.

After the issuance of SKB, there were at least three responses to it. First, the Ahmadiyya group and National Alliance for Religion Freedom (AKKBB) which viewed SKB as being unfair and charged it as the source of violence against Ahmadiyya. Second, the group that accepted SKB with a note that it should be seriously implemented. MUI for example accepted the decrees as long as the government prevents Ahmadiyya members from spreading its teachings, stop the distribution of Ahmadiyya's books and TV programs. And the third group is those who recognized SKB but remained to demand the dismissal of Ahmadiyya due to its various deviant teachings especially on the prophethood. In this context, the case of Ahmadiyya seems to be a battle among various groups to win the government's support for their respective stands and influence.

## XI. THE FINDINGS

From the elaboration of the respondents' narratives, there are several factors that had contributed to their 'conversion' to Ahmadiyya which can be listed as follows:

1. Inherited from parents.
2. Family religious orientation.
3. Response to mass violence against Ahmadiyya members.
4. Missionary influence of Ahmadiyya movement.
5. Influence of the books and discussions on Ahmadiyya.

Among all these factors, two elements appear to be the most outstanding which are: Ahmadiyya missionaries and books on Ahmadiyya. Some respondents also came from families with religious Islamic background and orientation. A few of them

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*Jama'at* are warned and ordered, as long as they consider themselves to hold to Islam, to discontinue the promulgation of interpretations and activities that are deviant from the principal teachings of Islam, that is to say the promulgation of beliefs that recognize a prophet with all his teachings who comes after the Prophet Muhammad. Third, any follower, member, or leading member of the Indonesian Ahmadiyya *Jama'at* who does not comply with this warning and order as specified in the first and second articles shall be liable to penalties as prescribed in regulatory laws and such penalties shall extend to the organisation and legal body. See "Surat Keputusan Bersama Tiga Menteri", <<http://www.thepersecution.org/world/indonesia/docs/skb.html>> (accessed October 12, 2008)

were from a family whose parents' understanding of religion had deviated from the mainstream Islamic understanding. Another important element in this study is that some respondents had direct experience in witnessing or being directly affected by the mass violence against the Ahmadiyya members. All respondents had been influenced by the prominent Ahmadiyya figures as well as books and discussions on the movement and movement's teachings.

Also, it is observed that the experiences of the respondents in directly witnessing or being affected by mass violence against Ahmadiyya members had also influenced their new religious inclination. The violence made them feel sympathetic and pity to the Ahmadiyya members, which in turn gave them the urge to find out more about the movement's teachings. In other words, the violence had triggered them to have doubts about their past understanding of Islam. The activities of Ahmadiyya missionaries or *mubāligh* further strengthened their enthusiasm to reinterpret their understanding of Islam.

In the beginning of their membership, the respondents used to reside in rural environment where information obtained by them was relatively minimal. Upon arrival in Jakarta, they became more easily indoctrinated by the Ahmadiyya teachings. This was also one of the factors that drove the respondents to have courage to change their inclination to Ahmadiyya.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the respondents' understanding of Islam is closely related to their life experiences which include the understanding they gained through reading various materials. Umberto Eco said that the environment and experiences alters people's understanding which in turn influences the meaning they give to the content of what they read.

As far as Ahmadiyya members are concerned, they believed that their earlier understanding arising from the books they read was narrow, rigid and did not give them room for various rational interpretations.

From the earlier narrations on their backgrounds and experiences, it can be inferred that before their involvement with Ahmadiyya, their understanding of Islam was obtained mainly from their families which was based the literal teachings or textual interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. However, their Islamic understanding was altered and influenced by the books on Ahmadiyya and the discussions which took place within the movement's environment. Now Ahmadiyya teachings for the respondents seemed to present Islam as a religion that allows multi-interpretations and rational. For Ahmadiyya, interpretation of texts of the *Qur'ān* is an individual

right and therefore can be in line with the individual's understanding of Islam. This to them should be respected.

In addition, there were opportunities for the respondents to obtain or develop a wider Islamic understanding on ritual also. Rational explanation of *Qur'ānic* texts on this for them should also be allowed including opening the discussions to various forms of thought in order to bring useful answers to the problems faced by the society.

This study therefore has shown a tendency of the respondents to be more religious but beyond the mainstream Islamic understanding and practice. They interpreted the Islamic teachings which were considered by many Muslims to have already been standard. Another thing that was observed is that they tried to avoid violence in practising Ahmadiyya teachings even when they were provoked by other groups. This seemed to be the most forbidden act in the teachings of Ahmadiyya especially in line with their concept of *jihād*. As we could see, they would not take revenge, instead would remain silent when their houses and facilities were burnt or damaged by people. The above findings were derived from the analysis of the life experiences of the respondents especially with regard to the nature of factors that influenced their understanding of Islam.

## XII. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This research among others aims at understanding the meaning of Islam according to Ahmadiyya movement. From this study, it is found that their meaning of Islam seems to have been influenced by their own experiences. The study also revealed that there are similar patterns of experience among the respondents. In one sense, these experiences such as being exposed to the movements, reading materials, being involved in frequent discussions within the Ahmadiyya environment and interaction with *mubāligh* of Ahmadiyya have become quite standard to all respondents. In addition, there are some experiences which are unique to certain respondents which might also shape their understanding of Islam. For example, some have claimed that they were exposed to the story of the Messiah since they were young, or have witnessed violence against Ahmadiyya members. Despite such individual experiences, it was the common experiences of the respondents that had been the main factors in the formation of their meanings of Islam. Other experiences only reinforce this kind of religious understanding.

In defending their religious beliefs, the movement had also been responsive in certain ways towards others.

In particular, it had expressed itself against the MUI *fatwā* in the following ways:

1. The movement's followers unwanted MUI *fatwā* claiming that MUI does not have the right and authority to charge or label other groups as being deviant.
2. They also demanded the withdrawal of the MUI *fatwā* saying that MUI's *fatwā* is a form of interference in other people's religious understandings and individual's private matters.

In short, we can conclude that the Ahmadiyya environment was conducive for the unconventional interpretation of Islam among these respondents. The new understanding of Islam embraced by the members of Ahmadiyya was thus based on these experiences and since this understanding happened to contradict the mainstream understanding of Islam, their religious expressions in the social context were partly explained by the MUI *fatwā* on their teachings and subsequent implications on the movement.

The research also found that there was a high spirit of togetherness and brotherhood among the members of Ahmadiyya. This might be due to them being a minority group with a common feeling of being 'victims' of other more dominant groups.

In summary, this study has revealed among others the patterns of thinking and behaviours among Ahmadiyya members, their understanding of Islam and their socio-cultural expressions as the result of such 'unconventional' religious understanding. It also analyzed the reasons behind their rejection of the MUI *fatwā*.

In the broader context, the study discloses that human society is an active agent in shaping its culture and in forming members' meaning of their actions. The different religious expressions in society can thus be regarded as part and result of this complex process of cultural formation. In this process, experience plays an important role.

### XIII. AHMADIYYA MOVEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF SOCIOLOGICAL AND ISLAMIC INSIGHTS

The calls to ban the Ahmadiyya movement and teaching reverberated in a number of cities in Indonesia. At the same time, there were also groups which urged the government to guarantee the religious freedom. The latter argued that Indonesia does not belong to any particular class. Indonesia belongs to all groups that want to live together in this country in peace. If any religious group considers the teachings of the other groups as deviant, the state should not be involved by supporting either side. Constitutional guarantee of religious freedom is not

only in accordance with the principles of universal human rights, but also with the teachings of Islam, they argued.

In the case of Ahmadiyya, it involves a different understanding of Islam by only one religious group which happens to develop into a widespread problem in the nation. The case of Ahmadiyya is really a test for the country as a pluralistic nation that claims to guarantee and provide freedom to all citizens.

Anywhere, the problem of religious belief is not straightforward as it relates to a number of other issues and factors including law and human rights in addition to religious dogmas themselves. There were solutions offered for this case. For instance, MUI instructed Ahmadiyya to declare it as a new religion. But this was rejected by them. The problem will continue to be a challenge for the government to handle it in an appropriate way. Otherwise, violence and chaos may emanate triggered by one or both of the parties concerned.

The recognized body such as MUI has stated that Ahmadiyya is a misleading and deviant movement due to the fact that it propagates among others that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a prophet, a belief that contradicts the mainstream belief of the Muslims. The MUI *fatwā* is thus understandable. In the face of such movement as Ahmadiyya, the position of Muslims is obvious - that this sect is deviant. Many other international Islamic institutions had also stated the same with regard to this sect.

On the other hand, some organizations viewed the *fatwā* issued by MUI to be violating the law of human rights. However, some also argued that these two things are not quite related. For MUI, the *fatwā* against Ahmadiyah was grounded on its obligation to protect the *ummah* from deviant teachings of Islam. It therefore did not infringe on anyone's freedom to embrace any religion as people are allowed to choose and practice any religion of their choice.

Here, 'human rights' seems to have been used as a legitimacy to support the sect considered deviant such as the Ahmadiyah. In fact, on some ground the Ahmadiyah has tarnished the teachings of Islam with its belief in the new prophet whereas in Islam there is a clear belief that the last prophet is Muhammad s.a.w and some said it's clearly violating this human right. It should be kept in mind that to guard the true teachings of Islam is part of responsibility of organization like MUI and consequently it is also part of human rights struggle.

As discussed in this study, the actions committed by a group in society is a form of response to social environment and the individual's or group's meaning

of an object is based on the interpretations of experiences they encountered in their daily lives. This study takes members of Ahmadiyya as the unit of its analysis. The movement has been playing an active role in forming, developing and indoctrinating unique values in the minds of the group's members.

In this study, some theories have been benefited in analyzing social life of this group as well as the reasons behind their interpretation of Islam. It has been argued by some that the source of this problem is the difference of interpretation of the contents of *Qur'ān* and the *Hadīth*. In this context perhaps the view of E. D. Hirsch Jr. is relevant to observe where he argued that the interpretation by the reader to gain the meaning of a text, in this case the *Qur'ān* and the *Hadīth*, sometimes will not be similar due partly to the different socio-cultural factors and the interpreter's level of knowledge. However, Umberto Eco said that the readers have an important role in interpreting the text. In addition to the socio-cultural factors and interpreter's experience, Eco said that the nature of language of the text also opens for multiple interpretations. In this analysis, we also argued that in Islam, there is a standard generic method for interpreting the sacred texts which seems to have been unduly disregarded by this movement. A Muslim should follow this standard in interpreting the *Qur'ān* or the *Hadīth*. Unfortunately, the Ahmadiyya often uses weak *Hadīth* to justify their interpretation.

Muslims hold that Islam has teachings that will not change in the course of history. Therefore, there is no Islam other than 'the Islam' with the belief that Allāh is the only God, Muhammad is the last Prophet for mankind and the *Qur'ān* is the Holy Book of this religion. These are the core and clear beliefs in Islam which unite all Muslims alongside the clear pillars of Islam namely the prayer, alms due, fasting and pilgrimage. All these core teachings of Islam have been the unifying doctrine that makes Islam as one and the only Islam until the last day. Any interpretation that adds confusion to these clear teachings and/or which seems to compromise their clarity is bound to be questionable. Such is the case against Ahmadiyya movement.

#### XIV. RECOMMENDATION

This study of religious expression focuses only on one movement with limited scope of analysis. Therefore, a more comprehensive study is needed to gain more insight into this movement. Some areas that are not covered by the present study need to be further investigated.

The results of this study are hoped to enhance the previous related studies as well as to assist further research especially in understanding the process of forming religious meaning and expressions by particular group in society. The research is also hoped to trigger further research on the factors that might be influential in the emergence of individuals or groups with heretical beliefs. Such a research is important for various parties including the government when making their policies on religious movements and groups in society.

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