# PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG ENGLISH- EDUCATED MUSLIMS IN WORLD WAR II MALAYA*

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## Prelude

The dominance of Muslim traders in Southeast Asia between the 15th and the middle of the 18th centuries is quite well-known in Southeast Asian historiography. It was trade, primarily, which brought Islam to the Malay Archipelago and trade again helped Islam to penetrate areas where animism or Hinduism or Buddhism had long been the religion of the natives.

British country traders (merchants who resided in the Malay Archipelago), however, gained control of the Straits of Melaka in the second half of the 18th century. One representative of this group was Francis Light. By occupying Penang in 1786 and turning it into a port, he strengthened British commercial position in the Straits of Melaka which was further consolidated when Singapore was occupied and also turned into a port in 1819.[1]

Muslim traders, nevertheless, continued to play an important role in the development of trade in the Straits of Melaka. The Chulias helped to make early Penang a success and the

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[1] See, in particular, D.K. Bassett, "British Commercial and Strategic Interest in the Malay Peninsula during the late Eighteenth Century" in John Bastin & R. Roolvink (ed.), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies: Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on his Eighty-Fifth Birthday*, Oxford, 1964.

Bugis continued to be the most important indigenous traders in the early history of both Penang and Singapore. Arab traders, numerically small though, made their presence felt too in both these settlements.

But the scenario was fast changing by the turn of the 19th century. The expansion of British commercial activities in the Malay Archipelago provided the opportunity for Chinese traders to participate in the increasingly flourishing trade of both Penang and Singapore, which, like ancient Melaka, were emporiums. Free trade was the order of the day and although maritime trade soon became the preserve of European agency houses, local trade was monopolized by both Chinese and indigenous traders.

On the mainland the scenario too changed with the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. The Dutch-firm believers in monopoly-withdrew from Melaka from where they had for almost two centuries attempted to control the export of tin from the Malay states. Once freed, the Malay ruling elite began to open up more mines but relied primarily on Straits merchants for capital. Despite the relative success of these mines (production was often curtailed by disturbances owing to rivalry among the chieftains) few of the members of the Malay ruling class were able to accumulate capital. Their debts to the Straits merchants often remained unsettled. It was unavoidable that they should eventually surrender ownership of the means of production to Straits merchants. More and more concessions were given especially to Chinese merchants who ultimately were not only in almost complete control of tin production but moved towards gaining control of revenue collection via the farming system.[3]

It was at this point that British intervention in the mining states began which, to some extent, frustrated the ambitions of Straits merchants. But, in Kedah, where British administration had not been established until 1909, there was a point prior to that when practically the entire country had been farmed out to Penang merchants.[3]

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[2]See Khoo Kay Kim, *The Western Malay States 1850-1873: The Effects of Commercial Development on Malay Politics*, Kuala Lumpur, 1972; and C.D. Cowan, *Nineteenth Century Malaya: The Origins of British Political Control*, London, 1961

[3]See Sharom Ahmat," Kedah: Tradition and Change in a Malay State: A Study of its Economic and Political Development 1878-1925", MBRAS Monograph No. 12, 1984, 25-30.

In Johor, where economic development rivalled that of the tin-mining states, the indigenous government was in better control—through the Kangchu (Chinese headmen) system—but, by the end of the 19th century, it was prepared to surrender economic control of the state to British companies whose plans, however, were blocked by the British government.[4]

Pahang, far less accessible than the tin-mining states on the western side of the Peninsula, also drew the attention of Singapore merchants towards the end of the 19th century. They acquired concessions from the ruler but invested little capital so that a great deal of the land was just locked up and the state remained poor and undeveloped despite the establishment of British administration beginning from 1888.[5]

What was clearly observable throughout the 19th century was the passing of economic control of the Malay states to foreigners so that, in many instances, even before the advent of British administration, the ruling elite were no longer in control of the economy of their own states: that is, it was not their capital which effected economic development; neither did they control the mode of production nor the distribution network. Just prior to the establishment of British administration, the ruling elite at least enjoyed the privilege of collecting dues, mainly imposed on the export of tin and the import of goods. But, under British administration, the authority to collect revenue was taken away from them and they were paid, instead, monthly allowances or pensions.[6]

There was, however, opposition from the ruling elite when their fiscal authority was appropriated. But, in the clash between the local ruling class and the British, the latter proved to have superior fire power and the former were soon relegated to a position of purely ceremonial and social significance.

By the 1880s, the British began to plan, for the first time, the effective development of the Malay states which, as they envisaged, was to depend, in the long run, on the large tracts

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[4]Khoo Kay Kim, "Johore in the 19th Century: A Brief Survey" in *Journal of the Historical Society of Malaya Kuala Lumpur*, Vol. VI, 1967/68, 78-96.
[5]Eunice Thio, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula 1880-1910*, Vol. I, *The Southern and Central States*, Singapore, 1969, 66-67, 76-77, 80-82.
[6]See Emily Sadka, *The Protected Malay States 1874-1895*, Kuala Lumpur, 1968.

of hitherto undeveloped land. Tin mining, already in an advanced state, was seen as a passing phenomenon; the land would soon be exhausted. The importance of agriculture, however, could be permanent for the soil could be kept continually fertile; and agriculture was to include the production of food which was seen as absolutely indispensable to ensuring stability as political disturbances could, from time to time, occur.

Capital for the development of agriculture was to come from Europe, preferably Britain. By the 1890s, British planters, some of them graduates of Oxford University , began to move into the Malay states. Selangor was ahead of most of the other Peninsular states in terms of agricultural development. Initially, development was confined to the coastal area—Kuala Selangor, Klang, and Kuala Langat—with the interior still very much the preserve of tin mining. By the close of the 19th century, especially with the growth of rubber planting in the early 20th century, the interior too was developed agriculturally—Ulu Selangor, Rawang, Ulu Langat, and even the area at the back of Kuala Lumpur such as Batu and Gombak.[7]

The Muslims (Malays) in the Peninsula, in so far as it can be ascertained, did not respond actively during this period of economic construction. At any rate, the available historical sources provide little information on their perception of the rapid transformation that was taking place in the Malay Peninsula. Not that the Malays were totally uninvolved.

Many of them were, but they worked small plots, such as the Achinese migrants (who were particularly adept at pepper planting) and the Minangkabau population of Negeri Sembilan (where padi planting was a common occupation by the mid-19th century).[8]

But the significant control of the trade of the Malay Archipelago by Muslim traders between c. 1400 and c. 1750 had given way to Chinese and European control of an "extractive

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[7]See James C. Jackson, *Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya 1786-1921*, Kuala Lumpur, 1968.

[8]Annual Reports of Perak and Selangor of the late 19th century frequently mentioned that individual Achinese took an interest in pepper planting. On rice cultivation in Negeri Sembilan, see R.D. Hill, *Rice in Malaya: A Study in Historical Geography*, Kuala Lumpur, 1977, 125-127.

economy" to which the Malays contributed, in some measure, in terms of labour and transportation (conveying goods in their little boats up and down the river) but little in terms of capital or organization. Nor were they the agents handling the very lucrative trans-continental trade.

## The Kaum Muda

Awareness of being literally left out of every major aspect of economic life came quite early although it was confined to a relatively small group of Muslims. Based primarily in Riau and Singapore, in the early 20th century, these reformists (widely known as Kaum Muda) voiced their concerns mainly through their publication, the *Al-Imam*, published in Singapore, between 1906-1908. Being Singapore-based, these early reformists reacted largely to their immediate environment where the Chinese were seen as the group in control of almost every aspect of economic life. The Muslims, on the other hand, seemed to have been reduced to a state of complete dependence.

The *Kaum Muda*, however, did not discuss economic theories nor did they attempt to discuss the mechanics of economic colonialism. Indeed, they seemed less aware of European capital than of Chinese entrepreneurship. Their suggestions for redress were, seen in modern terms, somewhat simplistic. They merely asked that the Malays should change their attitudes and be willing to participate in all forms of economic activities because Islam was not opposed to such endeavours. But the most basic message that the *Kaum Muda* attempted to disseminate to fellow Muslims was that Islam, as practised by the Malays, was impure because a mixing of Islamic teachings and traditional beliefs had taken place. It was imperative that the Muslims should return to the Quran and Hadith.[9]

Though lacking an educated understanding of Western economics, the *Kaum Muda* realized that Western domination

[9]For a general discussion of the Kaum Muda Movement, see William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, New Haven & London, 1967, chap 3. See also Mohd. Sarim bin Haji Mustajab, "Gerakan Islah Islamiyyah di Tanah Melayu 1906 hingga 1948" in *Malaysia: Sejarah dan Proses Pembangunan*, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1979.

was possible owing to its more advanced technology (science). The *Kaum Muda*, therefore, advocated that Western science should not be neglected and they saw too the efficacy of the Western system of education as compared to the traditional pondok schools (based largely on rote-learning). They endeavoured to reform the Melayo-Muslim society by founding more modern schools (comparable to the existing English-medium schools) which they called *madrasah*. In later years, the term *madrasah* became so popular that even *pondok* schools (retaining much of their original features) used the name *madrasah*.[10]

The *madrasah* encouraged, to a limited extent, the learning of English and elementary mathematics, even logic (*mantik*), but neither commerce nor economics featured in their curriculum. In English-medium schools, economics was also not taught but book-keeping was. One modern religious school, however, proved to be an interesting exception—the *Sekolah Al-Diniah* at Kampung Lalang, Padang Rengas, Perak, founded in 1924 by Syeikh Al-Junid, of Sumatran origin. Commerce was not only taught in theory but also in practice in the sense that the children were actually required to run provision shops or work rubber smallholdings or padi plots. They were also taught how to make soap and *kechap*.[11]

There was also a religious teacher, Haji Wan Mahmud bin Haji Wan Daud—one of the founders of the Madrasah Muhammadiah in Kota Bharu which was not a Kaum Muda school but it was nonetheless modern in that it combined religious and secular learning who, recognizing the importance of commerce produced, in 1929, a book (based mainly on an existing text in Arabic) on commerce, called *Siasah Perniagaan* which was probably the first book of its kind ever to have been written in Malay.[12]

But Islamic reformists/modernists, in general, lacked support. In a number of places—for example, Melaka and Lenggeng

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[10]See Khoo Kay Kim, "Perkembangan Pelajaran Agama Islam" in Awang Had Salleh (ed.), *Pendidikan Ke Arah Perpaduan: Sebuah Perspektif Sejarah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1980, 8-17.

[11]Ismail Sudin, "Beberapa Aspek Sejarah Sosial Kuala Kangsar" in *Jernal Sejarah* (University of Malaya), Vol. X, 1971/72, 44-45.

[12]Abd. Hamid Othman, "Intelligentsia Melayu Di Dalam Kegiatan Persuratan di Kota Bharu 1900-1945" in *Jernal Sejarah*, Vol. XI, 1972/73, 85.

in Negeri Sembilan—their attempts to introduce a more scientific/logical perception of Islam encountered serious opposition. It is not clear how far the adherents of the *Kaum Muda* movement were able to practise what they preached. A few of the leaders did. Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin (of Bukit Tinggi origin) proved most versatile. In his early days in the Malay Peninsula, he was a pilgrim broker and he continued to engage in the occupation for some time. He also once opened a textile shop in Taiping, Perak. He was, in 1906, editor of *Al-Imam*; in 1934, he was editor of another periodical, *Saudara*. Sayid Syeikh Ahmad Al-Hadi was another *Kaum Muda* activist with business acumen. He was in charge of an office in Singapore dealing with bricks when he became involved in the publication of Al-Imam. About 20 years later, he established the Jelutong Press in Penang.[13]

## Islam and Colonialism

But these were comparatively minor business ventures. Islam and Western economic principles were sometimes in conflict as it happened in Terengganu when British administration was first established. It was land administration which sparked off a serious confrontation. Traditionally, Terengganu peasants were required to pay produce tax; the British converted that to land tax which had to be paid irrespective of whether land was worked or whether there was any harvest in a particular year. This caused hardship in times of natural calamity. Also in dispute was whether land belonged to the Raja or to *Allah*. The disturbances which ensued were soon suppressed and this led to a further consolidation of British adminstration.[14]

British administration, in the first place, split the Muslim society into two—those who were educated and, in certain instances, actually nurtured, to play a direct role in the administration of the country and those who were placed on the periph-

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[13]Mohd.Sarim Haji Mustajab,Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin al-Falaki: Pelopor Gerakan Islah Islamiyyah di Tanah Melayu" in *Malaysia in History*, Vol. XXII (2), 1977; see also W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* 78.

[14]See Shaharil Talib, *After Its Own Image: The Trengganu Experience 1881-1941*, Singapore, 1984,139-140. In fact, the ulama made a distinction between land (tanah) and earth (bumi): land belonged to the ruler and earth to *Allah*.

ery, not totally ignored, but left very much to their own devices. The British also introduced the element of cleavage between what was considered secular and what was considered religious. In the case of the latter, the distance from the colonial government was greater. Vernacular (basically secular) Malay schools were funded by Government although there also existed *rakyat* schools (in Kedah, in particular, beginning from the 1920s) which were more self-reliant. Religious schools, except in the case of Johor and, to some extent, Kelantan which was the first state to establish a Religious Council (*Majlis Agama dan Istiadat Melayu*), were left very much in the hands of individual teachers. Many of the graduates of such schools found their way to West Asia (e.g. Al-Azhar) to further their education, basically in the discipline of Theology. But whether or not they furthered their education overseas, they were basically unacceptable in the employment market both public and private. In the commercial world, in particular, knowledge of Islam was seen as being irrelevant to the nature of work which had to be done. Islam turned more and more to the theological. Religious schools, by and large, emphasized the basic tenets of Islam and considerable attention was focused on the correct behaviour of Muslims.[15]

## Za'ba[16]

In general, Muslims then were aware of economics but not in a highly technical sense. This is best illustrated in the case of Zainal Abidin Ahmad (Za'ba), one of the few before World War II with an all-round education—English, Arabic and Malay. In two articles which drew considerable attention because they were published as leader articles in the Malay Mail of 21 and 22 December, 1923, Za'ba explicated his understanding of Malay economic as well as moral problems. As he put it rather succinctly:

> The salvation of the Malays, economically as well as morally, is to be found only in one way, and that is in remedying their intellectual poverty- the poverty of knowledge-by means of the right sort of education.

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[15]Khoo Kay Kim, "Perkembangan Pelajaran.."

[16]In a forthcoming biography by Adnan Haji Nawang (Dept. of History, University of Malaya), Za'ba's perception of Malay society is discussed at some length.

In fact, that was an opinion he expressed a little earlier. But, after having had responses to his statement (in the first leader article in the *Malay Mail*), he subsequently modified his opinion slightly. He felt compelled to add that

> ... co-operation, self-help and self-exertion are the basis of all worldly salvation for the Malays. Nevertheless, the place of the utmost importance must still be reserved for education in any scheme of Malay salvation.

And he explained the importance of co-operation (not specifically in this instance a reference to the co-operative movement) in the following manner:

> The white ants co-operate, and they succeed in building a hillock. Everything in nature co-operates with one another according to the laws fixed by the Creator, and the result is this stupendous Universe. The different parts in the machinery of any human government co-operate, and the result is successful government. The same thing should apply to the Malays, if they desire to raise themselves. *The dissemination of a general knowledge in thrift, in farming, in agriculture, in business methods and kindred subjects for the masses*, can be done by co-operative propaganda among them-preaching, advising, showing examples, and issuing simple literature-doing all that by co-operation, i.e. working together, each worker doing his "bit". The providing of a high and advanced scholastic, technical, and professional education to the brighter and more promising children of the Malay race can be done by co-operation in the way of raising funds, founding scholarships, and sending these youngsters abroad to study. [Emphasis added].

Apart from the lack of co-operation, he attributed Malay backwardness to "moral poverty" which, he explained:

> .. is poverty not only in one or two or several, but in very many of the moral qualities and attributes of national character which combine to make a people great in the world. Among the connotations implied, those which are found among the general body of us are poverty in self-reliance, in perseverance, in a sense of responsibility, of duty, of punctuality: poverty in industry, in business qualities, in thrift, in leadership, in self-sacrifice, in public spirit., in aspiration, in ambition, in patriotism, in high-thinking, and in worthy ideals of life. In all these, as in a few others, we, Malays, as a whole are distinctly a poor people.

Unlike the *Kaum Muda* who saw Islam (specifically the *Quran* and *Hadith*) as the ultimate salvation for the Muslims, Za'ba thought that "the surest and quickest cure for it is to be found in the healing virtues of the right sort of education." Without education (meaning modern education), the Malays would have no idea of progress. A certain number, therefore, ought to be given higher education, "Some on the scholastic and literary side, some professional." He continued:

> Not all, however, should flock to become lawyers, doctors, engineers, mechanics, and civil servants. According to aptitude some must be made to learn business, trades, crafts, agriculture, poultry-keeping, dairy-farming, planting, and so forth. All these are the first and most important credentials in the national assets of the Malays if they are ever to progress side by side with the other advanced people in the various fields of activity. To carry out this scheme requires not only vast sums of money but also moral fibre of the highest type, unbounded sincerity, honesty, and intensity of purpose, besides the fact that the promoters must be prepared for cases of failures. It must indeed require a big organisation, and the basis of it all is no other than co-operation. [*Malay Mail*, 22 December 1923.

Interestingly, Za'ba's ideas were, in a very fundamental sense, implemented after the country achieved independence. In the second of his articles, he summed up what he thought ought to be implemented in order to elevate Malay society. Firstly, Malay students ought to study in English schools beyond the Junior Cambridge (Fourth Form today). Secondly, unemployed youths, idling in the kampungs should learn "the trades of local tinsmiths, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, tailors and outfitters, shoemaking, carpentry, and others by engaging local Chinese experts to teach them." Thirdly, literary societies, with libraries and reading rooms, should be made available and books dealing with history, biography, classics, religion, etc., should be provided instead of "trashy novels". In all instances, societies should be formed to promote activities and funds sought. Also,

> The money or capital obtained by these societies must be put in the hands of capable trustees consisting of prominent members of the pro-Malay public, and preferably the Government itself.

## English Education

Za'ba was not alone in urging the necessity of introducing drastic reforms in the Melayo-Muslim society. Others, especially the English-educated, like him, shared, generally, similar ideas. All of them recognized that Muslim society in Malaya had seriously lagged behind in terms of socio-economic development which threatened the very foundation of their political position. They agreed too that education was an indispensable means to progress. The subject was enthusiastically discussed in the English press throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It was emphatically urged that Muslim children should be given better opportunities to learn English.

The average Malay child who wanted an English education then could indeed gain admission into an English school, that is, if he qualified for it, but only at the age of 11, after having first studied in a vernacular school (and probably prior to that in a Quranic school). He was then subjected to two years of intensive study of the English language. However, he would still be at a disadvantage compared to boys of other races who joined the English school from the beginning of schooling. It was suggested, therefore, that English should be taught in Malay vernacular schools and, as an alternative, perhaps the Muslims should establish schools where both religious and secular instruction might be imparted side by side as was being done in India. Such schools ought to be given grants-in-aid.[17]

The problem engaged the attention of a number of Muslim leaders in Singapore and between 1925-1926, a committee had been formed to try to establish a fund to help poor Muslim children to obtain better education.

By 1926, a Muslim Students' Aid Society had been founded which was exempted from registration under the Societies Ordinance. A sum of $3,000 had been collected. One of the objects of the Society was to enable Muslim boys who had passed a higher standard locally to go to a university abroad to study for a profession; another, a very ambitious one, was to establish, in Singapore, English schools if funds permitted.[18]

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[17] *The Malay Mail*, September 20, 1923.
[18] *The Singapore Free Press*, September 28, 1926.

There is no evidence that the desired objectives were fulfilled. The Muslim correspondent of the Singapore paper, the *Malaya Tribune*, commented cynically on the Muslims in Singapore on July 12, 1929. He said:

> ... the enthusiasm of local Muslims for any under-taking requiring initiative and energy is "soda-water enthusiasm". When one opened an aerated-water bottle the liquid instantly bubbled with a buzzing sound, but within a few seconds the force subsided and the water became calm .... Many a time, when some "crisis" or other faced them, up they rose to do something to meet the crisis. Enthusiasm prevailed, schemes were discussed, and committees were appointed to see the matter through. But as time went on and the "crisis" had apparently passed, enthusiasm waned, "tidak apa" followed, and finally the matter was forgotten, only to be remembered and discussed again when some other "crisis" arose. Such, it is to be regretted, had been the psychology of the Muslim mind.

Although some of the plans did not materialize, the subject of English education was constantly discussed and taken up zealously by the Singapore Malay Union (*Kesatuan Melayu Singapura*) whose president, Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, was the Malay representative in the Straits Legislative Council. He broached the subject almost as soon as he was appointed to the Council, asking that greater opportunities ought to be given to Malay children to learn English in order that they should not lag behind the other races. Despite consistent urging, the British refused to budge.

In 1927 the prevailing situation was considered alarming. The Education Report for that year showed that there were 23,155 children of all races in the English schools in Malaya. Of this total only 691 were Malay pupils (there were 575 in 1925 and 621 in 1926). It was pointed out that:

> ... the number of pupils not only has no proportion to their population, but in higher standards it begins to diminish until it entirely drops out in the highest classes. In professional schools and colleges they have not even a solitary pupil to represent their population ....[19]

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[19]*The Malaya Tribune* (henceforth *MT*), May 22, 1929.

In fact, the lack of Malays in professional fields had been noticed even earlier. In a letter to a Singapore paper, a correspondent said that he had

> ... with great interest ... read over the results of the London Chamber of Commerce examinations, hoping to see among those successful students the names of some Muslim boys. My hopes turned to despair. I was exceedingly sorry to see that not a single Muslim boy's name appeared.
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> The system of education given in our schools is in accordance with certain regulations approved by the Government which apply equally to all boys; in fact a certain privilege is given to Muslim [Malay] boys in that they get free education at Government Schools if they pass through Vernacular Schools. This being so and all other things considered equal, I do not see why Muslim boys lag behind others as regards English Education.[20]

A Muslim, impatient with the lack of progress shown in attempts not only to improve the education of Muslim pupils but also the general welfare of the Muslim population, later, made a scathing attack on his co-religionists, saying:

> Men may speak and men may write but none has his courage gathered enough to fight for his theory or put it into practice.
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> This is well confirmed by evidence I have collected in my experience in Singapore, although I am still, for many reasons, inexperienced, and also am not quite alive to the animated movements, particularly, of my brethren in caste and creed-the Muslims in Malaya.
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> To-day one criticises much and to-morrow another contributes a very feeble article in the papers about the Muslim Usages and Customs; nevertheless, without any fruitful effect, day in, day out, exists the same strife, due to the Muslim leaders' infatuation, but never have I seen anyone embark on a deliberate struggle to redeem the cause. If one deems it essential to effect some improvement in his community, he happens to be a man on the road, whilst all the gentlemen-like men are slumbering soundly and snoring aloud in the slothful couch of their wealth.[21]

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[20]*MT*, March.8. 1926.
[21]Ibid, March 21, 1929.

But, in fairness, it may be said that at least one person proved importunate. He not only continually raised the subject in the Legislative Council but discussed it in public whenever he could, for like many of the English-educated Malays of his time, he believed that without a sufficient command of the English language, the Malays would be at a disadvantage, economically, compared to the non-Malays. This was Mohd. Eunos bin Abdullah. But all his endeavours were in vain for the British administration was of the opinion that sufficient facilities existed for Malay children to learn English. Moreover,

> ... it would be contrary to the considered policy of the Government to afford to a community, the great majority of whose members find a congenial livelihood and independence in agricultural pursuits, more extended facilities for learning English, which would be likely to have the effect of inducing them to abandon those pursuits.[22]

## The Concept of 'Progress'

Although it is clear from the activities of the *Kaum Muda* and those who wrote frequently in the press, namely, that Muslims must pursue education in order to achieve progress, it is pertinent to take a closer look at their understanding of "progress". This was, in fact, explained by one correspondent in the local press. He remarked:

> One of the charges levelled against Islam is that it is not a faith of progress and that its followers have therefore not advanced materially and otherwise as the followers of other religions have done. It is true that in some parts of the world Muslims have not advanced with the times, but that is not the fault of the religion they profess. It is, more or less, due to environment and the teachings which they have received from interested parties.
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> Islam has always been a progressive faith, and its progressiveness is evident from whatever aspect it is viewed. To the Muslim, it must be understood, all educative progress is connected with his religion, and therefore religious progress means, to him, general advancement.[23]

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[22]Ibid., July 5, 1929.
[23]Ibid., April 4, 1931.

He mentioned Sultan Mahmud, founder of the house of Ghazni in India, specifically, as an example of a progressive ruler. The Sultan gave liberally to the support of learned men and poets and founded institutions for the permanent promotion of learning. Adjoining the magnificent mosque which he erected was founded a university supplied with a vast collection of curious books in various languages. It contained also a museum of natural curiosities. And for the maintenance of the establishment, he appropriated a large sum of money besides a fund sufficient for the maintenance of the students and proper persons to instruct youths in the arts and sciences. Ghazni became a popular resort of literary men, poets, philosophers and scientists.

The writer reminded his readers that in Europe too, in particular those countries which fell under Islamic influence, a general advancement of learning was found. It was the Saracens who made the first great discoveries in geographical science.

Geography was a favourite study of the Arabs. It was also the Saracens who gave the first great impetus to the science of mathematics. They were the first to translate the works of Archimedes, Ptolemy, and other Greek mathematicians. Trigonometry which had never been known to the Greeks as a separate science took that form in Arab countries. The Arabs revolutionized the system of arithmetical notation by inventing or adapting from the Indian or Chinese cyphers or numerals which replaced the letters of the alphabet as used by the Greeks, and this system was introduced from Muslim Spain to Europe in the tenth century by Pope Silvester II. The credit for the true utility and importance of algebra too must be given to the Arabs. Muhammad ibn Musa invented the solution of equation of the second degree, while another Muslim, Omar ibn Ibrahim, wrote the first treatise on cubic equations. Arab Muslims also led the way in astronomical science, detecting the errors of former systems, correcting and improving the imperfect data of the Greeks, in addition to formulating their own hypotheses, which, afterwards, proved to be accurate. In chemistry and medicine, the Arabs were undisputed and absolute pioneers and inventors. Many remedies in use in the 20th century were discovered by the Saracens.

In pursuing education, the writer emphasized, Muslims "are but fulfulling the injunctions of the Prophet." "Acquire knowledge," the Prophet had said. "It enableth its possessor to distinguish right from wrong; it lighteth the way to heaven; it is our

friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when friendless; it guideth us to happiness; it sustaineth us in misery, it is an ornament among friends, and an armour against enemies." Finally, the writer reiterated that:

> ... Islam as a world faith is a progressive one, and it is therefore very surprising that a large number of Muslims, not only in Malaya but in many other countries, have not advanced with the times. In order to regain what the Muslims have lost in the realm of learning, science, industry, commerce, etc., Muslims of advanced thought have adopted the slogan "Back to the Holy Quran." Therein lies the salvation of the Muslims.

It can be discerned from the above that the better-educated Muslims in Malaya then did not actually forget economics when discussing the need for Muslims to achieve progress even if the subject was not overtly emphasized. In extolling the virtues of education, it was simply assumed that all-round progress would be achieved once Muslims became well educated.

## Wealthy Muslims

It is important to point out here that, although general dissatisfacstion was widely expressed over the overall backwardness of the Muslims, it was not tantamount to saying that no Muslim had been successful in various professions and that there had never been wealthy Muslims in the country.

In Singapore were to be found some very wealthy Muslim families whose success in business dated from at least the mid-19th century. For a long time, since the early days of Singapore, probably the largest property owners in the island were members of the Alkaff family. The patriach, Syed Sheikh bin Abdul Rahman Alkaff, of Hadramaut origin, arrived soon after the establishment of British administration in Singapore. He founded the firm of Alkaf & Co. which successfully carried on businesss for many decades.[24]

Then there was the Angullia family. Ebramje Mohamed Salleh Angullia who hailed from Surat, India, arrived sometime

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[24]Arnold Wright & H.A. Cartwright (ed.), *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, London, 1908, 710, 714

in the late 1840s and founded the firm of M.S.E. Angullia & Co. He had begun by importing Indian goods of all descriptions and exported local produce. In the early 20th century, the firm traded as general merchants and commission and estate agents. From India, they imported yarns of all kinds, cotton, tea, curry stuffs, &c; from Rangoon, Saigon, Bangkok, and other centres, rice; from China and Japan, native products; and from Europe and America, rough and soft goods, hardware, &c. To India, Burma, Egypt, Arabia, Syria, China, Japan, and the Netherlands East Indies, the firm sent tin, betel-nuts, gambier, pepper, tapioca, rubber, copra, and getah percha, [25]

No less distinguished was the Alsagoff family. Alsagoff & Co. was established by Abdul Rahman Alsagoff in the mid-19th century. In the 20th century, the company did a large business in the export of every kind of local produce and woods to Arabia and Europe, including products such as rubber, sago, coconuts, coffee, cocoa, and pineapples. Most of the products were obtained from their own estate at Kukup in Johor.

Other establishments owned by the firm included the Perseverance Estate, the Straits Cycle and Motor Co. and the Express Saw Mill Co. which was one of the largest saw-mills in the East. The firm also imported spices from Banda, Moluccas. There were about 200 men employed at Kukup and 40 in Singapore. One of the major operations of the firm was the conveyance of pilgrims annually to Mecca. Messrs. Alsagoff & Co. were also the owners of the Raffles Hotel building.[26]

Mohamed Alsagoff the grandson of the founder of the firm was a particularly flamboyant personality. He was once said to be "the friend of Princes and so many times a millionaire that money ... held no significance for him ....[27]" Educated at Cambridge University, he was one of the first to capitalize on the first rubber boom at the beginning of the 20th century. He took his large inheritance and went boldly into the rubber market. Within year, he became one of the wealthiest men in the world. He quickly became the centre of an ever-increasing social cir-

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[25]Ibid., 108, 710.
[26]Ibid., 705, 707,
[27]The *Malay Mail* January 26, 1931.

cle, courted and flattered by men and women of every degree of importance. The Alsagoff parties became the talk of Singapore. The Turf soon took his fancy. It was said that "He was a first-class judge of horseflesh, and soon his palatial stables were filled with the pick of horses from Australia and Arabia." It was said too that:

> It became one of the sights of Singapore to see young Mohamed driving a high tandem along the front A gorgeous liveried Indian rode behind and held a jewel-mounted fly-switch of white horse-hair.

But Mohamed Alsagoff's fortune collapsed during the rubber slump of 1920-1921. He never recovered and died in early 1931 a pauper.

There were other families too (the royal family of Johor, for example) who successfully participated in the economic development of the country. But, by and large, the Muslims who participated, on any significant scale, in the economic development of Malaya, beginning from the mid-19th century, were few in number. The Malay chieftains who ventured to open up tin mines in the early decades of the 19th century, subsequently, could not sustain their activities and granted concessions to Straits merchants who, increasingly, began to work the mines directly.[28] The Eastern Peninsular Malay States (in particular Kelantan and Terengganu) where the practice of Islam was more visible were also, economically, less advanced though the factors which retarded development were certainly more complex, the geographical factor being, perhaps, the most significant.

As indicated earlier, "advancement" or "progress", in an Islamic sense, was not specifically linked to economics. Although wealth was not unimportant, the more approved symbol of progress was knowledge. However, this was very much the thinking of the better-educated. In most instances, the leading ulama of that time were more concerned with the proper practice of Islam. They taught its laws and philosophy; they were insistent that certain obligations ought to be strictly observed;

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[28]See Khoo Kay Kim, *The Western Malay States*

and they were the custodians of morality. Their influence was pervasive. But they made no noticeable attempts to come to grips with economic problems whereas sometimes over "a trifling cause of religious interpretation, the whole Muslim community split into two factions ...."[29]

## Riba' and the Co-operative Movement

Though co-operative societies were started in Malaya, in 1922, to eliminate indebtedness among both the rural and the urban poor, irrespective of their ethnic belonging, the idea was first mooted in 1907 primarily to assist the Malay peasantry overcome their increasing dependence on money-lenders.

The idea, however, at once encountered strong oppositon. There were contentions that the Malay was in little haste to grow wealthy; was somewhat distrustful of his neighbours (whether Malays or others); still suffered from the recollections of past evil rule when nothing was worthwile and saving was merely inviting attack; was not of one stock (in other words, the Malays were a heterogeneous group); and was perhaps undergoing a rather painful development from what had been called a self-sufficing domestic economy.

Even more formidable appeared the objections on religious grounds which revolved around the issue of Riba' (or usury). It was decided, subsequently, in 1911, to appoint a Special Committee to look into the problem. In its report, the Committee said:

> Although it has appeared in evidence before the Committee that certain Malays are in the habit of letting out money on interest in an indirect manner, it is nevertheless entirely against the tenets of the true believer of Islam to take interest on money lent out. This being so at once disposes of the system suggested to be considered so far as cooperation among Mahomedans is concerned.[30]

For almost the next 10 years the idea to introduce the co-

[29] *MT*, June 22, 1928.
[30] *MT*, September 16, 1927.

operative movement was held in abeyance. In 1921, steps were taken to obtain further information on the subject as it was observed that, despite the contention that Muslims could not accept interest on money, Malay peasants were actually paying usuriously high rates of interest on loans they secured.

Enquiries were then made in Egypt and the Punjab where the co-operative system was progressing well among the Muslims, to discover how the problem of Riba' was surmounted. The information obtained was that, in Egypt, to overcome Muslim objections to interest in respect of the Post Office Savings Bank, the Grand Mufti issued a special Fatwa which rendered the interest allotted to depositors legally acceptable. In the Punjab, no problem existed because the Muslims were used to paying interest to the "unsurers", so they willingly paid to the co-operative societies.

Meanwhile, A.J. Cavendish, an official of the Agricultural Department, was sent for two months to study rural credit institutions in Burma. And with the information obtained from Egypt and the Punjab, the Government decided to form Credit Societies among the Malay padi planters in the Krian District.

In October, 1921, the District Officer, Krian, was asked to convene a meeting of all his *penghulu* to discuss the subject. The meeting also arrived at the decision that no active steps to form the societies could be taken until the difficulty in connection with the payment and receipt of interest on loans raised through the co-operative system was first settled so far as the Muslims were concerned.

It was decided then to present this matter to Sultan Iskandar of Perak as a problem for consideration. The ruler considered the matter in consultation with his ulama at a meeting held on June 16, 1922, as a result of which he gave it as his opinion that the payment and receipt of interest, as required by the proposed by-laws of the co-operative credit societies, would not be contrary to the tenets of Islamic Law and religion, and would not constitute *Riba'*[32]

Copies of the document (in Malay) in which Sultan Iskandar

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[31]*The Straits Times*, August. 4, 1923.
[32]Ibid.

expressed his private opinion on the matter were then printed and circulated among members of the Malay community. Many of the leading Muslims in the country were said to concur in the opinion expressed by the Perak ruler.

Meanwhile, the Co-operative Societies Enactment which had been in existence since 1921 came into force on July 1, 1922, and the organization and registration of the first co-operative society in the country-the Federated Malay States Posts and Telegraphs Co-operative Thrift and Loan Society-took place.[33]

But the problem was not that easily resolved. In Negeri Sembilan, the Yang Di Pertuan Besar (Tuanku Muhammad), apparently, refused to allow the formation of credit societies on the grounds that any form of interest paid was *Riba'*.[34]

In Kedah, after the Religious Board had issued a *Fatwa* on the subject, a meeting had to be called of Kedah officials-administrative and religious-as well as officers of the Co-operative Department to discuss the *Fatwa*. The *Sheikh-ul—Islam* of Kedah had to explain that the Fatwa was issued to answer questions arising out of the establishment of co-operative societies-in other words, whether the teachings of Islam were opposed to such societies. The Religious Board had expressed the opinion that they were not. The meeting, after deliberating the matter, confirmed the decision made by the Religious Board whereby the Government of Kedah proceeded to grant permission for co-operative societies to be established in that state.[35]

Broadly speaking, the system of credit societies worked as follows:

> Small-holders, men of good character and industrious disposition, belonging to the same village, form a society in order to pay off the old debts which they have contracted at high interest to "chetties" and others, and to save money for a rainy day. If, for example, ten men combine, they agree to pay $10 a year for ten years, thus acquiring $100 worth of shares. These shares or savings can be used in the future for funeral expenses, the education of a son, the dowry of a daughter, or some similar purpose. They then wish to borrow

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[33]Ibid., October 15, 1931.
[34]William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* 78.
[35]Ibid., September 16, 1927.

> collectively, say, $6,000, on the security of all their joint property, lands, houses, bullocks, and so forth, to pay off their debts, obtain cash for working expenses, or buy cattle. The Registrar of Co-operative Societies registers their society and authorizes it to borrow this sum. The committee is then empowered to borrow the $6,000 from some rich man or from a bank, and the members agree to pay 15 per cent for their various loans. The committee obtains the money at 10 per cent., part of the balance of 5 per cent. going to defray the expenses of the society and the remainder into reserve to meet unforeseen contingencies.[36]

The co-operative movement, on the whole, was deemed successful. The total number of societies in the FMS and the Straits Settlements on June 30, 1931, was 199, with a membership of approximately 35,000 and paid-up capital close to RM 3,700,000. The loans granted since the inception of the movement exceeded RM 11,500,000. Investments in gift-edged securities exceeded RM 1,700,000 while the cash in hand was over RM 800,000. Over RM 9,500,000 of the loans given out had been repaid.[37]

However, how far the movement benefitted Malay society societies, is not clear. But, in Krian, the members of the co-operative societies, who were padi planters, were able, within a few years, to abandon what was know as the *padi-ratus* system. This institution had been the bane of the rice-growing industry in that district. By it growers were compelled to sell their crops to creditors sometimes at a low rate (six cents a *gantang*). The co-operative societies, supplying all the credit needs of their members, placed them in a position to sell their crops at their pleasure and at full market rates, receiving prices considerably higher (18 to 19 cents a *gantang*). It was estimated that the co-operators realized $40 an acre more for their crops than their neighbours who borrowed money outside to cover the costs of cultivation.[38]

Indeed, it was predicted even at the time when the Co-operative Societies Enactment came into force that it would, "if taken full advantage of, secure the future prosperity of Ma-

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[36]Ibid., September 16, 1927.
[37]*The Straits Times*, October, 15, 1932.
[38]*MT*.,September, 16. 1927

laya".[39] It was clearly meant to provide benefit primarily to members whose livelihood was dependent on agriculture. "Producers," it was said, "by combining together are able to secure for the individual a fair price for his produce, and to protect him from the necessity of selling at a sacrifice to meet temporary requirements."[40]

Despite satisfactory (from the Co-operative Department's point of view) response to the movement, Muslims continued to be divided on the subject of interest connected with the lending and borrowing of money and trading in general. Apparently, although many individual Muslims and Muslim firms kept their money in the banks on fixed deposits on which the banks paid a certain rate of interest, some of the Muslims did not claim the interests, leaving them to lie dormant in the bank. It was said that one individual had more than $50,000 lying dormant in the banks.[41]

## Divisiveness within the Society

Discussions in the press regarding th black of progress among the Muslims also centred on the problem of ethnicity. This was not, of course, necessarily, a pan-Malayan problem. It was more evident in Singapore and Penang where the Muslim society comprised wealthy Indian Muslims and Arabs. As one correspondent described it:

> The Arab community severs connections with the Indian Muslim mass; the Malays, though they are the followers of the same Prophet (peace be upon him), are not allowed to, or would not themselves, consort with the former. This negligence, I opine, is due to sect-prejudice, or to the pride of some who are great and rich.[42]

Divisiveness also existed in a different form as another correspondent pointed out:

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[39] *The Straits Echo*, July 12, 1922.
[40] Ibid., 55 and 91
[41] *MT*, September, 11, 1931.
[42] Ibid., April 12, 1929.

> Amongst my race, though there are barristers, members of Councils and Boards, and rich merchants all over the country, no one seems to do a bit of charitable work, but all patently shun it. Of course, one cannot compel them, but when someone speaks of their sullenness, they themselves should deem it a duty to abandon their present mood in order to toil for the benefit of their race and religion.[43]

Perhaps these were exaggerated views. Certainly there were a number of Muslim organizations which existed for the benefit of the Muslim community as a whole. Possibly the oldest organization was the Moslem Association founded as far back as 1897. It was not a purely religious institution being established also for the purpose of bringing about the intellectual and physical improvement of its members. In later years, it held billiards, chess and draughts tournaments.

Up to 1915, it was recognized by the authorities as the leading Muslim representative body in Singapore, and various questions pertaining to the Muslim community were referred to it by the Government for opinion and advice. But with the formation of what was called the Mohammedan Advisory Board in 1915 (as a result of Turkey's involvement in World War I on Germany's side), the Moslem Association's activities and usefulness to the community were curtailed and its influence declined. But it continued to be interested in public affairs in particular those that had a direct bearing on the Muslim community.[44]

In the early 1920s, for example, it attempted to rally Muslim support for the appointment of a representative to the Straits Legislative Council and it was active again when the subject of Council Reform was raised in 1930. In both instances, its aspirations were ironically thwarted by the Government's decision to appoint a representative of the Malay (later Asian) rather than the Muslim community in the Straits Settlements. In both instances, the man chosen was Mohd. Eunos Abdullah. In 1924, he was appointed the first Malay representative to the Straits Legislative Council, and, in 1931, he was the first Asian to be appointed to the Excutive Council of the Straits Settlements[45]

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[43]RSC, Annual Report 1967, 37-38; RSC, Annual Report 1970, 35; RSC, Annual Report 1971, 49-50.

[44]Ibid., July 18, 1930 & September 25, 1931.

[45]Ibid., March 6, 1924 & July 13, 1931.

After the Moslem Association, the next important Muslim organization to be founded in the Straits Settlements was the *Anjuman-i-Islam*. It was formally opened on April 2, 1921, by H.G. Sarwar (the first Asian to be appointed to the Straits Settlements Civil Service) who, in his address, spoke in Malay for the benefit of the non-English speaking Muslims. He said, *inter alia*:

> All Muslims are one. There should be no ill-feeling among them. If there have been or are any differences of opinion, of ill-will, such things should be wiped off. The outside world does not know the light of Islam. We are keeping it closed up. It is our duty to bring the light out and raise it high to the view of the world. The religion of Islam is not dead yet. It is still a living force. It will never die. The duty of raising the light of Islam high here lies on the Anjuman, and as such every Muslim should join and help it to do its duty.[46]

The *Anjuman* (Association) was indeed established for the purpose of propagating Islam, removing misconceptions about the tenets of the religion, issuing books, pamphlets and papers on Islamic subjects, opening a free reading-room and library, etc. It proceeded to publish *The Muslim* which, for many years, was the only Islamic journal in English in the whole country.[47]

Although it survived for many years, it encountered fluctuating fortunes. In late 1929, an attempt was made to re-organize the flagging association in Singapore. At the same time a meeting was held, in October, 1929, at the Chulia Mosque (now known as the 'Masjid India' at Jalan Masjid India) in Kuala Lumpur with the view to form what was to be the "Anjuman-i-Islam Malaya"[48] What happened to the *Anjuman-i-Islam* subsequently is not yet clear but it never became the force that the founders had hoped it would be.

But the Moslem Association and the *Anjuman-i-Islam* were not the only Islamic organizations to exist in Singapore. In December 1923, there came into existence what was known as the United Islamic Association. In the first eight months of its existence, its activities included,

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[46] *The Singapore Free Press*, April 5, 1921.
[47] Ibid., September 1, 1925; *MT*, October 18, 1929.
[48] *MT* October 18, 1929 & October, 25, 1929.

> ... the successful application to the Postal Department for erection of a much needed pillar box at Post 310 (3rd Milestone), Geylang Road; the application to Government for the firing of a sunset gun daily during the Fasting Month, which was kindly granted, entirely free of charge; the application to the Mohammedan Advisory Board to have the Bidadari Cemetery definitely declared a Wakaff, which has been complied with, in writing, as well as their request to have the final closing of Wakaff Cemetery postponed, which has likewise been sympathetically dealt with by the authorities) and last, but not least, their application to Government to have Religious Teaching in some form or other introduced in the Malay Vernacular Schools of the Colony the Association offering to supply manuals for this purpose.
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> (Introduction in the Malay Vernacular Schools of the Colony of religious "Readers" to be compiled by the Association has since been approved by Government by kind mediation of the Mohammedan Advisory Board).[49]

But the United Islamic Association did not survive long. By late 1929, it was no longer functioning.[50]

By then another Islamic organization had emerged in Singapore. On March 25, 1928, a meeting was called to consider the formation of an association among the English-eudcated Muslims in Singapore. The objects of the association were:

> ... for the moral, physical and intellectual improvement of the members. Reading lessons, lectures and debates will be arranged for the acquisition of general knowledge. Means will be provided for in-door and out-door games. Interest will be directed towards local Muslim affairs. A reading-room will be established.[51]

The association was to be called the British Muslim Union. This organization too made little impact on the community.

Being the capital of the Straits Settlements and also the most progressive town with the largest population, most of the Islamic organizations were located in Singapore. In Penang, only

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[49]*The Singapore Free Press*, August 26, 1924.
[50]*MT* October 25, 1929.
[51]*The Singapore Free Press*, March 30, 1928.

one Islamic organization stood out. This was the Young Muslim Union which was founded in 1911. It was an organization which was primarily interested in literary activities and sports. Games like badminton, billiards and table tennis were popular. The Union organized numerous talks, some of the subjects covered were of an intellectual nature such as "Reason", "Anger" and "The Qualification of a Modern Teacher"[52]

Melaka was comparatively less active in the sense that no Islamic organization existed until the eve of World War II. Even then what existed was the branch of an organization called the *Jamiatul Dakwa al-Islamiah or Persekutuan Seruan Islam Se Malaya* (All Malaya Federation of the Voice of Islam) which, not surprisingly, was based in Singapore. It was founded in 1938 and the branch in Melaka was established towards the end of the same year. This was another attempt at forging unity among the Muslims.[53]

Despite the existence of a number of Islamic organizations, divisiveness in the society became more pronounced. The subject was serious enough for the Muslim correspondent of a Singapore paper to comment on it. He said:

> Are the local Muslims united? A couple of years ago there was, speaking generally, only one answer to the question and that was in the affirmative. To-day, however, a different state of affairs exists and it is deplorable to note that the local Muslims are hopelessly divided. I say they are divided because as evidenced by their acts and deeds, they have, unconsciously it is hoped, failed to follow one of the great teachings of the Holy Prophet with regard to Muslim Brotherhood. He is reported to have said that the Muslims form one brotherhood, but recent events in Singapore go to show it to be otherwise. To-day the word "Muslim" is relegated to the background and forgotten; and each and every follower of Islam here appears to find pleasure and comfort in calling himself Malay, Arab, or Indian. Let us take a recent instance) the receptions in honour of His Excellency the Governor. The Muhammadan Advisory Board presented

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[52]*The Straits Echo*, Aug. 8, 1924.; *MT* February. 23, 1927; and *The Singapore Free Press*, March 8, 1928.

[53]Khoo Kay Kim, Abdul Aziz bin Mat Ton & Baharam Azit, "Melaka's Malay Society in Modern Times" in Kernail Singh Sandhu & Paul Wheatley (eds.), *Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400-1980*", Kuala Lumpur, 1983, Vol. II. 85

> an Address on behalf of the Muslims. The Arabs and the Malays also presented Addresses separately and the Indian Muslims joined with non-Muslims [Hindu Indians] in presenting one. Formerly such a thing was not possible as the local Muslims then were united and carried out all such functions unitedly in the name of the whole Muslim Community.[54]

Disunity among the Muslims also formed the theme of a leader article in the same paper in the middle of 1928. This was a comment on the difference of opinion which then prevailed over the exact date of the commencement of fasting and the date of Hari Raya. Singapore observed one date and the rest of Malaya another.[55]

The Muslim correspondent of the paper concerned attempted to provide an explanation for the existing differences of opinions on certain religious issues. He believed that it started originally in 1925, adding:

> ... there had been until a few years ago goodwill and amity among the local Muslims. What has been there since then to cause a friction among them? The friction has been caused by foreigners. Most of the Moulvis, Moulanas and "their holinesses" who came here to collect funds or for other purposes have sown the seeds of friction, and have left the local Muslims to reap the fruits. We are fighting their fights, and unless we call a truce and haul up the white flag on either side, and that at once, for a round table conference, the hiatus caused by misunderstanding will yet become wide....
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> Academical discussions, lectures and publication of circulars explaining one's views and opinions will only lead to similar steps being taken by the other party. Such discussions and explanations will be endless for they can never terminate satisfactorily.[56]

He thought that a meeting of Muslim leaders might solve the problem. It is not known whether the proposed meeting ever materialized but Islamic polemics in this country have continued to this day.

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[54]*MT*, September 8, 1927.
[55]Ibid., June 8, 1928.
[56]Ibid., June 22, 1928.

It should be noted that the numerous Islamic organizations founded mainly with the idea of helping to foster the "intellectual, moral, religious and physical" improvement of the Muslims did not particularly focus on the economic development of the community. Among the many talks known to have been given to members of various associations, hardly any focused on the subject of economics. Possibly the closest was Syed Sheikh al-Hadi's address to the Young Muslim Union of Penang in late September, 1926, when he spoke on "Islam and Modern Progress and Development".[57] But, as the precise content of his talk is not known, it is difficult to surmise whether he was conscious of the economic problems faced by the Muslim community.

Probably he was since he was a leading proponent of the *Kaum Muda* movement in the country. The *Kaum Muda*, at least through their organ, the *Al-Imam*, did continually urge Muslims not to neglect commerce as Muslims were almost completely dependent, economically, on the Chinese. The Kaum Muda too endeavoured to convince the Muslims that savings bank and co-operative society interests were non-usurious.[58]

Although much of the discussion here is confined to the scenario in Singapore, it may be mentioned that those who wrote to the English press (in particular the *Malaya Tribune*) were generally aware of the situation prevailing in the country as a whole. But their remarks were naturally directed at the English-educated segment of the Muslim community in Malaya.

The English-educated were more learned in matters Islam. One of the leaders of the Muslim community in Singapore, H.G.Sarwar, in 1930, translated the Quran into English.[59]

There were, in fact, constant discussions of Islam in the English press throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The more immediate problems which the Muslims faced can be quite accurately culled from these discussions.

In general, it may be correct to say that the cleavage between Islam and British (and, therefore, Christian) colonialism made it difficult for Muslims to comprehend, much less accept, Western ideas-political, social and economic. The pervasive influence of Western systems was evident only to a small group) the *Kaum*

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[57]Ibid., February, 23, 1927.
[58]William R. Roff, *The Orgins of Malay Nationalism*, 78.
[59]A copy of the book is in the University of Malay library.

*Muda* and the English-educated, hence the stress they placed on the importance of modern, in particular English, education.

In the Malay states where Islamic education was extremely popular, English education was received by only a small number. For example, there was no Government English school in Kelantan until 1936 (the present Sultan Ismail College). In the more densely populated urban areas, the British administration did establish English schools to enable Malay children to learn English as the other English schools were managed by Christian missionaries. But such schools also had a majority of Chinese and Indian pupils.

English education was, of course, meant primarily to prepare select Malays to take their places in the bureaucracy. Malay students were sent to Western universities only after World War I. The majority, after graduation, such as Tunku Abdul Rahman (later Malaya's first Prime Minister) and his brother, Tunku Yaacob, both of whom graduated from Cambridge University, as well as Raja Musa bin Raja Bot (of Selangor who studied law), were absorbed into Government service.

The sole exception was Haji Abdul Wahab bin Tok Muda Abdul Aziz (later Panglima Bukit Gantang and the first Menteri Besar of Perak) who, after completing his law studies in England, chose to practise as a lawyer. So did Tunku Ismail bin Tunku Mohd. Yassin (of Negeri Sembilan), eventually, after first serving the Government.

And with the Malays unable to harness political power (all hopes that Turkey might prove the salvation of the Muslims collapsed at the end of World War I) to meet the overriding influence of Western colonialism, Islam tended, to some extent, to try to build a world of its own, in particular among those who were not English-educated.

There were, however, associations and fraternities) some of them discussed above) formed for recreational (there were numerous sports clubs too) and intellectual purposes and sometimes to assist members in need. In Singapore, as early as 1904, there was a Muslim Trust Fund Association which survived until the 1930s at least. It was said to be the biggest Muslim charitable institution in Singapore. Its main function, however, was "to assist and receive the custody of orphans of Mohammedan parents and other unprotected and indigent Mohammedan children and to place them in the charge of Imams or officials of the mosque of the district or place in or to which such

orphans or children may be found or belong, and to provide for the maintenance of such orphans or children". It, subsequently, in 1928, founded a Muslim orphanage for boys.[60]

There were also, in the 1930s, organizations such as the *Sahabat Pena* (more specifically a literarty society) and Malay states associations (dominated by the aristocrats) as well as the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (practically a gathering of plebeians), all of which attempted to promote the interests of the Malays (and, therefore, Muslims even if there was no overt expression of Islamic objectives). But there was no organization, especially at the Pan-Malayan level, which specifically sought to divert the existing trend of economic development in the country or to enable the Malays to play a substantial role in it.

The situation changed but gradually after World War II and both UMNO (founded in the throes of the Malayan Union controversy in 1946) and the Islamic Conference (1948) at Maahad II Ihya Assyariff, Gunong Semanggol, specifically established 'Economic Departments' in an endeavour to help alleviate problems faced by the Malays (Muslims). There was also the effort of Ma'arof bin Haji Zakariah (of Negeri Sembilan), another law graduate of the 1930s and also absorbed into the civil service, who in the late 1940s started a Bank Rakyat. But he was soon found hanging from a tree outside Kuala Lumpur. Even then, the principal aim of these various endeavours was to help reduce poverty rather than to attempt to restructure the existing economic system a subject which was not well understood by the Malays until long after the country began to agitate for independence.

A blueprint which provided the basis of a new economic policy for the Federation of Malaya Government was published on February 4, 1953, by UMNO. This was, in fact, a memorandum sent to the special committee appointed by the High Commissioner (Sir Gerald Templar) to investigate the economic position of the Malays.

The memorandum paid no attention to the existing co-operative

[60] *MT*, July 31, 131.

movement nor did it mention the Rural Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) which was, earlier, created for the purpose of helping the rural Malays to improve their livelihood.

It asked the Government, *inter alia*, to regulate and control the processing, marketing and transport of all major products, the production of which was the main source of livelihood of the Malays. It urged that Malay youths should be trained in commerce, engineering, electricity, carpentry, building and in the processing of crops, reminiscent of Za'ba's recommendations. It suggested that agricultural banks and a Malay national bank should be established and Malay participation in Malayan industries should be compulsory. Not the least important of all, it called for Malay students to be sent to Western countries as well as Japan, India and the Philippines to study commerce, accountancy and the sciences. But the New Economic Policy was finally promulgated only in the early 1970s.